

HC asks Govt to prevent pollution

Staff Reporter, New Delhi

**The Pioneer,
Friday, September 22, 2006**

The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the city Government to take appropriate steps to prevent pollution in river Yamuna in view of the coming Durga Puja festival. A bench comprising acting Chief Justice Vijendra Jain and Justice Kailash Gambhir passed the order after a submission made by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) that immersion of Goddess Durga in the river would cause lot of water pollution.

“Delhi Government is directed to take steps so as to ensure that no pollution will cause in the river Yamuna in view of the festival time,” the bench said while hearing a PIL seeking implementation of the Delhi plastic bags and non-biodegradable garbage (control) Act in totality.

Under the new law, it is mandatory for all vendors to use biodegradable plastic bags while sealing their products, as the existing plastic bags are not biodegradable.

However, the Govt. has decided to implement the law in a phased manner. It has so far allowed biodegradable plastic bags to be used only in four or five star hotels, liquor shops, fruit and vegetable vendors, mother diary and hospitals.

Need for proper management of natural resources in Rajasthan

New study recommends “value formation” at the community level

Jaipur: The Rajasthan Government should take the initiative for proper management of natural resources with emphasis on “value formation” at the community level. It may look for strengthening its integration with civil society organizations, If needed and local institutions in rural areas for the purpose, recommends a new study on “Institutional reforms for alternative, ecologically sensitive and people friendly development in televisions” here

While making these recommendations, the study has underlined the need to ensure that the benefits from the local resource base are not seized by the powerful sections alone.

Sunil Ray, Senior Fellow of the Jaipur based Institute of Development studies (IDS) conducted the three-year-long study under a project supported by the food foundation. Prof. Roy made the interdisciplinary research in the five selected areas spread over different agro-climatic zones in the state. He found that the incidence of impoverishment in rural Rajasthan was directly linked with the degree of vulnerability of people to the growing crisis of renewable natural resources. It has a paralytic impact on the local economy that cannot be explained by the standard tools of economic analysis. The debate with in the political economy framework revolves around skewed distribution of command over rich stock of renewable resources, such as drinking water, irrigation

water, land with good forest cover or pasture land with better yield of grass. Prof Ray said the conflicts in these areas was unavoidable due to the increasing gap between low generation and rising demand.

The professor called for bringing the missing link between poverty reduction and ecological restoration to the center of development discourse. "Institutional interventions in some case in Rajasthan succeeded in restoring a degraded ecosystem by expanding bio-diversity and ensured livelihood during a prolonged drought spell," he said.

The study also revealed that the community institutional approach for revival of the common resource base had gained social legitimacy and momentum in some parts of the State when the degradation reached the point of no return. Social networking, mutual trust and reciprocity created conditions for emergence of new practices for restoration of ecosystem and its sustainable development

"If tree lopping and grass being regularly grazed by animals are also calculated, the estimated value will be much more," added Prof. Ray. He said the state Govt. should evolve an appropriate management strategy to tap common-pool natural resources, the property rights of which were yet to be clearly defined.

Gram sabha nod must for SEZs: Medha **Civil society groups and farmers' representatives oppose creation of** **Special Economic Zones**

Special Correspondent

The Hindu, Thursday, September 28, 2006

Civil society groups and farmers' representatives Wednesday opposed the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and questioned the special concessions and tax holiday being offered to profit making industries.

They also demanded that all land acquired for the SEZs be returned to farmers and the land redistributed to the landless and marginal farmers. These farmers should be given "special concessions" for inputs such as decentralized irrigation, indigenous seeds and organic manure

Announcing a "Jan andolan" (People's movement) under the banner of the National Alliance of people's movements here, Narmada Bachao andolan leader Medha Patkar said that through the SEZ Act had been approved by Parliament, there should be a national consultation on the concept, as people had not been taken into confidence.

"Industries can be complementary to agriculture, but not at the cost of agriculture. Approval from 'gram sabhas' should be a pre condition."

Ms. Patkar said thousands of farmers are being displaced and their lively hoods hit.

"The National Rehabilitation Policy framed by the National advisory Council, then headed by Sonia Gandhi, has been put on hold to allow all SEZs top come up without

industrialists having to give compensation to those farmers and farm labour who are being displaced and who will lose their livelihood. This will distort the balanced growth of economy, natural resources, food security and entire development process.”

“A system of apartheid”

Lawyer Prashant Bhushan said: “SEZ is a system of apartheid, the return of the old system of zamindari. There will be a preferred group of people/industrialists in these enclaves just because they happened to grab a piece of land approved as SEZ as opposed to those who are out side of the SEZ.

“One can understand concessions if an industry is setup in a backward region or desert, but what is the logic of giving concessions to SEZs setup in metropolitan areas. This will sound the death knell of all industry outside the SEZs and have enormous implications for other industry, government revenue, environment and labour.”

He said Section 49 under the Act gave such sweeping powers to the Government that it could, by notification exempt any SEZ or all SEZs from the application of any law or all laws. “This should be challenged”

Sanjaya Sangvai asserted that democracy required discussion with people. “Many people opposed reservation for other backward classes, but what of this reservation being made for big industrialists and builders?”

Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Arun Kumar said past experience showed that big companies did not honour their commitments on employment generations

“The SEZs would create havoc because peasants do not know how to invest the money they get for their land. Every job offer in the SEZ would displace 30 jobs in the unorganized sector. Justice may seem to be done but there is very little justice for the poor in the SEZ system.” he said.

