

PRESS RELEASE FOR KIND CIRCULATION & PUBLICATION

Sub: Deepor Beel - A gold-mine for socio-economic upliftment

From June last the INSTER has been raising voice of protest against the possible detrimental environmental impact due to the proposed construction of a B.G. Line through ~~the~~ Deepor Beel. We have always been pointing out that the N.F. Railway is not the only enemy to the wetland which has been declared as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention only recently. The mushroom growth of industries, civil construction, illegal settlement, brick fields and industrial effluent disposal are a few of the many problems being faced by the wetland. We are rather thankful to the Indian Railways for providing us an eye opener by proposing the unethical constructions in the form of a track, a passenger yard and a freight terminal in the area. What the INSTER is demanding is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Study and ~~proper~~ conservation of the Beel. We have observed with great pain the passive attitude being adopted by authorities concerned ^{as such are are now} and ~~are~~ planning to move a Public Interest Litigation Petition to force the Railways to complete the construction of Jogighopa-Kamakha (Guwahati) B.G.Line within the target period but with proper studies. The Union Minister ~~of~~ Railways Mr. George Fernandes, The Union Minister of State for Environment and Forest Mrs. Maneka Gandhi, the Government of Assam, Union Environment Department, the Railways and others have been duly informed ; but, unfortunately our views are not taken seriously by anybody.

Deepor Beel serves as the residence and winter transit for many thousands of birds including those from Siberia. Apart from it being worth preserving from avi-fauna point of view, there are a few very important socio-economic needs to which this wetland caters ~~to~~ and Deepor Beel bears striking similarity with the Char Nombor Bheri

of the ~~V~~ Salt Lake in Calcutta,

- 1) Deepor Beel has traditionally been used by fishermen belonging to Podumbori, Tetelia, Azara-Keotpara, Lankashwar, Kalitakuchi, Sundarbori, Mikirpara Chakarad and other villages. The economy of these backward class people can be boosted up by conservation of the wetland and developing captive fisheries in and around the Beel. However, unfortunately fishing is now being done by rich mohaldars and local people are totally deprived. The State Fisheries Development Corporation has a proposal to convert 4.40 sq.kms of the 54.89 sq.kms wetland into a natural fishery~~s~~. Local people will have sole right for fishing under this UN Food~~o~~ and Agricultural Organization (FAO) project under World Food Programme. Development of such fisheries would be very productive and would help in easing 90,000 tonnes per annum deficit of fish in the State. INSTER stands for development of more such fisheries in the co-operative section with participation of the local people.
- 2) The Unique topography and natural beauty of forest and water co-existing, the area makes a potential spot ~~z~~ for winter tourist attraction. It may be noted that Guwahati though the only major city in the N.E. India lacks badly in recreational and tourists attraction spots except for small artificial parks. Deepor is only 18 Km from down-town Guwahati and has been identified as a Botanical Garden-cum-City Forest-cum-regional park vide Government of Assam Notification No TCP.79/83/56 dt. 25th Sept.,1986. Being accessible from the National Highway itself and being near to the airport, Deepor promised a lot in the form of earning through tourism.
- 3) The wetland ~~serv~~ serves as the storm-water basin for Guwahati City and without it the already worse flash flood problem in the city will only worsen. Guwahati would be the Venice "Vennice of the East". The State Flood Control Department has ~~already~~ already worked out a proposal to drain off Guwahati water through Deepor Beel taking advantage of the natural topography. So far, there is no other technically feasible proposal for Guwahati drainage.

- 4) The winter grass-land ^y ~~sees~~ as grazing pastures and also can be used for vegetable cultivation for city supply with economic benefit to the local people. Animal fodder is being collected from the area during both summer and winter. Collection of "Mokhona" (a delicious vegetarian product from aquatic plant of the same name) also makes a very profitable business. A Kg of processed Mokhona is sold at nearly Rs 120 ~~per~~ in the local markets and being sent to out-side the State also.
- 5) In case the INSTER proposal for a REAL ~~DEEP~~ SANCTUARY in Deepor Beel materializes, it would be a real boon for the local people. The Government of Assam being under pressure has declared only a 4.14 sq.kms of the Beel as a Sanctuary which interestingly does not even include the inlet and the outlet of water to the Beel and includes that area where birds sits for rest only. Large scale bird trapping and killing has taken place this year ~~and~~ including over fishing. New permits have been issued for brick fields and industries and large scale civil construction is on.

Deepor Beel is one of the best examples of environmentalists standing for development ~~contra~~ as against popular believe. However, we have observed that the authorities are working against the interest of the people by proposing anti-people new alignments. We demand the intervention of Mrs. Maneka Gandhi urgently and awaiting to welcome her visit to Deepor Beel.

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