

ENVIRONMENT JUSTICE MATTERS

A Bi-weekly News Digest from
the Environment Support Group

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Welcome back!

The second wave of the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges for us as an organization. The upsurge in Covid infection made us put a indefinite pause on our bi-weekly newsletter as colleagues, family, friends and acquaintances either fell ill or we lost them to the pandemic. One such person was Dr. Shirdi Prasad Tekur, a beloved community physician and also Trustee to ESG, who lost the battle to Covid on 16th of May. Until the very last moment before his hospitalisation he remained fully committed towards treating patients, especially those stricken by the same disease which ultimately took his life.

The pandemic also took away people like Prof. Dinesh Mohan, who devoted his life advocating for affordable and accessible public transport to improve quality of life for all in our cities; Sundarlal Bahuguna, the veteran environmentalist and philosopher best known for his association with the Chipko Movement; HS Doreswamy, a Gandhian, freedom fighter, social activist, teacher, journalist and a constant figure in advancing various civil and political rights struggles in Karnataka amongst others.

As we resume our bi-weekly newsletter, we invite you to also read the unpublished issues of EJ Matters, which we have [archived](#) on our website.

WEBINAR SERIES & CAMPAIGNS

1. Bengaluru's Climate Action Plan: Making it Participatory and Inclusive

Despite the losses faced over the last two months, we challenged ourselves to move ahead and resumed our webinar series, Bengaluru's Climate Action Plan: Making it Participatory and Inclusive after a month-long pause, the final session of which took place on 28th June, 2021.



Our unprecedented webinar series for evolving a participatory Climate Action Plan for Bengaluru concluded with Ms. Vanditha Sharma, IAS, Development Commissioner of Karnataka welcoming the [draft plan](#)

and appreciating the efforts invested by ESG and the participants in organising the effort. She assured that the collective effort invested in developing the climate action proposals for Bengaluru would be seriously considered for incorporation into the State Government and BBMP's plan in securing the ecological, social and economic future of the metropolis. Assessing the overall import of the webinar series, urbanist and leading architect Mr. Prem Chandavarkar stressed the need for systems thinking and radical transformations in perception and practice of urban governance, for the metropolis, and the region at large, reversing prevailing crises.

We invite comments and critical review of the draft climate action plan, which will remain open till 15th July, 2021. You can write to us at esgresearch@esgindia.org. Thereafter, all received responses will be appropriately collated and the final climate action plan will be submitted to BBMP and the Karnataka Government for possible integration of these ideas into the official plan of the metropolis

contributing to the Paris Climate Agreement process. Detailed reports and video recordings of each of the 9 webinars are [accessible here](#).

2. Count Every Death

Demands for rectifying the [gross undercounting](#) of Covid deaths are growing, and with good reason. We need to count every death, because every life matters. To ensure every person who has perished is remembered, that the grieving families find solace, and to also ensure there is accountability on the part of the State, various civil society organisations and trade unions from across Karnataka have come together in a campaign to [Count Every Death](#). As a part of this process, hundreds meet online every Sunday at 5 pm to demand accountability. To learn more about this initiative and to volunteer, visit the campaign's [Facebook page](#).

ESG FEATURES

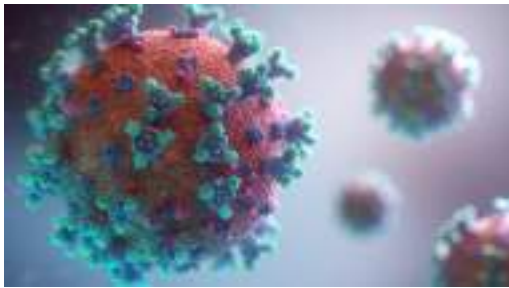
The Principal Bench of the Karnataka High Court headed by Chief Justice Oka is set to examine the question of whether the State Government can [abdicate the essential waste management functions](#) of Bengaluru's municipal corporation BBMP to a body corporate. This will happen in an upcoming hearing on July 5 in the solid waste management PIL being heard by the Court. ESG has already submitted that a move to outsource and corporatise waste management in the city is [illegal and unconstitutional](#).



The extraordinary humanitarian service of our beloved friend and trustee, Dr. Shirdi Prasad Tekur, who we lost to Covid-19 in May, is being honoured in unexpected yet

heartwarming ways. Here is a remembrance of his [personalised brand of medicine](#), while someone who almost grew up in his constant care [grieves at his untimely loss](#). In a village in [Odisha's Koraput](#) a memorial is being dedicated to Dr. Tekur in remembrance of over 30 years of service Dr. Tekur rendered to tribal communities there.

PUBLIC HEALTH



While the world grapples with multiple theories and investigations on the origins of the pandemic, Dr. Zeynep Tufekci explores for New York Times how the world [failed to learn lessons](#) from earlier lab accidents and from evolving research on the threat to humans from bat coronaviruses. Meanwhile, the latest identified variant, [Delta Plus](#), has been flagged as a Variant of Concern by the Indian Health Ministry. With the country opening up as the second wave recedes, an [explainer](#) by fluid mechanics researchers for The Indian Express underscores the need of making ventilation a prominent part of the national strategy to minimise infection risks.

BIODIVERSITY, CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

Last month's momentous report from the [first ever IPBES-IPCC workshop reminded us again that biodiversity protection and climate action can, and must, go hand in hand](#). Aathira Perinchery highlights the [critical need for conservation and restoration of grasslands](#), which are finally being recognised as more reliable carbon sinks than even forests.



While the [unprecedented heatwave](#) in Canada and the US has advanced the sense of urgency for climate action, a New York Times essay highlights how indigenous communities are at most at risk of being [thrice dispossessed--first by white settlers, then by governments, and now by climate change](#). This draws parallels to the [dispossession and marginalisation of India's adivasis](#), and their increased vulnerability to the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change.

Lawsuits are fast becoming a key strategy to hold governments and institutions to account for the climate crisis. An [interactive](#) in the Guardian spotlights 26 cases filed by US cities and states against oil and gas companies for their role in fuelling climate change. In a case brought by a coastal French town, an apex French court has threatened the government with sanctions if it does not take steps by March 2022 to [align the country with its 2030 climate target](#) of cutting emissions by 40% compared to 1990 levels.

Acknowledging the dependence of economic activity on a healthy environment and climate, the IMF has urged G20 countries to [adopt a carbon floor price for industries](#) as the quickest way of reaching goals under the Paris climate agreement. Striking a similar note, the new [Financial Sector Guide for the Convention on Biological Diversity](#) has underlined the role of the financial sector in curbing nature loss, [stressing ways for the sector to engage with, and align itself, with the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#) expected to be brokered at the CBD COP15 in Kunming, China.

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE



The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 was a historic law passed 25 years ago to ensure autonomous and decentralised governance of tribal-majority areas in India. Sumedha Pal argues for Newsclick that the law has been reduced to a [“toothless” regime](#). She also highlights how the recent steps to dilute environmental and human rights laws such as the Forest Rights Act, the Forest (Conservation) Act and environmental clearance norms are in lockstep with moves for increasing private sector participation in coal and mineral mining. This poses serious threats to autonomy of indigenous communities, she warns. The government’s recent announcement to [amend the Indian Forest Act](#) to promote ease of doing business and economic growth in the forestry sector, must be seen in this context.

Perhaps heeding to the demands of the power sector, MoEF&CC has attempted to further relax [fly ash disposal norms](#) with its [draft Fly Ash Notification 2021](#). The draft has scant regard for the toxic impacts of fly ash on humans and environment across the country which has witnessed, in the past year alone, [17 major fly ash disasters](#), according to a report by Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE) and Health Energy Initiative India. Accentuating this race to the bottom, the Union Cabinet has approved the [Deep Ocean Mission](#) which paves the way for commercial deep sea mining while paying lip service to marine biodiversity conservation and climate change studies.

At the global level, international lawyers have drafted the first-ever [legal definition of ‘ecocide’](#), proposing that it be the fifth international crime to be tried under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. As the [official commentary](#) to the definition explains, this includes

grave impacts on cultural resources, making explicit “*the cultural value of elements of the environment, particularly to indigenous peoples*”.

COMMUNITIES & LIVELIHOODS



The intertwining of culture, livelihoods and environmental protection is more clearly evident in local issues. A group of scientists have written to the Indian President seeking his intervention to withdraw the [draft Lakshadweep](#)

[Development Authority Regulation, 2021](#), citing its detrimental impact on Lakshadweep’s ecology, livelihood and culture. Manju Menon and Ishita Chatterjee point out for The Wire that the recent orders of the Supreme Court for eviction from low-income settlements in [Khorī Gaon](#) on protected Aravalli forest land only highlight the urgent need to interweave the twin objectives of forest conservation and social housing.

