

BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL  
(SOUTHERN ZONE BENCH, CHENNAI)  
IN  
ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 15 OF 2020 (SZ)

**STATUS REPORT FILED BY ADDITIONAL CHIEF SECRETARY,  
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT / 1<sup>ST</sup> RESPONDENT**

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Dated at Chennai on this the 31<sup>st</sup> day of October 2022.

  
M/s. **E.K.KUMARESAN**

Standing Counsel for State Government of Kerala - NGT(SZ) Chennai Bench

(1)

**Report filed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Respondent in compliance with the order dated 24.02.2022 of National Green Tribunal in OA No.15/2020(SZ) "Burning of dried grass lands in Bharathapuzha".**

It is submitted that as per the direction of this Hon'ble Tribunal in OA No 15 of 2020, activities as per the master plan are being implemented through various departments. Besides this, Chief Secretary had conducted a meeting with the stake holder Departments such as Revenue, Police, Forest, Local Self Government & Irrigation on 05.08.2022. Instructions were given to Irrigation/Local Self Government Institutions to see that river and its banks are not misused by any one (minutes enclosed as **Annexure**). It was also decided in the meeting to evolve a mechanism of community surveillance and multidisciplinary team inspections for averting fire mishap/illegal trespass.

Specific directions were issued to the District Collector, Palakkad to implement the master plan with the active guidance of various stakeholder departments. The District Collector, Palakkad conducted a meeting on 01.10.2022 to review the progress of the implementation by various stake holder departments.

It is submitted that a team of surveyors has been appointed by the Revenue department and the team had started survey in Lakkidi, Peroor 2 and in Shornur 1 villages to redetermine the boundaries of the river flowing through the villages of Lakkidi-Peroor- 2, Ottappalam 1, Ottappalam 2, Vaniyamkulam 2 and Shornur 1, 2. On completion of the preliminary survey upto a distance of 25 km, it was noticed that 146 survey subdivisions share boundaries with the Bharathapuzha river in Ottappalam taluk. But survey could not be completed in Pattambi due to high water level in the river. Earnest attempts are being done to complete the survey at the earliest.

It is submitted that the Agriculture Department in coordination with the Local Self Government Institutions have planted fruit tree seedlings under MGNREG scheme.

The Local Self Government Institutions have completed the work of fixing up sign boards as per the master plan. The Police, Revenue and Corporation are conducting joint inspection to check antisocial elements on the river banks where burning happens occasionally. Police have also strengthened day and night patrolling to prevent encroachment and protect the riparian diversity on the banks. Steps have also been taken to constitute biodiversity committees in coordination with Irrigation Department to find out suitable species of plants for strengthening the embankments and to maintain the biodiversity.

Dated this day, 7<sup>th</sup> day of October 2022.



Dr. VENU V IAS  
Additional Chief Secretary  
Home, Vigilance  
Environment Departments  
Government of Kerala  
Thiruvananthapuram.



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 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 water shed, 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, 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 Govt 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: LSGD, 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

**DR V P JOY  
CHIEF SECRETARY  
O/O CHIEF SECRETARY**