

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): (a) The Western Ghats are internationally recognized as a region of immense global importance for the conservation of biological diversity, besides having areas of high geological, cultural and aesthetic values. The ecosystems of the Western Ghats include the tropical wet evergreen forests, the montane evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, etc. There are over 4,000 species of angiosperms (1500 endemic), 332 species of butterflies (37 endemic), 288 species of fishes (116 endemic), 156 species of amphibians (94 endemic), 225 species of Reptiles (97 endemic), 508 species of birds (19 endemic) and 137 species of mammals (14 endemic) reported from Western Ghats.

(b) and (c) The Government of India has taken several steps to conserve the rich biodiversity of the Western Ghats. A large number of protected areas comprising national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves and elephant reserves have been established to provide stringent protection to both flora and fauna. Nearly 10% of the total area of Western Ghats is currently covered under the Protected Area category. The largest Protected Area in Western Ghats is the Bandipur National Park in Karnataka. The Silent Valley National Park in Kerala and the Kudremukh National Park in Karnataka are among the important tracts of virgin tropical evergreen forests in India, serving as the home to a healthy population of the globally threatened fauna.

(d) and (e) The Western Ghats are important from the standpoint of biodiversity conservation. For the purpose of ensuring protection of biodiversity of Western Ghats, there are some restrictions for setting up of industries in certain ecologically significant areas of Western Ghats, for example, there is a moratorium upto 31st December 2012 for consideration of projects from Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri areas of Maharashtra, and for consideration of mining projects in Goa. There is also a ban on consideration of mining projects in some districts of Karnataka in compliance of Hon'ble Supreme Court Orders dated 29.07.2011 and 26.08.2011.

Measures taken for combating light pollution

512. SHRI ANIL MADHAV DAVE: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the measures undertaken by Government to combat light pollution; and

- (b) the details of steps that have been taken, so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): (a) and (b) The Ministry of Environment and Forests/Central Pollution Control Board has not conducted any study to assess and combat the light pollution.

Vacant post of Members in National Green Tribunal

513. DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased be state:

(a) whether a few members of National Green Tribunal (NGT) have quit the Tribunal;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor along with the number of vacant posts of members of NGT at present; and

(c) the immediate steps taken by Government to fill the vacant posts of NGT and also to expedite the process of providing adequate amenities and conducive work environment for members of NGT?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) So far, three Members have tendered their resignations in the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The reasons assigned by the three are: (i) for taking up new assignment (ii) no reason given (iii) personal inconvenience respectively. Resignation of the third Member has been kept in abeyance on his request. At present, 7 posts of Expert Member and 6 posts of Judicial Members are vacant in the NGT.

(c) A proposal for appointment of 6 Expert Members in the NGT has been sent to Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) for approval. The process for filling up of remaining vacancies of Members has already been initiated. The service conditions of the Members, NGT are governed by the National Green Tribunal (Manner of Appointment of Judicial and Expert Members, Salaries, Allowances and other Terms and Conditions of Service of Chairperson and other Members and Procedure for Inquiry) Rules, 2010 as amended from time to time.

Permission for mining in forest lands

514. SHRI K.N. BALAGOPAL: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state: