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Villagers dread industrial expansion

Verna Estate Development Taking A Toll On Ecosystem: Conservationists

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Verna: Industrial and infrastructure development at Goa's biggest industrial estate is causing angst among environmentalists and neighbouring villagers, as they are worried over the adverse impact on biodiversity and ecology.

Verna industrial estate already covers 68 lakh sq m through five phases of acquisition. More roads, pipelines and infrastructure are taking a toll on the green cover. The extension of national highway 17-B through the busy industrial zone has also stripped more green cover, disturbing the flora and fauna.

The villages of Cortalim, Quelossim, Loutolim, Nagoa, Verna and other areas have been complaining about ecological and social problems, as more space was carved for industries over the last 25 years. Verna-Nagoa villagers had pleaded with the Goa Infrastructure Development Corporation (GIDC) to halt expansion due to large-scale destruction, which includes



Savio Fonseca

A variety of wildlife (above) have been spotted at the Verna Industrial estate

adverse impact on the source of River Sal.

"Considering the damage already done, authorities should study how best destructive impact of expansion can be reduced as the plateau is a huge natural storage tank for water," said Edwin Pinto, a resident of Nagoa.

Threats of more eco-fragile land in private domain being commercialized loom large due to industrialization and extension of the

NH 17-B through the Verna plateau. Migrant labour ushers in more problems, spurt in crime rate, poaching wildlife and other issues. "Camps sprout near industrial areas for migrant labour who change social demographics," Joao Philip Perelra, a local resident said.

Walking beyond the borders and green fringes of industrial plots is an eye-opener for many birders and nature lovers. The plateau

with its rich cover on slopes has streams flowing into rivulets and small water holes for wild animals. These sources dry up after the monsoon.

The mindset that Verna plateau is barren and a rocky grassland should change, said conservationists. "This is an ecosystem by itself, hosting a lot of biodiversity flora and fauna. Roads have been laid in places over the path of streams, insensitively cutting off their flow," said Savio Fonseca, a birder and wildlife enthusiast.

Fonseca, like a few others, is keen that corporates pursue the agenda of biodiversity conservation. "Each corpora- te should use funds under their corporate social responsibility (CSR) budget for a scientific study of biodiversity and repair the environmental damage already caused," he said.

A few measures to protect existing fruit-bearing trees, water bodies and the plateau from pollution can help the promotion of eco-sustainable development. "There are leopards, black-naped hare, Indian wild boar, jungle cat, many bird species, especially grass- land birds and raptors, and most of them are migratory animals," Fonseca said.

The plateau, though termed a grassland, had many springs that helped the groundwater recharge in surrounding villages. "We found, through a survey that there were about 30 springs on the plateau," said Perelra.

Fonseca agreed, "Though the plateau is called barren, it is an oasis to be protected as much of Goa is getting destroyed."

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