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Sep 14 2015 : The Times of India (Delhi)

56,827 sq km of W Ghats across 6 states eco- sensitive

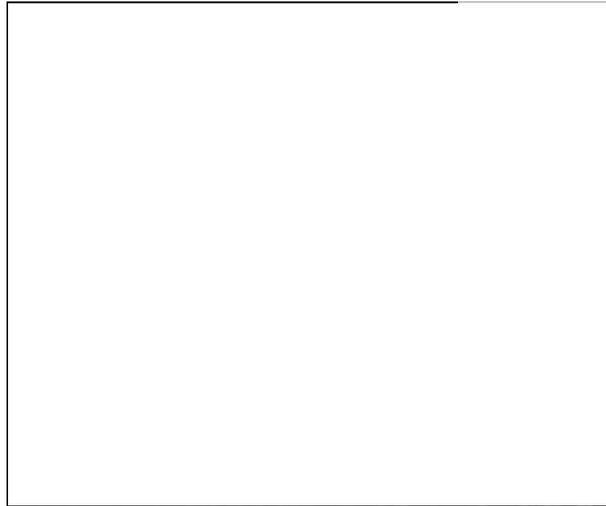
Clara Lewis

Mumbai

**Notification Bans Mining,
Quarring, Thermal Projects**

The Centre, through a September 4 order, has notified 56,825 sq km spread over six states --Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu-as ecologically sensitive area (ESA). Karnataka has the largest share with 20,668 sq km under this zone.

The notification comes nearly four years after the Madhav Gadgil-led Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel recommended that the entire Western Ghats be declared as ESA since it is a biodiversity hotspot. Thereafter, the union ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) constituted the K Kasturirangan High Level Working Group (HLWG) to take a relook at the entire issue. The HLWG recommended that 37% of the Western Ghats, which constitute 60,000



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sq km, be declared as ESA. But only 56,825 sq km has been declared.

The onus of monitoring and enforcing restriction in the ESAs has been placed on the respective states, though the MoEF will set up a monitoring centre for the Western Ghats.

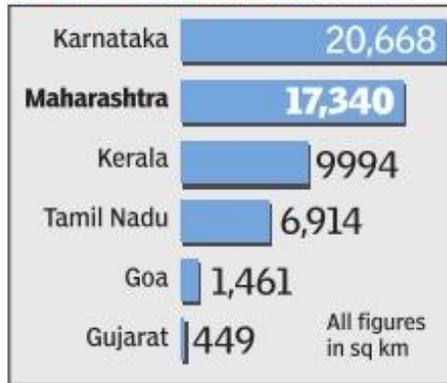
In Maharashtra, the ESA includes 2,177 villages in nine districts of Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Thane, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Satara and Kolhapur. The notification has banned all new red category industries, mining, quarrying and sand mining in the ESAs. All existing mines will be phased out in five years of the final notification or on the expiry of mining lease. It has also banned new thermal projects and expansion of existing ones in the ESAs.

D Stalin of NGO Vanshakti said no thermal power projects have been proposed in the ghats. "On the other hand, the notification permits hydropower projects within 3km of each other. This will affect the flow of water downstream," he said.

No new building or construction projects and expansion of existing ones above 20,000 sq m are to be allowed. Similarly area development projects or townships above 50 hectares have been prohibited. Activists, however, point out that the notification restricts the builtup area permitted for each project but there is no restriction on the number of projects permitted in an ESA.

Environmentalist Sumaira Abdulali said the notification permits orange category industry that are polluting.

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