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## Only Unesco tag can save Western Ghats

Prakash Kumar, NEW DELHI, July 3, 2012, DHNS

Mining activities in the area a major problem, says govt official



**Inclusion of the Western Ghats in the list of Unesco's world heritage site may be India's last option to save the pristine biodiversity from unscrupulous mining, felt a senior government official who led the initiative for getting the tag.**

"We had fought for the Western Ghats nomination repeatedly as it was one of the positive methods of ensuring that the unique natural features of the stretch are preserved from the threat of mining and other dangers," former Culture Ministry Secretary Jawahar Sircar, told Deccan Herald.

The mining activities were a "major problem" in the Western Ghats which comprise nearly 40 component parts, ranging from Tiger Reserves, National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Reserved Forests, he added.

He said that "all components" were reportedly owned by the State and were subject to protection under laws including the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. "The problems of site management were something that India will have to learn to administer," he pointed out.

Sircar, who is now Prasar Bharati chief, actively led India's campaign to get the Western Ghats inscribed on the list of World Heritage Site of the Unesco, until he retired from the Culture Ministry in February this year.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which were against the nomination of the Western Ghats in the coveted list of World Heritage Sites, had also identified mining activities in the area as a major threat.

"Mining has been identified as a major threat and the nomination was careful to exclude any areas under mines," the IUCN had noted its report while reviewing Indian proposal.

"For example, and although not part of the nomination, there are mining concerns in Sindhudurg in Maharashtra. Similarly, Kudremukh National Park has a large iron-ore mine in the centre which, although the State Party has re-confirmed that no mining occurs at present, holds the potential to be reactivated," it had pointed out.

However, justifying India's proposal, Sircar said the Western Ghats contain exceptional levels of plant and animal diversity and endemism for a continental area. "In particular, the level of endemism for some of the 4-5,000 plant species in the Western Ghats is very high; of the nearly 650 tree species found in the Western Ghats 352 (54%) are endemic."

Animal diversity is also exceptional, with amphibians (upto 179 species, 65% endemic), reptiles (157 species, 62% endemic) and fishes (219 species, 53% endemic). Invertebrate biodiversity, once better known, is likely also to be very high (with some 80% of tiger beetles endemic).

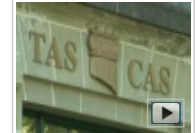
"A number of flagship mammals stay in the property including parts of the single largest population of globally threatened landscape species such as the Asian Elephant, Gaur and Tiger. Endangered species such as the lion-tailed Macaque, Nilgiri Tahr and Nilgiri Langur are unique to the area," he said.



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The property is also key to the conservation of a number of threatened habitats, such as unique seasonally mass-flowering wildflower meadows, shoal forests and Myristica swamps. "The IUCN (also) considers that the nominated property has the potential to meet this criteria, if integrity, protection and management issues are addressed," he added.

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**Gary Miller** • 4 years ago

Indian govt. should declare the area as protected national treasure and enforce the law. Why Unesco has to certify it? All National Parks in USA are designated so by US govt., not Unesco tags.

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**Suresh** • 4 years ago

Probably they are going to get special funds from UNESCO! Sounds yummy to all the bureaucratic bandicoots !

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share >

**GaSiva** • 4 years ago

These govt officials are funny? To save western ghats, our government has to try for Unesco tag? Does not make any sense! If you serious you dont need any tag. If you are not serious and continue to be corrupt bandicoots, then no tag would help. It is as simple and clear as that.

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