

## **Kasturirangan Committee on Western Ghats**

## Why in News

Recently, the **Government of Karnataka** has informed the Center government that the state is opposed to the **Kasturirangan Committee report** on Western Ghats.

- The Kasturirangan committee report has proposed **37% of the total area of Western Ghats** to be declared as **Eco-Sensitive Area (ESA)**.
- The Karnataka's Government is of the opinion that declaring Western Ghats as ESA would adversely affect the livelihood of people in the region.

## **Key Points**

- About Eco-Sensitive Areas:
  - Eco-Sensitive Areas (ESAs) are located within 10 kms around Protected Areas,
    National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
  - ESAs are notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) under Environment Protection Act 1986.
  - The basic aim is to regulate certain activities around National Parks and Wildlife
     Sanctuaries so as to minimize the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile
     ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.
- About Recommendations Of The Kasturirangan Committee Report:
  - Area to be Covered: The Kasturirangan committee report proposes roughly 60,000 square kilometers, to be declared as eco-sensitive area (ESA).
    - Out of this, 20,668 sq km of the area falls in Karnataka covering 1,576 villages.
    - The boundary of the sites, are in most cases, boundaries of the legally demarcated national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves and forest divisions and therefore, already accorded with high level of protection.
  - Desired and Banned Activities: The report recommended a blanket ban on mining, quarrying, setting up of red category industries and thermal power projects.
    - It also stated that the impact of infrastructural projects on the forest and wildlife should be studied before permission is given for these activities.
  - UNESCO Tag: It also stated that the <u>UNESCO Heritage tag</u> is an opportunity to build global and domestic recognition of the enormous natural wealth that exists in the Western Ghats.
    - The 39 sites are located across the Western Ghats and distributed across the states (Kerala 19), Karnataka (10), Tamil Nadu (6) and Maharashtra (4).
  - **Role of State Governments:** The state governments should view this development and build a plan to protect, conserve and value the resources and opportunities of the region.

- Opposition of Karnataka Government:
  - **Impeding Developmental Progress:** Karnataka has extensive forest cover and the government has taken care to protect the biodiversity of Western Ghats.
    - The state government believes that **implementation of the report will halt the** developmental activities in the region.
  - **People-Centric Developmental Model:** The Kasturirangan report has been prepared based on the satellite images, but the ground reality is different.
    - People of the region have adopted agriculture and horticultural activities in an eco-friendly manner.
    - Priority has been accorded for environment protection under the <u>Forest</u>
      Protection Act 1980.

## **Way Forward**

- **Preventive Approach:** Considering the changes in climate, which would affect the livelihood of all people and hurt the nation's economy, it is prudent to **conserve the fragile ecosystems.** 
  - This will cost less compared to the situation prone to calamities than spending money /resources for restoration / rejuvenation.
  - Thus, any further delay in the implementation will only accentuate degrading of the most prized natural resource of the country.
- Engaging With All Stakeholders: a proper analysis based on scientific study followed by consensus among various stakeholders by addressing respective concerns is required urgently.
  - Holistic view of threats and demands on the forest land, products and services, devising strategies to address these with clearly stated objectives for the authorities involved must be taken.

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