

Minutes of the meeting chaired by Chief Secretary on 05/08/2022 in OA No. 15/2020 (SZ) of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal to review the progress made in implementing the Master Plan prepared for the conservation of riparian Biodiversity along the banks of Bharathapuzha.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 am with the Chief Secretary presiding. The Additional Chief Secretaries of Environment and Local Self Government Departments, Directors of Panchayats, Urban Affairs and Agriculture, District Collectors of Palakkad, Malappuram and Thrissur, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (FM), DFO, Palakkad, Chairman, Kerala State Bio Diversity Board, Joint Secretary, Forest & Wild Life Department and other officials were present.

Chief Secretary enquired on the situation which led to the burning of grasslands and whether the perpetrators were booked. DC, Palakkad informed that activities like consumption of alcohol and cooking of food happen in unattended / remote areas. The fire incident may be caused due to such activities. To prevent such occurrences some sort of vigilante is under the consideration of the local bodies and the master plan also have provisions for averting such mishaps. Additional Chief Secretary, LSGD conveyed the details of the decisions taken during the last meeting held by the Chief Secretary on 14/02/2022 and action taken subsequently.

Following recommendations were offered after detailed discussions:

1. Multidisciplinary team inspections and community surveillance for averting fire mishap/illegal trespass:

Chief Secretary recommended the involvement of citizens residing on the banks of Bharathappuzha for protecting the banks from such activities of miscreants and opined that the locals may be sensitized on the actions required. ACS, LSGD also suggested the community surveillance may be integrated to the monitoring mechanism suggested in the Master Plan, which the local bodies may look into. Interested NGOs can also be made part of the multidisciplinary committee to be constituted at the local and block level; the said committee can visit the banks and plan restoration activities as required. In addition to this, Departments/ Authorities shall perform the duties assigned to them. It is the duty of the Irrigation Department and LSGIs to see that rivers and its banks are not misused by anyone. ACS, LSGD opined that as the actions are part of a larger watershed, integrating the actions under the Master Plan to the watershed plans being floated in the district, would be better and this can be achieved at district level through

the coordination of various Departments involved, under the active guidance of the DC, Palakkad.

Chief Secretary opined that employment of man mazdoors during dry season on the banks of Bharathappuzha at a cost of rupees 36 lakh may not be advisable. The mechanism of community surveillance and inspection by Irrigation, LSGI's & Police by way of patrols and random surveillance on the banks of Bharathappuzha may be helpful in restricting anti-social activities. Irrigation Department/LSGD has to formulate Guidelines to prohibit such trespassing into waterbodies/river banks/purambokke areas. District Collector, Palakkad may also provide guidance to both Irrigation department / LSGI's regarding measures to avoid trespass and penalizing such activities on the banks of Bharathappuzha River. The display boards for public awareness shall be aesthetically designed and shall be eco-friendly.

(Action: Revenue, Forest & Wild Life, agriculture, Home, Local Self Government and Irrigation Departments)

2. Remote sensing system for detecting fire mishaps:

Chief Secretary suggested to implement remote sensing methods to detect/report fire incidents or other mishaps and to streamline the actions to be taken to mitigate the consequences of such occurrences. There are control rooms of Kerala State Disaster Management Authority(KSDMA) in every district to coordinate various kinds of disasters/mishaps. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (FM) informed that F&WL Department has a Satellite based alert system to alert the authorities on forest fire incidents and to coordinate various activities to deal with such situations. Irrigation Department can also be made part of such alert systems. Forest department may look into the possibility of expanding the alert system to facilitate the Irrigation and other Departments in the State also. Possibility of utilizing the facilities of KSDMA and that of the Forest Department to deal with man-made fires/accidental fires, identification of encroachments may be considered seriously. Irrigation Department is to conduct digital survey and demarcate the boundaries of the rivers and water bodies coming under its purview. It was also decided to hold a separate meeting on remote sensing system.

(Action: Irrigation Department, Forest & Wild Life Department , Revenue Department ,Chief Conservator of Forests, Kerala State Disaster Management Authority(KSDMA,)

3. Awareness programs:

Sensitizing public regarding offense of trespassing into Government property and dangers of creating fires in dry areas may be done. Chief Secretary also suggested to disseminate digital awareness programs through various social media platforms.

(Action: Irrigation Department, Forest & Wild Life Department, Local Self Government Department)

4. Enrichment planting:

Master Plan for Bharathappuzha consists of enhancing the riparian vegetation along the banks with suitable species and strengthening the embankments by natural methods. Forest department is already in the process of releasing seedlings and that the same is being planted under the MGNREGS scheme. ACS, LSGD informed that the seedlings are being planted through LSGIs under MGNREGS scheme. Chief Secretary expressed satisfaction on the activities so far taken and directed to complete the project in a time bound manner as specified in the Master Plan.

(Action: Forest & Wild Life Department, Local Self Government Department, DC Palakkad)

5. Filing report:

In compliance to the order dated 24/02/2022 of the NGT and decisions taken during the meeting held on 14/02/2022, specific instructions were issued to the District Collector, Palakkad by the Environment Department to implement the Master Plan with active guidance and participation of Irrigation, Local Self Government and F&WL Departments and also to hold monthly meeting at district level and to furnish monthly and quarterly progress reports to the Environment Department, to enable the latter to submit consolidated half yearly reports of the State before the Tribunal in time.

(Action: Forest & Wild Life Department, Local Self Government Department, Revenue Department, Environment Department, DC Palakkad)

The meeting comes to a close by 11:00 AM

CHIEF SECRETARY

