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Dear Prakashji

30th April, 2015

Subj: Growing risk to ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas in Bengaluru due to real estate projects

I am writing to you regarding the growing risk to Bengaluru by real estate projects on ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas like Lakebeds, catchment areas around lakes, and valley zones.

The city of Bengaluru is not located on a river bank and therefore the water needs of its 1 crore plus population and ground water levels depend largely on a network of lakes and underground water sources. These lakes are a part of a cascading chain, developed naturally and over many years to take care of Bengaluru and its ecology.

Several commercial developments have encroached or coming up on various lakes like Hebbal Lake, Belandur lake, Nagasettiahalli Lake, Byrasandara, Iblur, Chikkalasanda and Venkatanarayanakere. These large projects are being constructed often at a huge cost to the natural hydrology of the city and surrounding environment. This rampant, unchecked corruption by the vested interests has resulted in frustrated citizens filing Public Interest Litigations (PILs) seeking the intervention of the National Green Tribunal and other courts.

For example, in the case of the Bellandur lake in the south east quadrant of the city, post the initial environmental clearances for this project given by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in 2011, a team from MoEF visited the site to monitor compliance to the Environmental clearance conditions gave an adverse report about the non-compliance of conditions by the project promoters. Despite the adverse report given 15 months back, in August 2013, no action taken against the project.

As the watchdog of the Environment, the Ministry of Environment and Forests must step in to ensure the lakes of Bengaluru do not fall victim to reckless commercialization that benefit vested interests. Section 5 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986, states that, the Central Government may, in the exercise of its powers and performance of its functions under this Act,



issue directions, for among other things, the closure, prohibition or regulation of any industry, operation or process to any person, officer or any authority and such person, officer or authority shall be bound to comply with such directions.

The issue here is both about the water needs and the long term environmental impact of such unchecked and rampant development. My city Bengaluru could be impacted significantly if the large projects, which violate all environmental norms and, are allowed to come up on city's lake beds.

The ministry must conduct an audit and review of all clearances and approvals given to lakebed and ecologically sensitive projects in Bengaluru on an urgent basis, to ensure that no clearances and approvals have been given to these private projects on illegal or corrupt grounds. It must conduct a study on the compliance of environmental conditions of such projects and must make such reports public and take appropriate action against those projects that have failed to comply with the mandatory environmental compliance conditions.

The MoEF must additionally, also ensure strict action against those officials who has been negligent, either by ensuring clearances without due diligence, or by failing to adequately monitor compliance. Such measures will be a first step towards ensuring the natural heritage of Bengaluru does not become an unfortunate casualty of vested interests within MoEF and outside.

I look forward to your immediate action so that the ecologically and environmentally sensitive areas like Lakebeds, catchment areas around lakes, and valley zones are safeguarded from projects that receive approvals on illegal or corrupts grounds.

Yours Sincerely,

RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR

Shri Prakash Javadekar
Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forests & Climate Change
Government of India
New Delhi