ENERGY



India and other Asian economies are attracting criticism for pushing plans for [new coal-fired plants](#), at a time when [calls for a just energy transition](#) through rehabilitation of coal mining areas are growing. At the same time, we must keep

in mind that even renewable energy has its own adverse impacts, and cannot be infinitely sustained in a paradigm of limitless economic growth. Vandana Singh and Chirag Dhara use the example of [electric vehicles](#) to illustrate this point in Scientific American.

In India, large-scale solar parks are driving [green capitalism](#) and having disturbing social impacts, with unfair, illegal and even violent means often employed to acquire land. ESG has been at the forefront of questioning this process, most recently as part of a fact-finding mission on corporate land grab for a 15 MW solar plant in [Nagaon, Assam](#). Recently, the Rajasthan High Court also took due note of irregularities in land transfer in 3 villages near Jaisalmer for an Adani solar venture, [cancelling allotments](#) of 1452 bighas of land.

Centralised mega renewable energy projects also have their fair share of environmental impacts. As we highlighted in our last newsletter, they are threatening the survival of India's grasslands, and the [Great Indian Bustard](#), a flagship grassland species. Ecology experts weigh in on the issue in this [podcast](#) for The Economic Times. It has also emerged that the [MNRE](#), taking a cue from renewable energy companies, has also decided to approach the Supreme Court seeking a revision of its April order directing the companies to lay power lines underground to protect the movement patterns of the large bird.

AGRICULTURE



Representatives from the unprecedented farmers' protest submitted a [memorandum](#) to the Indian President on the 46th anniversary of the imposition of the Emergency, highlighting the *"twin challenges of saving our agriculture and saving our democracy"*. On the removal of stock limits through the amended Essential Commodities Act, one of the three contentious farm laws, SG Vombatkere [describes for Countercurrents](#) how this amendment has left small farmers and consumers even more vulnerable than before, and set the stage for corporatisation of agriculture.

Shweta Saini and Pulkit Khatri argue in The Print that a real-time [farm distress index](#) powered by digitised data can go a long way in solving agricultural problems. Before any such initiative, the State must first address the apprehensions that have [already been voiced](#) by farmers' and civil rights collectives on recent moves to digitise agricultural data.

On the other hand, a crucial unmet need of several farming communities is survey and recognition of farmers' land rights and tenure. In a piece reminiscent of the solar land grabs mentioned above, Mohit Rao writes for The Morning Context how land tenure insecurity in "[unsettled villages](#)" in Karnataka's Bellary has rendered farmers, particularly those from lower caste and tribal communities, vulnerable to exploitation by mining companies, and prevented them from claiming rights under the Forest Rights Act.

The world's [first trial for GM rubber](#) is now underway in Assam, meant to create extreme weather resistant varieties. This comes a decade after the Kerala government [refused such trials](#) in the state on grounds that it is a threat to agro-biodiversity and human health. The rubber board has sought to allay fears by highlighting that the gene being manipulated is sourced from the rubber plant itself, a process known as "[cisgenesis](#)".

URBAN GOVERNANCE



Results from a recent official lake survey in Bengaluru show that nearly 20% of lake land in and around the city has been encroached. Deccan Herald notes that [past initiatives](#) to hold the real estate developers and conniving officials to account have long been in limbo.

Unsurprisingly, a recent move to fell [more than 6,000 trees](#) to rejuvenate a lake in the city (still open to [public](#)

[comment](#)) is also attracting questions on whether it will benefit the lake or land grabbers.

As modern society grapples with how to manage and protect its commons, perhaps it would do us well to remember stories like those of the legendary Bengali Shudra widow Rashmoni who used the law of private property to protect the waters of the Hooghly as a commons for fishing rights--a feat that a grateful public remembers by naming the Hoogly '[Rani Rashmonir Jal](#)'.

**LETS HELP THE MOST AFFECTED
ONES DURING THIS DIFFICULT
PERIOD**

DONATE NOW

Regards,

[Team ESG](#)

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