

Second thoughts on eco-sensitive zone around Chandaka

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Reconstitutes committee on the issue

Fast expanding capital city and its real estate sector have forced the State government to change its plan to declare eco-sensitive zone around Chandaka-Dampada Wildlife Sanctuary and Nandankanan Zoological Park.

According to reliable sources, the State government has reportedly re-constituted a committee headed by Principal Chief Conservator Forest (PCCF) to draw eco-sensitive zone around the two wildlife sanctuaries.

In 2002, the Ministry of Environment and Forest had mooted a proposal of declaring an area of 10 km from the boundaries of protected areas as eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) aiming at prohibiting industrial activities and regulating developmental activities in such zones for the safety of wildlife.

Report

As per the decision, an expert committee headed by Divisional Forest Officer of Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary had submitted its report on declaration of eco-sensitive zone on Saturday.

However, sources said, if the 10-km radius standard was taken into consideration, the zone in northern side was extending up to Athagarh and in other sides, the zone was almost touching Acharya Vihar, Sainik School, Khandagiri and Jayadev Vihar – which fall in central zone of capital city.

Projects

In the present context when localities around Chandaka and Nandankanan are heavily built-up and several government as well as private projects are coming up close to sanctuary boundary, declaring eco-sensitive zone on the basis of 10-km-radius criterion is not feasible. As a result, a new committee has been constituted to give its report.

Government sources said the new committee, which would have representatives of the Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO), Bhubaneswar Development Authority, Housing and Urban Development department and Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation as its members, would take pragmatic approach for identifying the zone.

If eco-sensitive zone is declared, certain developments in the region would be prohibited, regulated and allowed. Mining, quarrying or setting up industries would be prohibited while expansion of road projects and vehicular movements would be regulated.

Activities such as agriculture or restricted movement around monuments in the zone could be allowed.

Wildlife activists said the State government was under tremendous pressure from real estate sector not to declare eco-sensitive zone around these two sanctuaries. Right up to boundary of both Chandaka and Nandankanan, residential complexes have been developed. Declaration of eco-sensitive zone is likely to evoke huge public outcry as vast patches of land adjoining to sanctuaries have already been sold to people. A senior official in Revenue and Disaster Management department said people would definitely approach courts in large number if any such prohibitory zone is identified in future.

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