

Save Mollem movement

December 4, 2020

Locals, environmentalists and activists are highly concerned about the disruption of Goa's biodiversity with the recent sanction of two new projects amid its rich forest. It is felt that the cost that has to be paid in exchange for making Goa a commercial coal hub is not justifiable.

In news: Goa protests doubling of the Railway Track.

Placing it in syllabus: Society

Static dimensions

1. Approval process of a Non Forest project

Current dimensions

1. In news
2. What is the Project and its concerns ?

Content:

In news:

- Thousands of Goans are protesting against the state government's move to push for **expansion of the railway network between Margao and Sanvordem.**
- Demonstrators occupied railway lines after the authorities started work on doubling the tracks as Goa acts as an important link for coal transportation to Karnataka.
- Despite the existing infrastructure, the Goa government is looking to speed up the transportation process by **introducing three major infrastructure projects.**
- These projects **threaten the forests in and around the regions of Mollem National Park and Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary** which spills across 240 square kilometres into the Western Ghats.

- During the COVID-19 lockdown, the National Board for Wildlife virtually cleared these projects.



What is the Project and its concerns?

- The Ministry for Environments and Forests (MoEF) approved the **widening (four laning) of the existing national highway 4A, double-tracking of the railway line, and construction of a new 400kV power transmission line.**
- The sanctuary currently supports more than 70 mammal species, 235 bird species, 219 butterfly species, 44 fish species, 45 reptile species and 27 amphibian species.
- The affected forest also acts as an important revenue source for nature-based tourism.
- Along with Dudhsagar, hundreds of river-feeders originate in the forest and act as a lifeline for Goa's water supply.
- With respect to the protected area, around **170 hectares are planned for forest diversion.**
- The **two forest clearances will lead to chopping down of 59,024 trees** in the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park.
- Though the projects have been passed in the name of

“public interest”, the activists are blaming that the **projects allegedly serve the vested interests of corporates and investors who aim to convert Goa into a coal transportation hub.**

- The **Mormugao Port Trust (MPT)** located in Vasco, is primarily used for coal and iron ore transfer and handling and is at the centre of the whole issue.
- As MPT must multiply its coal handling capacity to fulfill the coal demands in the region, the doubling of railway tracks is one of the prerequisites for that to happen.

Approval Process of a Non Forest project:

- Prior recommendation of the Standing Committee of **National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) under the provisions of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** shall be obtained, for taking developmental activities in/over an area falling within eco sensitive zones.
- **NBWL nod will not be mandatory for projects** within eco-sensitive zones outside protected areas which do not require environmental clearance.
- NBWL's standing committee approval will be required for projects that are located in areas linking one protected area to another like tiger reserves.
- The prior **wildlife clearance will be required by projects located within 10 km of national park/wildlife sanctuary where eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) has not been notified and which need environmental clearance.**

National Board for wildlife:

- It is a Statutory organization constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- Primary function of the Board is to promote the conservation and development of wildlife and forests.
- It is **chaired by the Prime Minister** and has 47 members

including the Prime Minister.

- Among these, 19 members are ex-officio members.
- Other members include three Members of Parliament (two from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha), five NGOs and 10 eminent ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists.
- It has power to review all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.
- No alteration of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.
- Its **role is "advisory" in nature** and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country.