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'Declare Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive zone'

Mangalore, Feb 14, DHNS:

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Gundia project will affect the elephant corridors, says scientist



Members of the public and the experts who participated in a public discussion on 'eco-sensitive spots in Western Ghats' urged the government to declare the entire Western Ghats stretch as ecologically sensitive zone.

The discussion was organised jointly by the Western Ghats Task Force, Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, Forest department of Mangalore division at School of Social Works Roshni Nilaya in Mangalore on Monday.

Dr Harish Bhat from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore said Gundia project will wipe out rare species in the region. According to a study, there are 250 flowering plants, 95 varieties of birds, 44 types of butterflies and 55 species of fish in 700 hectare land which will be submerged due to Gundia power project. The loss from the project will be Rs 200 billion per year. If implemented, this power project may harm one of the world's bio-diversity hotspots.

The project will also affect the elephant corridors and the elephant-man conflict will increase, he added.

Retired professor Dr N A Madyastha said there is highest endemic of landsnails when compared to other species in Western Ghats. Extinction of land snails is an indication of what is happening in the environment. Of the 270 species of landsnails found in Western Ghats, 206 are endemic to the Western Ghats alone.

Karnataka Pollution Control Board former chairman Dr H C Sharathchandra said if air pollution from thermal power plants and other industries were not checked, then it may affect the Western Ghats in the form of acid rain. With the levelling of hillocks, the bio diversity on the hillock is being destroyed. Sea erosion causes imbalance in the coastal eco system, he added.

Sacred groves

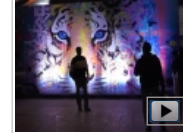
Retired professor K Prabhakar Acharya said sacred groves which are rich in bio-diversity needs to be conserved. Mangroves are being lost due to reclamation and shrimp farming. Turtles in Maravanthe, sacred fishes in holy rivers and lakes, 'Bavalivana' at Kolli near Mithabagilu can be conserved under Biodiversity Act.

Fisheries College lecturer Dr Ramachandra Bhat said Kodachadri should be declared ecologically sensitive area. The proposal has been submitted to MoEF in 2006. There are 183 endanger plants in Western Ghats. Of which, 81 are medicinal plants.

He said shore based and inshore fisheries from Baikampady to Mulki is severely threatened due to the affect of petrochemicals.

National Fishermen Federation General Secretary Vasudeva Bolur said the proposal on the diversion of river will affect the survival of fish. Even the CRZ norms will harm the fishing community. A farmer from Mithabagilu B K Parameshwar Rao said seed bank should be set up at panchayat level to preserve

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the native seeds.

Raghava from Mangalore and Rajiv Salian from Nagarika Seva Trust said no big industries should be allowed till the carrying capacity study is being undertaken in the region. If Western Ghats are damaged, can anybody replace the Western Ghats? they asked.

Salian said the plan to construct gas pipeline from Kochi-Mangalore-Bangalore should be dropped. Venugopal said the sacred fish in Kapila river at Shishila should be conserved.

No hydro power project should be allowed across Kapila river.

Umesh of DK Parisarasakthara Okkuta said the pollution units should not be allowed in the district. About 136 hydro power projects which were sanctioned to Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Chikmagalur should not be allowed to start. Vidya Dinakar said zero pollution industries should be allowed in the region.

Western Ghats Task Force member Keshav Hegde Koorse presided.



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