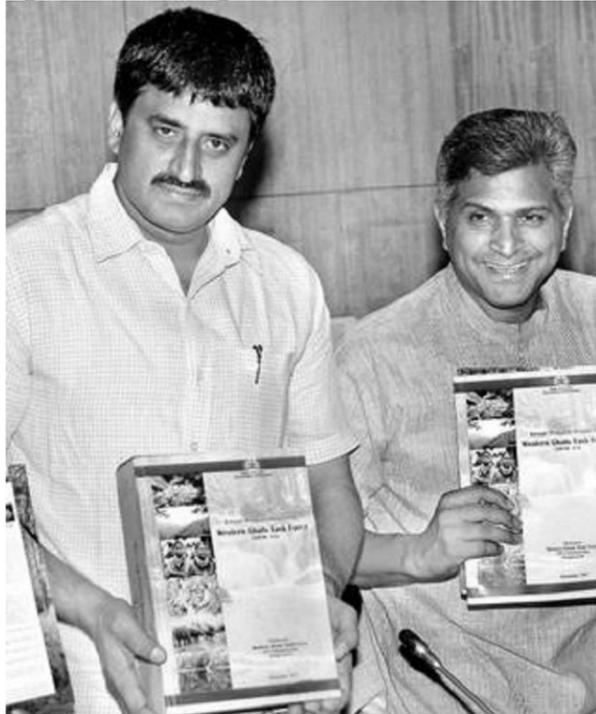


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### 'Set up Western Ghats Conservation Fund'

Special Correspondent



Report submitted: Minister for Forests C.P. Yogeshwar with Chairman of the Western Ghats Task Force Ananth Hegde Ashisar in Bangalore on Wednesday.— Photo: BHAGYA PRAKASH K.

The Western Ghats Task Force has recommended to the Government to set up a Western Ghats Conservation Fund, on the lines of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, to augment financial resources required for conservation.

In its report on 'Conservation and sustainable development of Western Ghats region of Karnataka', submitted to the Government here on Wednesday, the task force headed by Ananth Hegde Ashisar, said the proposed fund could be utilised for special and unique expenses related to conservation and sustainable development of the Western Ghats region apart from fire prevention measures tackling natural disasters, taking up plant protection works, afforestation, tackling smuggling and poaching, managing man-animal conflicts and taking up livelihood-related works to support forest dwellers and tribal people.

The report said the fund was necessary since conservation and sustainable development required huge financial support.

#### **Public donations**

The fund could be created through public donations and contributions from companies as per their corporate social responsibility principles, the task force said.

Stressing the need for protecting river valleys in the Western Ghats, the report recommended that the Government come out with a long-term river protection policy. Further, conservation strategies must also address the needs of local people and a policy should be framed for designing ecologically feasible development programmes in the region.

### **Tobacco processing**

The report expressed concern that more than 2.5 lakh trees were being cut every year for processing tobacco leaves alone in areas coming under the Western Ghats as about 5 lakh tonnes of firewood was needed every year for the purpose. Hence there was a need to design firewood-efficient tobacco processing units, the report said.

Hailing the Government's decision to ban mining in the Western Ghats region, it demanded that a government notification be issued in this regard.

Minister for Forests C.P. Yogeshwar received the report.

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