

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2768
TO BE ANSWERED ON 19.12.2024

Protecting East Kolkata Wetlands

2768. SHRI SAMIK BHATTACHARYA:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of East Kolkata Wetlands, designated as Ramsar Site, that are facing significant threats due to rapid urbanisation and infrastructural encroachments;
- (b) the measures implemented to prevent unauthorised land use changes and protect the ecological integrity of this wetland ecosystem;
- (c) whether any plans are introduced for stricter regulations or policy amendments to address the ongoing threats and encroachments in these wetlands, and if so, the timeline for such actions; and
- (d) whether Government is aware of the degradation in water quality and biodiversity loss in the East Kolkata Wetlands due to untreated sewage and industrial effluents?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) to (d) As informed by the State Government of West Bengal, East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) is a unique wetland ecosystem having three main land uses; urban/rural settlement, productive farming area and waterbody. It is a livelihood based system with more than 100 villages and approx. 1,50,000 people residing within the wetland. A significant portion of EKW is rayati (privately owned), which often leads to disputes over land use. Due to this large population, there is a high demand for housing and infrastructure to support daily life, leading residents to construct new buildings for residential use. EKW is facing challenges due to rapid urbanization and infrastructural encroachments.

MoEF&CC is currently implementing a centrally sponsored scheme namely, National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA) for conservation and management of wetlands in the country on cost sharing basis between Central Government and respective State/UT Governments. Under the scheme of NPCA, Integrated Management Plan of EKW has been sanctioned during 2022-23 at a total cost of Rs 39.82 crores for 5 years for undertaking various activities such as strengthening institution and governance, water management, pollution abatement, conservation of species and habitat and sustainable resource development. So far, an amount of Rs. 3.89 crore (central share) was released to the State Govt. of West Bengal for conservation and management of EKW under NPCA, which includes Rs 1.499 crore released under the above said IMP during 2023.

In the year 2006, the Government of West Bengal enacted East Kolkata Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Act, 2006 for conservation and management of this unique wetland complex. The East Kolkata Wetlands Management Authority (EKWMA) was established under the Environment Department, Government of West Bengal under Section 3 of the said Act to oversee the protection, management, and sustainable use of the wetlands. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has notified the Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 superseding the Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2010. As per the said Rules, inter-alia, any construction of a permanent nature, setting up of any industry or expansion of existing industries and conversion for non-wetland uses including encroachment of any kind, solid waste dumping, discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, cities, towns, villages and other human settlements within EKW (being a Ramsar site) are prohibited. Further, vide these rules, the State/UT Wetlands Authorities, including West Bengal State Wetlands Authority, have been constituted which are responsible for protection and conservation of wetlands. As informed by the State Government of West Bengal, some of the initiatives taken by EKWMA to protect and conserve EKW are as follows:

- A pop-up message has been incorporated in the existing property Registration Portal by Finance Department and in the Banglarbhumii Portal by the Land & Land Reforms & Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department for EKW area to make the local people aware and enforce prohibition on conversion of land use/change of character of land/construction of permanent nature within 37 Mouzas of EKW area.
- All concerned Panchayats within the EKW area have been informed by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (P&RD) for not sanctioning building plans without the permission of EKWMA for the areas falling under EKW.
- All regional offices of West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL) within EKW area have been informed to include permission letter from EKWMA as essential documents for providing electric connection for the area falling under EKW.
- So far, 1048 monolith pillars have been erected along the boundary of the EKW to demarcate it. Further, nine demolition and restoration works have been undertaken at different places in EKW.
- Hoardings displaying messages on importance of the EKW and prohibition of certain activities within the EKW (C&M) Act, 2006 and Wetlands (C&M) Rules, 2017 at different places have been erected.
- An East Kolkata Wetlands Vigilance Committee has been constituted for prevention and removal of illegal construction/encroachment in pursuance of the order of Hon'ble High Court.

As informed by the State Government of West Bengal, the sewage of Kolkata is channelled into the EKW, wherein it passes through a natural purification process, involving sedimentation and biological treatment in the wetland ecosystem. Treated wastewater, rich in organic nutrients, supports the growth of phytoplankton and zooplankton, which are natural food for fish. In order to maintain the water quality and biodiversity in the EKW, various measures have been taken which includes the following:

- To maintain optimum level of water conducive to pisciculture and for overall water management within the bheries, canal de-siltation has been carried out from time to time.
- Leachate Treatment Plant (300 KLD) was set up at Dhapa dumpsite by Kolkata Municipal Corporation for treatment of leachate.
- Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI) was assigned the work of eradication of invasive fish species through screening of pathways to reduce loss in fish production.
