

17/08/2021

**Minutes of the meeting held by the Chief Secretary on 10-08-2021 to discuss the subject matter in OA No. 117/2021 and action taken therein**

The video conference commenced at 10 AM with the Chief Secretary in chair. The meeting was attended by the Additional Chief Secretary, Environment Department, Additional Chief Secretary, Water Resources Department, Principal Secretary, Forest Department, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, District Collector, Kottayam, Executive Engineer, Irrigation Department, Kottayam, Member Secretary, Kerala State Biodiversity Board and Senior Scientist, Kerala State Biodiversity Board.

The Chief Secretary started off the meeting seeking inputs on the nature of issues dealt with in the OA and the action taken therein. The Additional Chief Secretary, Environment Department briefed the case details and the further action taken was conveyed by the District Collector, Kottayam who is also the chairperson of the Joint Committee constituted by the Hon'ble Tribunal for furnishing of report before the Tribunal. It was informed that a report was submitted before the Tribunal by the Joint Committee with the dissent note from the Executive Engineer, Irrigation Dept, Kottayam (also member of the Committee). The interim report furnished to the Tribunal by the ACF(Social Forestry), Forest Department, was not authenticated by the Committee. The dissent note of the Irrigation Department was given against the background that the ongoing projects for mitigation of floods would be adversely affected if the course of flow of the river is not restored by removing the obstructions. Hence the report itself reflected a difference of opinion between State Govt. Departments. Executive Engineer, Irrigation, Kottayam presented the ground reality by way of a power point presentation which had the pictures of the delta that was formed in the watercourse. A pictorial representation of the silting up of the river course leading to the drastic reduction of flow in that cross section was also conveyed beyond doubt. It was pointed

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out that there was aggradation on one side of the bank while on the other degradation or deep declines were formed. ACS Water Resources & ACS Envt endorsed the views of the EE and opined that protection of river and restoration of depth & sides of river is of paramount importance in flood mitigation. It was also conveyed during the meeting that the riparian vegetation that had grown in the delta (Attuvanchi) does not belong to critically endangered category and not endemic to Kottayam alone. It is also found in many of the other districts in Kerala.

Chief Secretary opined that all actions of the State Government irrespective of the department that delivers it, is ultimately to be in public interest and beneficial to the society and also the environment and to promote sustainable development. It is natural that differences of opinion may occur while implementing different Acts / Rules by various Departments. However healthy discussions may be held by the committee members harbouring divergent views on implementation of various Rules, in connected matters, with a motive to reach an amicable solution to address the differences in a sustainable way in the best interest of the State.

**After detailed discussion following decisions were taken:**

1. All projects of the State Government is to be implemented in a time-bound manner and any hindrance to the projects, like the ones for flood mitigation would have far reaching consequences. Delayed projects would also increase financial burden. In cases where there is a difference of opinion amongst various departments while filing reports, action may first be taken to sort out the differences and to reach a consensus in the best public interest so as to carry out the responsibilities vested with the various Departments. If there is any possibility of violation of Rules the same can also be addressed. As far as the State Government is concerned, all the Departments are to ensure that they function effectively and in coordination towards implementing the policies of the Government. Additionally, said consensus must be one that promotes the public interest. As the head of the district administration, the District Collector shall ensure that steps are taken to arrive at a consensus based on discussions and

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deliberations among committee members. The Committee shall always strive hard to present a single view which is both sustainable and effective in addressing the issues. Whenever such divergent views on environmental concerns are not amicably resolved the matter may be brought to the notice of Environment Department, as it is the nodal Department in addressing environment related matters, by the Chairman of the Committee immediately. A general circular in this regard shall be issued by the Envt Dept.

**Action : Environment Department, District Collector, Committee Members**

2. Water bodies, especially rivers shall be protected to ensure that their natural flow is not obstructed and that they remain sufficiently navigable. Any hindrances which need to be removed for ensuring unobstructed flow of rivers to avert possible flooding and eutrophication or slow death of the water body needs to be removed and the ecology of the river and riparian vegetation restored to the maximum extent sustainably possible.

**Action : Environment Department, District Collectors, Revenue Department, LSGD, LSGIs, Biodiversity Board**

Meeting came to an end by 10.45 am.

Dr V P Joy  
Chief Secretary