

'Distillery Posing Threat to Wildlife'

Express News Service

Coimbatore: Environmentalists are up in arms against the proposed distillery at Chinnampathi village in Mavuthampatti Panchayat near Madukkarai.

Since a 13-ft-long King Cobra was rescued from the area on Friday, the furore is understandable. In fact, the snake was the second one to be rescued from there in the past two months.

Clearance for the distillery was given by Tamil Nadu Hill Areas Conservation Authority. As per the minutes of the 41st HACA meeting held at Chennai in September 2011, the regional office of Mavuthampatti Panchayat sought permission for the construction of buildings to manufacture spirits and wines. The extent of the land is 11.25 acres.

File number 15629/11/HSBA of HACA report states: "HACA has decided to clear the proposal for the construction of industrial buildings subject to the conditions imposed by Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Geology and Mining. Survey number 103/2 PT (the land) falling

VALID CONCERNS

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■ If the distillery is established there, it will lead to an increase in human footfalls and damage the fauna of the region

■ Moreover, the elephants are attracted to arrack. The distillery will only attract elephants who will then be accused of straying into human habitats

■ The cement factory will lead to the habitat destruction of all crawling creatures and species like Uropeltidae and the Crotalinae

between the industrial building and the forest is to be entered in the caution register and any further development on this land should satisfy the conditions of the PCCF."

Though Express tried to ascertain what the conditions specify, the PCCF refused to comment.

When contacted, District Collector M Karunakaran said, "The factory has been cleared by the Commissioner of Prohibition and Excise only after observing all the formalities. The HACA approval was also sought and obtained besides the clearances from Local Planning Authority (LPA), PWD and TNPCB."

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It is owned by a prominent cement manufacturing company. Besides, another cement factory is located a few kilometres away on the Kerala border.

"Chinnampathi is a part of the Kalkothi-Walayar Elephant Corridor. If the distillery is established there, it will lead to an increase in human footfalls and damage the fauna of the region. There is also a water body in the region that is being exploited by the cement factories. Moreover, the elephants are attracted to arrack. The distillery will only attract elephants who will then be accused of straying into human habitats," an environmental activist said, on the condition of anonymity.

Dr V Kalaiarasan, a leading herpetologist and former director of Tamil Nadu State World Wildlife Fund, pointed out that the region is a natural habitat of the King Cobras. "The cement factory will lead to the habitat destruction of all crawling creatures and species like Uropeltidae and the Crotalinae, commonly known as pit vipers, which were once abundant in the region. They are already facing extinction due to unmindful industrialisation," he rued.

According to Marimuthu Yoganathan, a bus conductor with TNSSTC and a well-known eco-activist, the cement factories and limestone quarries have been causing irreparable damage to the environment. "The effluents from the factories polluting the air and water in the elephant corridor can severely harm the health of the pachyderm to the extent of causing miscarriages in cow elephants and the birth of deformed elephant calves," he noted.

"The cement factory must be shifted to save the forests and the water bodies from perennial detriments," he stressed.