

QUARRYING PITS KICK UP A DUSTSTORM IN BNP AGAIN

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By Nitindra Bandyopadhyay

Activists urge Union minister's intervention to protect the eco-sensitive zone

The lack of political will has aggravated the damage being caused to the ecologically sensitive Banerghatta National Park (BNP), located around 25 km from the city, as illegal sand mining and stone quarrying mafia is thriving in the area.

The ecological issue has come back to haunt the state government as urban environment conservationists have pulled the issue out of the cold storage, much to the embarrassment of the Mines and Geology Department, Karnataka Pollution Control Board and Forest Department. A four-year-old petition, started to save this eco-sensitive area, has resurfaced on social media platforms. The petition now has caught national attention with activists taking up the issue with the Centre.

Vijay Nishanth, a city-based green warrior, said, "Recently, we went to the National Park Area and took pictures using a drone camera to assess the damage. In addition, a video was also made on the vehicle movement that has increased due to illegal quarries and all the documents have been presented to Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change during his recent visit to Karnataka."

"The minister has shown his concern and has assured us that he will take up the matter with the state government and will also initiate steps to immediately stop the damage being done to the biodiversity of the BNP range due to illegal quarrying and sand mining," he added.

A study taken up by the Energy and Wetlands Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences at Indian Institute of Sciences on the ecologically sensitive zones of BNP, shows that around 5,655.17 hectares have been encroached at the BNP over a period of time even as the state government and other authorities stood a mute spectator. Besides, despite repeated attempts the environmentally sensitive zones have still not been designated, despite many proposals made on the issue.

Environmentalist AN Yelappa Reddy said, "This is a serious issue and several reports have been compiled and submitted to the forest department, which should take it up seriously and act accordingly. The forest belongs to the forest department but for longtime now they have failed to protect its interest. Looks like government is more concerned about human development than conserving wildlife. This must be stopped immediately."

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