

State draws the line around flamingo haven

CONSERVATION Govt sends proposal to Union environment ministry to create buffer zone around Thane sanctuary, but ESZ won't extend protection to some mangroves, mudflats, salt pans

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MUMBAI: The Maharashtra government has sent a proposal to the Union environment ministry to create a buffer zone around the Thane creek flamingo sanctuary in Mumbai suburban and Thane districts. However, this designated eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) doesn't extend protection to mangroves, mud flats and salt pans on the northern and southern portions of the sanctuary. The final ESZ declaration notifications from the environment ministry are expected around November.

The 1,690.52-hectare (ha) Thane sanctuary has 167 bird species, including migratory flamingos. Now, the state has proposed a buffer zone of 3,405.99 ha, extending from 0 to 3.5 km around the sanctuary's area, which has been designated an ESZ. "As of now, the ESZ area is twice the size of the sanctuary itself," said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forest (Mantralaya). Being categorised an ESZ helps conserve the ecosystem by placing restrictions on mining, industrial activities and unregulated development in the area. Only agriculture, small scale industries and minor infrastructure are permitted.

The Thane sanctuary's ESZ extends on the eastern and western boundaries of the sanctuary and includes nine villages - Turbhe, Mandale, Deonar, Vikhrol, Hariyali, Kanjur, Bhandup, Nahur, and Mulund. However, the northern and southern portions of the sanctuary, despite having mangroves, mud flats and salt pans, are not in an ESZ. "The proposal seems to accommodate requirements of the construction lobby, which has eyed development and infrastructure projects," said Stalin D, director of the non-governmental organisation, Vanashakti.

"Various states have submitted ESZ declaration proposals. The proposals will be studied, shared with National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for consideration, and draft notifications will

'GREEN CLEARANCE FOR PROJECTS NEEDED FROM CENTRE'

The state mangrove cell has written to all municipal commissioners and collectors in the Mumbai division on May 7 that until the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) for the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary is finalised, a 10-km existing buffer zone is applicable and all non-forestry activities or development projects proposed within this area need an environmental clearance from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)

The letter was based on an SC order passed in the ESZ matter in December 2018, wherein

a 10-km ESZ is applicable around the flamingo sanctuary

BACKGROUND

The Government of Maharashtra, through a government notification dated August 6, 2015, issued in exercise of the powers under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, declared the intention of establishing a 1,690.52-hectare area in Mumbai suburban district as a sanctuary to be called as the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary

However, the process of demarcating a sanctuary involves settlement of rights, which was completed by the district administration and a final notification was issued on May 10, 2018.



<p>A LIST OF SPECIES AT THANE CREEK</p> <p>7 species of fish</p>	<p>3 crustaceans (crabs, lobsters, crayfish) and one edible bivalve (marine molluscs)</p>	<p>167 bird species (40,000 flamingos and lakhs of wetland birds including waders, plovers Oriental Stork, Black-headed Ibis, Indian and Greater Spotted Eagles, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-bellied Tern, Caspian Tern, European Roller, Indian Skimmer, Painted Stork and many others)</p>	<p>68 insect species</p>	<p>29 species of butterflies and moths</p>	<p>9 species of mangroves - Avicennia marina being the dominant one</p>	<p>37 species of phytoplankton - dominance of Skeletonema, Thalassiosira and Rhizosolenia was recorded</p>
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BULLET TRAIN PROJECT: HOW WILL IT AFFECT FLAMINGO SANCTUARY?

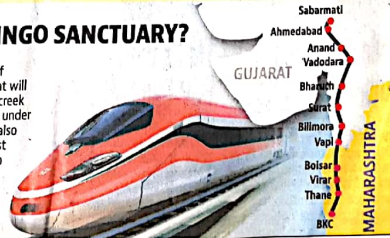
The Rs1.08-lakh crore bullet train project will span across 508 km between Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

Of this, 155.76 km falls within Maharashtra and 23.5 km lies within the state's coastal regulation zone (CRZ) areas. A 21-km underground corridor from Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) to

Kalyan has been planned with seven km passing under Thane creek

The alignment of the project is proposed on an elevated viaduct and bridges with 26.9-km of underground tunnels. Of eight tunnels, the longest one passes under Thane creek across 20.7 km.

Apart from 5.2 km of mangroves and mudflats that will be lost on either side of the creek as the network is built 1.8 km under the sea bed, the project will also require a 3,275.6-hectare forest area of Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary and a total 975 ha forest and non-forest area of the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary



be issued inviting suggestions and objections. By November, we expect to issue final ESZ declaration notifications," a senior official from the Union environment ministry said. In December-2018, the

Supreme Court (SC) had issued a directive that the Union environment ministry should declare ESZs around 21 national park and wildlife sanctuaries which do not have buffer zones. The Centre did not receive any ESZ

declaration proposal for the Thane sanctuary, Deolgaon Rehakuri Sanctuary in Ahmednagar district and Malvan Marine Sanctuary in Sindhudurg. When the apex court directed

the Maharashtra government to declare a 10-km buffer zone around all three sanctuaries, the state forest department said a 10-km wide ESZ was not possible around Thane sanctuary, but up to 3.5 kilometres would be pro-

ected. "A large portion towards the western end of the flamingo sanctuary is already built-up stretching from the eastern express highway onwards," said Tiwari.

BMC begins to map mangroves and buffer zone

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MUMBAI: The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has begun to map mangroves and a 50 metre buffer zone around them in the Development Plan's (DP, 2034) sheets, following the state government's notification of November 2018, directing all coastal cities to do so in their respective DPs.

For this purpose, BMC is writing to the forest department requesting maps with markings of mangroves, so that they can be superimposed on the Mumbai's DP sheets.

A senior civic officer from the DP department said, "BMC has requested the forest department to send sheets of these mangrove maps with a scale of 1:4,000 so that it can be superimposed on the DP. The existing mangrove maps submitted to BMC are of the scale 1:25,000, which will be difficult for us to copy." The civic body's DP sheets are in the ratio of 1:4000.

HT had reported in November 2018 of the state government resolution directing all DPs of coastal cities to map mangroves separately. By then, BMC had already completed working on DP sheets from the eastern and western suburbs, and was working on sheets for the island city.

Therefore, the civic body had decided to superimpose a layer of advanced graphic information system, with maps of the mangroves and the 50 meter buffer zone. BMC for its DP has an advanced graphic information system (GIS) that has created 22 layers, one for each amenity, such as water supply,



WHAT'S THE PLAN?

■ A state government notification of November 2018 directed all coastal cities to map mangroves and a 50-metre buffer zone in their respective DPs

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storm water, sewage. Mumbai's DP 2034 does not have a separate marking of mangroves around Mr. This area at present fall by the natural area, or NA, marked on the DP. No development is allowed in NAs.