



SERInews

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*With you in Pursuit of Sustainable
Management of Finite Water Resources*

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**Conservation , protection and
development of Ecosensitive Zone**

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Eternal Words

To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase it's usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed -

~ Theodore Roosevelt

The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.

~ Albert Einstein

If you gave me several million years, there would be nothing that did not grow in beauty if it were surrounded by water.

~ JAN ERIK VOLD, What All The World Knows, 1970

Dear Readers,

Unplanned urbanization has become a blot on modern civility. It's happening despite of all rules, regulations, acts, standards and norms are in place. Most of the governing staff is well-trained, all the professionals like architects, town planners, civil engineers, and irrigation engineers are acquainted with development processes and impacts, builders and developers are updated with construction guidelines. Despite of all these, the lakes in Pune are under stress of urbanisation. Pashan lake – one of beautiful lake – once the abode of migratory birds – is reeling under the pressure of construction in its catchment loosing it biodiversity at alarming rate. Many studies have shown that water body is eutrophicated due to ingress of sewage from Ram River. Though, government implemented some action plan with central government funding, but it could not revive the ecosystem of lake. So, the lake restoration programme needs six pillar approach of ILLBM.

Secondly, the Western Ghats – range of Mountains along the southwest coastline of India is ecological heritage of the world. Earlier studies by two eminent scientists Dr. Madhav Gadgil, ecologist and Dr. K. Kasturirangan, space technologist have been criticized by the development lobby looking for mining and exploitation of resources in serene biodiversity areas which are the source of clean rivers and subsurface flows. Unplanned development permitted by local administrative systems may cause ecological hazards in near future resulting into poisoned rivers and lakes in the Western Ghats.

Cover photo is of reservoir created by damming Koyna River in Satara district of Maharashtra – a part of northern ranges of Western Ghats. All hilltops are laden with cloud forests and the rivers are full of clean, pure waters. This region is ecological hotspot. Creation of deep water body has isolated this region from the exploitative development by modern man.

Shrishti Environment and Sustainability Society has proposed two round tables – one on Ecotreatment Zone in Open Drains in Cities and the other – Structure and Function of Environment Regulator of India in April and May 2014 respectively in association with other NGOs SEERAM and AILSG. Readers of SERInews will get brief noting of these round tables and they can contribute their views on those themes.

Thank you,
Chief Editor

News views 1

Pashan Lake of Pune facing challenges of urbanization

Growth of algae in Pashan Lake has been observed by regular visitors and residents in the past few months with uncontrolled growth of water hyacinth which has turned the water green potentially harming the biodiversity. Many environmental experts and researchers noted that this uncontrolled growth is mainly due to ingress of sewage along the shore and in Ram River in upstream. Uniform growth of algae is shifting ecological balance from oligotrophic status in turn changing aquatic life including bacteria, plants and fauna thriving on lake.



Several cores have been allocated and spent for eco-restoration of Pashan Lake under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). Beautification of lake was done few years earlier and the some part of shore was built with stone which have been held with metal net. There is also island created in soil for resting of birds.

There are lot many things to be done to revive dynamics of Lake Ecosystem and scientific approach taken during the beautification project. The muddy shore is key habitat for waders especially migratory birds. Lake Ecosystem includes terrestrial surroundings in vicinity of lake water body because the wetland birds nest /roost in such bushy vegetation.

These habitats have been converted in form of compound wall and artificial banks in the name of stabilization. It has interfered with the avian population and inhabitation such as marsh harrier, wagtails and tree pipit etc. Due to fast upstream

urban development and in vicinity of the lake, the quality of water is depleting and the water body is full of single species. It is taking toll on aquatic biodiversity.



Ram River full of water hyacinth due to Sewage ingress

The integrated ecosystem approach for basin management is the key to protect our water bodies from pollution and contamination. has to be taken and First preference should be given to keep the water sources pollution free. And secondly the ecorestoration of water body with proper ecological solution should be used instead of just an engineering approach.

Ecorestoration of Medi Kuntha Lake in Hyderabad having all IT industries is an admirable example of ecorestoration where priority was given to ecology rather than to civil structures. The lake was restored to rhythm the ecological balance of lake and to ensure society health.

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News views 2

Ministry declared 37 per cent of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive which covers an area of 59,940 sq km

A notification on Western Ghats declaring an area of 56,825 sq km of the hills as ecologically sensitive had been issued by Environment Ministry of India in March 2014. High Level Working Group headed by Dr. K Kasturirangan had identified approximately 37 per cent of the Western Ghats as ecologically sensitive which covers an area of 59,940 sq km of natural landscape of the hills as against Dr. Madhav Gadgil expert committee identified 1.4 lakh sq. km as sensitive zone.

