

THE COIMBATORE CHARTER
On
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS

National Conference

Ministers of Environment and Forests

29 ♦ 30 January 2001

Coimbatore

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on

ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS

A national conference on environment and forests was held on 29th January, 2001 at Coimbatore. The conference was attended by the State Environment and Forest Ministers, Secretaries to the State Governments, Principal Chief Conservators of Forests, Chairpersons of the Central and State Pollution Control Boards/Committees and senior officials of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. Members of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Environment and Forests also attended the conference. The conference was presided over by the Union Minister for Environment and Forests Shri T.R. Baalu and inaugurated by Shri Rangunath Misra, Member of Parliament (formerly Chief Justice of India).

The conference resolved to protect and improve the environment and forests of the country in accordance with the following:

Forest Protection and Afforestation

(a) Afforestation

1. The State and Union Territory Governments shall endeavour to expand forest /tree cover from the existing 23% to the desired 33% as mandated in the National Forest Policy, 1988 during the next 20 years thereby increasing the forest area from 76.5 million hectares to 109 million hectares of the country's geographical area of 328 million hectares.
2. The investment in afforestation has been, on an average, less than one per cent of the total Plan outlay in various Plan periods. The investment in afforestation shall be raised to a minimum of two per cent of the total outlay.
3. During the VII Plan, 20% of the funds under the rural development schemes were earmarked for the purpose of afforestation resulting in achievement of highest targets (8million hectares). This earmarking was discontinued from the VIII Plan resulting in achievement of only 7 million hectares. To achieve the target of 33% forest/tree cover set by the National Forestry Action Programme (NFAP), 20% of the funds of the various rural development schemes such as Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Drought Prone Area Programme, Desert Development Programme etc. be earmarked for afforestation. This may be done in consultation with the Planning Commission.
4. Under the Integrated Afforestation and Eco-Development Projects Scheme, multiple rows of strip plantations shall also be allowed due to non-availability of land for block plantations in some of the States.
 5. While there is need to step up allocations to forestry sector for enhancing forest cover, it is equally important that the States ensure timely release of funds provided under the centrally sponsored schemes of the Ministry to the implementing agencies for their optimal utilisation. The Central Government shall approve plantation schemes for five years and release funds directly to the Forest Development Agencies.
 6. Recognising that land degradation is a major environmental concern adversely affecting

productivity and socio-economic conditions, suitable measures shall be taken for addressing the problem.

7. 15.5 million hectares of degraded area having natural root stock shall be regenerated using Joint Forest Management approach.
8. About 9.5 million hectares of partially degraded area with depleted natural root stock and another 6 million hectares of totally degraded and treeless area shall be regenerated through technology based plantations with substantial investments.
9. Bamboo plantations, medicinal plantation projects and coastal shelterbelt plantations have been identified as thrust areas. In order to have uninterrupted coastal shelterbelt plantations against cyclonic winds, afforestation on private lands would be encouraged by making suitable provisions in the guidelines keeping the Orissa model in view.

(b) Joint Forest Management (JFM)

1. All State and Union Territory Governments shall implement the guidelines (February, 2000) related to JFM issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
 2. Forest Development Agencies shall be registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860. However, with regard to Village Committees, these may be registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1860 or under any local act or rule, or with the Conservator of Forests.

(c) Forest Fire Control Measures

1. State and Union Territory Governments shall map fire prone areas and ensure that funds are spent on identified areas on project basis.
2. State and Union Territory Governments shall implement the provisions of the National Fire Prevention and Control guidelines of 1999 issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and take suitable measures for prevention, detection and control of forest fires.
3. The JFM Committees shall be assigned specific roles for fire prevention and control and the Committees be given incentives for fire prevention.
4. The State and Union Territory Governments shall organise Forest Fire Prevention Week annually to highlight the damage to bio-diversity from forest fires and for soliciting public support in prevention of forest fires.

d. Issues related to Drought Prone Areas

1. States and Union Territory Governments affected by drought shall endeavour to improve forest cover by extending tree plantation to non-forest lands for mitigation of drought.
2. Effective water harvesting measures shall be undertaken both on forest and non-forest lands by the States and Union Territory Governments.
3. Cattle camps may be organised in the forest areas where fodder is available in drought prone areas.
4. Suitable fodder development programme shall be drawn up by the State and Union Territory Governments for meeting the fodder requirements of the cattle.

(e) Strengthening of Infrastructure

1. The vacant posts of Forest Guards, Foresters, Range Forest Officers and Assistant Conservator of Forests shall be filled up by the State Governments on priority for conservation and protection of forests. The ban on recruitment of forestry personnel imposed by some State Governments shall be lifted and appointment of forestry personnel be treated on the lines similar to Police Departments in the States/Union Territories, considering that forest services are essential for the ecological security of the country.
2. The rules related to recruitment, training and cadre management of forest personnel shall be implemented with due diligence.
3. Infrastructure such as forest roads, buildings, wireless equipment, vehicles, arms, etc., required for forest protection shall be strengthened on priority.
4. Working plans for boundary demarcation, prevention of encroachments, control of pests and diseases, natural regeneration, felling and other silvicultural operations shall be prepared and implemented after they are approved by the Central Government.

