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Environment Support Group and Department of Environmental Science,
St. Joseph's College, Bangalore

invite you to a talk on

The Future of Tree Protection in Karnataka

With specific emphasis on tree protection in urban areas

by

Mr. Brijesh Kumar, IFS

Chief Conservator of Forests, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike

Tuesday, 15th April 2014, 5.30 pm – 7.00 pm

Venue: Xavier Hall, St. Joseph's Post Graduate Centre, Langford Road, Bangalore 560027

Background:

As the summer peaks, the critical importance of trees to shelter life from the scorching heat is being realised. This is particularly felt in densely populated and heavily built urban areas like Bangalore. With sparse open spaces and the concrete, glass and steel structures radiating heat back onto the tar-topped streets, trees remain the only respite to the hapless pedestrians, street vendors and the rare cyclist. Yet, it is trees that are under attack and are readily being felled to make way for vehicular traffic – even when there is little evidence that this solves the problem of traffic congestion. Of late tree felling is also being justified to make way for pedestrian walkways!

Decisions relating to tree felling in Karnataka are entirely made by the Executive (the Forest Department). This power is currently without any public review, and rarely, if ever, is there voluntary disclosure of the intent to fell trees and to solicit public opinion. The Principal Bench of the Karnataka High Court drew attention to this problem in their interim direction of 3rd October 2012 in the PIL filed by ESG (W.P. No. 7107/2008) observing that "Public perception is that such (tree felling) orders are executed almost instantly and at night" and felt that ".....the public must be made aware of a proposal for removal of trees by issuance of public notice so that the objections can be invited". When such opinion is solicited, the lack of clear guidelines or rules makes the process largely ritualistic.

Such opaqueness in decision-making has caused widespread concern amongst the public at large, who are frustrated when their appeals questioning, critiquing and challenging tree felling decisions end up before the Tree Authority which includes the very officials who promote massive tree felling. This the Court held "may amount to a person being a judge in his own cause, which is anathema in law". Responding, the Government of Karnataka committed to the Court that such anomalies in the Tree Act would be set right. That was 15 months ago and till date no compliance has taken place.

In this background, it becomes essential to evaluate steps needed to ensure tree felling decisions are not arbitrary and irrational. There is also widespread evidence that the prevailing in-transparency in decision making is resulting in Tree Officers being coerced to irrationally grant permissions to fell trees, particularly in urban areas. The public come to know only when (or even after) trees are felled. And very little can be done at that point. This situation is resulting in widespread loss of the irreversible living heritage and causing serious environmental and social impacts.

Mr. Brijesh Kumar, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, has closely studied such processes and problems, and developed a methodology to enhance transparency in decision making relating to planting, management and felling (when necessary) of trees. In this talk, he will share this model and highlight various other concerns relating to the implementation of the, admittedly faulty, Karnataka Preservation of Trees Act, 1976.

Kindly confirm your participation in an email to pushpa@esgindia.org or by calling ESG at: 080-26713559 ~ 61.