The Madhav Gadgil report had recommended that the 1.4 lakh square kilometres in the Western Ghats eco system be graded into three categories. ESZ-1 would be the core forest area where no development would be allowed, while permitting restricted development in ESZ-2 and ESZ-3 (buffer zones). There would be no restriction on public infrastructure, farming and ecotourism initiatives in both zones.

The Kasturirangan report has scrapped the zoning process while demarcating ESA, a 50% reduction in the demarcated area compared to WGEEP recommendations. The report said that around 60% of Western Ghats comes under cultural landscape - human dominated land used for settlements, agriculture and plantations and only 41% of the land area can be classified as natural landscape and it is roughly 37% of the Western Ghats.

HLWG has demarcated 122 villages and nine talukas as ESA in Kerala while the WGEEP report had marked 25 talukas under different zones. A startling example is Wagamon in Idukki that has not been marked as ESZ by HLWG though it has over 1,200 acres of grasslands

About 3,000 sq km environmentally fragile land in Kerala's Western Ghats region demarcated by the high-level panel is exempted from the category of ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs) by the Ministry, in its recent notification in contrast with recommendation of high-level working group to declare Kerala's 13,108 sq km as ESA. The Ministry was under tremendous pressure from ruling Congress-led UDF in Kerala to take off habitations, plantations and agricultural areas in the state's 123 villages falling within the Western Ghat eco-sensitive.

In its directive, the Ministry had asked the state governments to ban new polluting industries, mining, quarrying, thermal power plants or large construction projects in the 1,600km long Western Ghats run through Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat. It is not only the flora and fauna that would benefit by labeling the area as ecologically eco-sensitive, but also the villagers whose very existence was being threatened by the predatory mining lobby.

According to the fresh draft notification, "the Eco- Sensitive Area in the state of Kerala is spread over of an area of 9993.7 sq km, which includes 9107 sq km of forest area and 886.7 sq km of non-forest area". The draft notification will be open to comments for 60 days from all stakeholders before the environment ministry passes the final order.

Mumbai high court also declared the Sawantwadi-Dodamarg wildlife corridor, linking sanctuaries in Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka, an ecologically sensitive area (ESA) and ordered the central government to submit a proposal in this regard. In an affidavit submitted to the high court in September 2013, the ministry of environment and forests had stated that it was willing to consider a proposal to declare the corridor as an ESA; and also admitted that the state government had considered the floral, faunal and ecological importance of the area, while declaring it an ESA, as it would benefit the protection and conservation of the ecosystem.

There is mix reaction as some village panchayats have taken a resolution in support of ESA stating that villagers are happy with the earning from agriculture and horticulture and they don't want mining in their area as the region is rich in forest, whereas the remaining panchayats have opposed it, citing it as a restriction for developmental activities.



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News views 3

Judicial step up for balance of development and environmental processes

In a major blow to the Centre's election year decision to speed up environmental clearance to long pending projects, the Supreme Court on Monday ordered the government to appoint a national regulator which would take up comprehensive environmental impact assessment (EIA) of projects. Brushing aside the Centre's opposition to a national regulator, a bench of Justice AK Patnaik, Justice SS Nijjar and Justice FMI Kalifulla said the super regulator was the need of the hour as the present mechanism "is deficient in many respects". This would bring an end to rapid EIAs, conducted earlier by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), for important projects. (Times of India 7 January 2014).

Sandeep Joshi – a noted environment technologist and impact analyst insists that environmental regulator is to be equipped with legal instruments for obtaining the authentic data/information from respective agencies which monitor climate, water resources, groundwater, air, soil and departments like revenue, urban, health, agriculture, water resources etc. Its role should be well-defined as "protector of environmental quality" based on "scientific & planning" inputs from the proposed development proposal. The implementation of cleared projects shall be closely monitored by expert impact analysts and timely corrective actions to be documented with real time analysis and monitoring till the project is commissioned. Later on the project will be annually or bi-annually audited for the stated compliance. National Environmental Regulator (NER) shall develop "National Environmental Quality System" (NEQS). NER shall be given authority to heir the services of project specific, area specific, discipline specific connoisseurs for achieving the stated, committed compliance and performance by the project proponent irrespective of financial encumbers. Environmental Regulator, first of all, should standardize environmental clearance procedures with mandatory pre-clearance site visit by Connoisseurs (specialists) to adjudge the suitability of project, environmental quality, socio-economic adaptability. The administrative system of NER shall support or assist "Team of Connoisseurs" in logistic arrangements, communication with project proponents, documentation, interaction with respective government agencies or departments, organising site-specific workshops or monitoring etc. Team of connoisseurs will follow scientific protocols and evaluation methods to ascertain or reject or improvise the claims by project proponent.

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