Wildlife Conservation

1. Wild animals do considerable damage to agricultural crops in areas adjoining national parks and sanctuaries, causing considerable concern, thereby requiring formulation of an appropriate insurance scheme for compensating damage to agricultural crops falling within five kilometers of national parks and sanctuaries.
2. Existing provisions for payment of compensation in the cases of deaths due to wild animals were emphasized, with the objective of ensuring compliance by the State/Union Territories Governments.
3. The ban on recruitment of forestry personnel shall be lifted and the vacancies filled up immediately on the lines of Police Department. The field formations shall be re-organised into viable units and be provided with adequate mobility, fire arms and effective communication network.
4. An effective mechanism for intelligence gathering and data base of habitual offenders should be developed for preventing wildlife crimes.
5. Adequate expertise shall be developed for prosecuting offenders and training be organised for undertaking investigation.
6. Steps shall be taken immediately for designating special courts for wildlife offences.
7. Create effective enforcement infrastructure both within protected areas and outside protected area to prevent poaching.

Functioning of Pollution Control Boards

and

Effective Implementation of Environmental Laws

1. For effective implementation of environmental laws, the Pollution Control Boards/Committees shall

build up capacity for requisite expertise and infrastructure. To this end, the following measures shall be taken :

- Induction of academicians, legal professionals, health experts and technologists as members of the Boards / Committees. This shall be done by 30th June, 2001.
- Appointment of multi-disciplinary staff by 30th June, 2001.
- Ban on recruitment shall be relaxed for the posts of scientists and engineers in the Pollution Control Boards/Committees.
- Training of personnel, for which programme shall be drawn up by the Central Pollution Control Board.
- Streamlining of Consent / Authorisation procedures.
- Inventorisation of polluting sources and pollution load.
- Formulation of Annual Action Plans.
- Publication of Annual State Environment Report.
- Strengthening and upgrading of water and air quality monitoring and laboratory facilities.
- State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)/Committees shall be equipped with full-fledged laboratory equipment and manpower by 30th June, 2001. List of minimum requirement of equipment shall be circulated by the CPCB to all the SPCBs/Committees by 15th February, 2001.
- The North-Eastern states and the State of Jammu & Kashmir shall prepare detailed proposals for strengthening of laboratories and manpower after consultations with the Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board and Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India on 14th February, 2001. Proposals shall also be sent for setting up of Pollution Control Boards by the states of Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal.

Solid Waste Management

1. A Committee shall examine various environmental issues related to indiscriminate littering, with particular reference to the disposal of plastic wastes. The Committee shall be constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri Ranganath Misra, with the Chairpersons of the State Pollution Control Boards of Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh as Members, and the Chairperson, Central Pollution Control Board as Member Secretary. The Committee shall submit its recommendations to the Central Government by 31st May, 2001.
2. The State and Union Territory Governments shall create common treatment and disposal facilities for bio-medical wastes, to be situated as far as possible from populated areas. Spare capacities of facilities at larger hospitals shall be used to treat wastes from smaller units.
3. The State and Union Territory Governments shall complete inventorisation of hospitals/nursing homes and take legal action against violation of Rules.
4. Composting of municipal solid wastes shall be promoted by the State and Union Territory Governments.
5. The State and Union Territory Governments shall complete inventorisation of plastics recycling units by 31st March, 2001.

Environmental Education and Awareness

1. A programme of volunteers to be called the National Green Army shall be launched this involving the establishment of Eco-clubs in about 100 schools in each district thereby covering around 50,000 schools in the country.
2. The above programme shall address various subjects for protecting and improving the environment, e.g., solid waste management, pollution control, afforestation, maintenance of parks and open spaces, dissemination of information and creation of awareness.
3. The State and Union Territory Governments shall be responsible for identifying schools, teachers and agencies responsible for implementing, supervising and monitoring the programme. The State and Union Territory Governments shall launch incentive programmes for adoption of Eco-club membership.
4. The Central Government shall make available financial assistance for establishing Eco-clubs, organising orientation of teachers and for resource materials.
5. The State and Union Territory Governments shall endeavour to enforce as a condition license of all cinema halls, touring cinemas and video parlours to exhibit free of cost atleast two slides/messages on environment in each show undertaken by them. Short films on environment shall be shown in one show every day in cinema halls.
6. Short programmes (5-7 minutes duration) shall be broadcast by All India Radio and Doordarshan everyday and there could be, once a week, a longer programme.
7. The Government of India and the State and Union Territory Governments shall endeavour to ensure that environment and its problems related to pollution should be taught as a compulsory subject.

River Cleaning Programme

1. The focus shall shift from cleaning rivers to cleaning riverside towns and cities in a holistic manner, i.e., subjects such as solid waste, municipal garbage must become part of the cleaning process.
2. The State and Union Territory Governments, municipal bodies and the public shall also participate by making funds available.
3. The participation of local bodies by way of contributing funds and/or in kind shall become part of future proposals. In the absence of local bodies, the State Governments shall take that burden.
4. Public participation by way of funds and/or in kind shall become an essential part of future proposals.
5. A detailed plan for recovering operational maintenance costs shall become part of the project proposals in future.
6. Upstream activities including treatment of catchment areas of the concerned rivers (including their minor and major tributaries) shall be planned.
7. Efforts shall be made to eradicate open defecation particularly in the urban and semi-urban areas.

8. All institutions of Local Self Government, NGOs, educational institutions shall be involved in a process leading to a succinct code of practices for citizens including conduct at places of worship on the banks of rivers.

International Issues

The Central Government shall keep the State and Union Territory Governments informed about developments on international issues related to protection of the environment and forests. These shall cover all the subjects addressed under the various U.N. Conventions and agreements, including climate change, bio-diversity, ozone protection, desertification, wetlands, forestry and hazardous substances.