A farmers’ representative from Pune, Prasad Bhagwe of the Ekvira Zamin Bachao Andolan, said farmers were very angry as large tracts of fertile land were being grabbed for the SEZs.

“The meager money a farmer gets for his land does not last long and a job, if at all to one person lasts only one generation. What about the rest of the family? They will be pushed to penury.”

Govt to develop 5-acre forest land

The Statesman

Wednesday, 20th September 2006

Shwetank Dubey & Devadeep Chowdhury

The Clean Delhi, Green Delhi Slogan of the Delhi Government got emboldened yet again in a move in which the government has sent a proposal to Delhi Metro Rail Corporation to develop a five acre piece of land in the Sultanpur Dabas area of outer Delhi into an artificial forest land.

A survey of the area has been undertaken by the Delhi Government already,” said Delhi environment minister Mr. Raj Kumar Chauhan. According to the directive, DMRC has to replace the trees in ten-fold proportion of the plantation they mow down at the course of laying down Metro tracks. They have been asked to develop this area into a forestland as opposed to the idea of replacing those trees area- specifically. “Over the years Delhi has witnessed a green revolution and this is one more step towards it”, added Mr. Chauhan.

Sultanpur dabas is an industrial area and reportedly lacks pollution control measures. Development of the Forests land will benefit residents in a multi pronged and sustained manner. Size of the forest would account to almost 19 percent of the total forestland Delhi has. At present Delhi has forest cover of 170.17 sq km that effectively means 11.46 percent forestland.

In a similar move, the government has also taken a decision to rejuvenate numerous natural ponds that exist in areas like Bawana and Jaunsi, considered as villages at a cost of Rs. One crore. Ponds are of greater importance for maintaining ecological balance as Delhi lacks considerable amount of water bodies.

The funds have been already released by Grameen Vikas Board and they are also contemplating releasing monetary support for renovation of ancient Mughal structures, named Diwan-e-khas and Diwan-e-Aam after the more famous court houses situated in Red Fort, in Jaunsi village to promote it as a heritage site.

Toilet bhagidari

Sunday Pioneer, September 17, 2006

Deepak Kumar Jha

Bhagidari or citizen’s participation in governance is acquiring new dimensions. After a series of successful experiments in many spheres, it is breaking fresh grounds. The latest to gain from this is going to be community toilet complexes.

The MCD is in the process of involving citizens directly for the maintenance of toilet complexes in their areas on the lines of bhagidari system. With wide spread criticism regarding upkeep of the public conveniences followed by a series of problems with the NGOs responsible for the maintenance, the MCD’s Standing Committee has moved a resolution seeking participation of community for maintaining the Community Toilet Complexes (CTC)

It has been suggested that a management committee for each CTC should be constituted. All heads of CTC user families of each locality may be an active participant and owe responsibility in the capacity of a member of the Managing committee.

“It will have elected members, 33 per cent would be women. The tenure will be for two years. The committee will make necessary arrangements for maintenance of the CTC. The daily income of CTC will be spent on its maintenance and upkeep of complex,” said MCD standing committee member Vijender Gupta, while proposing CTC in his resolution.

In 1963, a contract for the upkeep of CTC was given to Sulabh international for a period of 30 years. It is alleged that it could not carryout the work satisfactorily, the contract was rescinded by MCD in June 2006.

“This problem was discussed with experts, social workers and NGOs working in the areas near CTCs. All these were of the view that maintenance of CTC should be given to local residents,” said the resolution moved in the standing committee.

The construction maintenance and cleansing of drain, drainage, works, public toilets, urinals is an obligatory function of MCD under Section 42 A of the Delhi Municipal Act. Since then many CTCs have been constructed

Environment Ministry advocates diversion of funds into tree plantation

The Pioneer

September 6, 2006

In an effort to increase tree canopy, Environment Minister A Raja wants diversion of funds from Rural Employment Scheme for tree planting. The Government also wants farmers to grow and hardest trees on non-forest private lands.

The Ministry is also understood to be mulling private investment for meeting the target of one-third-forest cover by 2012. An additional 31.46 million hectares of forest and tree cover are required to be raised in the coming years. Keeping with the commitment, the 12th finance commission has allocated an additional Rs. 1000 crores for forest conservation.

The Environment Ministry is working with Rural Development and Agriculture Ministries to impress upon them to spend 2 % of their allocation towards greening the vast wasteland “we would like that 25% of the plan outlay in Rural Employment Schemes be ear-marked for planting trees.” Raja said inaugurating a meeting of conservators of forests and wildlife wardens on Tuesday. Even the UPA’s flagship scheme, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) can meet the twin objectives of employment generation as well as protection and management of forest resources. Activities such as water conservation and harvesting afforestation and plantation, land development, flood control drought proofing, renovation of traditional

water bodies, land development have large scope of make use of this Act and develop schemes for degraded areas, Minister of state Namo Narain Meena suggested.

The Ministry is also considering multi-stakeholder partnership programme, which could see private investment partnering with Government and farmers to grow trees on wasteland. The Government could lease out land, farmers will cultivate and the private sector could bring in initial investment and then buy back the produce from the farmer. The partnership will mean increase in tree cover by employing wasteland, profit for farmers and assured supply for the industry. Initiatives such as these however need support from state Governments who will have to allocate land.

The environment Ministry is straddled between conservation and development needs as population growth exerts biotic pressure on forests. The earlier temperament of keeping people out of forests is impractical and invited allegation of being anti people. People in and around the forests are part of conservation programmes in the past decade. "Reform the world over began to be people centered in the wake of popular ecological moments," the Minister said.