



Call for Action !



## No more holidays from accountability!

WE NEED STRONGER ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION FOR TOURISM

EQUATIONS statement on World Tourism Day, 27 September 2008

There is no ecosystem on our living planet that has not felt tourism's footprints. While the fact that tourism has negative impacts on the environment and on indigenous & local communities is widely acknowledged, practically nothing is being done to check these undesirable impacts. Furthermore, tourism is increasingly being located in natural areas that are frontier, inaccessible, untouched, critical in terms of their biodiversity, and ecologically fragile.

Current national policies and tourism policies of various states and union territories in India prioritise infrastructure driven tourism, and rarely address issues of impacts, regulation, and management. The scenario is not very different with environmental and forest laws prevalent in the country today. Environmental regulation in tourism is weak, and even what exists is flouted with impunity, by both policy makers themselves and the tourism industry.

The National Environment Policy 2006 in fact promotes ecotourism in many fragile ecosystems and overlooks the negative impacts that tourism brings in. In the area of climate change again the Ministry of Tourism seems more concerned about the potential loss of tourist arrivals than about tourism's negative climate change impacts. Protected Areas (PAs) like national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere reserves are seeing increasing intensive tourism development under the guise of "ecotourism". While the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 does allow tourists into Protected Areas, it clearly disallows commercial establishments. The Indian Board for Wildlife, the apex advisory body in the field of Wildlife Conservation in the country, in its XXI meeting in January 2002 resolved "lands falling within 10 km. of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should be notified as eco-fragile zones under section 3(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act and Rule 5 Sub-rule 5(viii) & (x) of the Environment (Protection) Rules". Despite this, a rash of tourism establishments are found cheek by jowl in the immediate periphery of every Protected Area of repute like Corbett, Ranthombore, Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Rajiv Gandhi – Nagarhole, Bandipura, Mudumalai, and Periyar.

Under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, section 2(d), non-forestry activity is prohibited in a forest area, except with the approval of the Central Government. Thus tourism enters the forests though a devious route! In this case, a proviso on explanation of "non-forest purpose" lays down that it does not include any work relating to or ancillary to conservation. Using the argument that revenues from tourism could potentially be used for conservation, tourism has pushed itself into forest areas, though it is clearly a non- forest purpose. The Board of the Kerala Forest Development Corporation Ltd. has gone one step further in its recent decision to include tourism as one of its core activities.

They have decided "to carry on tourism activities including Eco Tourism, Farm Tourism, Forest Tourism, Health Tourism etc. and to establish necessary infrastructure such as Hostels, Hotels Tourist Houses, Museum, Zoo, Hospitals, and Health Clubs etc. for the purpose, and to act as travel agents, tour operators etc for promotion of tourism activities." However, while rolling out the red carpet for tourism, the displacement of adivasis and traditional forest dwellers who have been the conservators of forests for centuries has not been seen as problematic by the same policy makers. The recent Forest Rights Act has been the only glimmer of hope for these forest people to claim their historic rights to the forest.

It is a well-recorded fact that the first push for dilution of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 1991 (issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986) came from the tourism industry, with repeated demands for the relaxation of the "no development zone". Subsequently, with over 20 amendments (read dilutions), in the battle between development and the coastal ecology, development won hands down. CRZ norms have been flouted blatantly by the tourism industry in all coastal states including in ecologically fragile ecosystems like the Andaman Islands. The push to "allow " tourism infrastructure to be built in violation of coastal zoning regulations has received overt support from policy makers and planners at the state and centre, with regulations are seen as archaic and "anti-development" .

A classic case of the holiday from accountability is tourism's exemption from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification (also under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986). EIA for projects was made mandatory in India in 1994 with the objective to predict environment impact of projects , find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, and if these impacts were too high, to disallow such projects. The Ministry of Environment and Forest's new Notification in 2006, has removed tourism projects from the mandatory list requiring the conduct of EIA and clearance from the Central Government. This is a retrograde step, as the negative impacts environmental, social, economic and political of tourism projects on local communities has been established conclusively.

*On the World Tourism Day, 2008 we call for accountability by the tourism industry and stringent environmental regulation for tourism in India.*


*We demand that national and state government reclaim their regulatory role by:*

- Seriously considering the negative and destructive impacts of tourism on the environment and indigenous & local communities and incorporating these in tourism policies and planning frameworks
- Setting up mechanisms that involve local communities and local governments to monitor the impacts of tourism. We ask that research and monitoring for such impact assessment be privileged.
- Regulating tourism growth taking into consideration ecological and social carrying capacity of locations.
- Adopting people-centred tourism planning and policy formulation to reduce environmental impacts of tourism;
- Formulating policies that are geared to preserving and conserving the natural environments rather than opening them up for relentless exploitation by development activities including tourism; In the light of unchecked proliferation of tourism into newer and fragile areas, taking steps to check access and growth, including moratoriums wherever required on the entry of tourism;

- Strengthening regulation and laws to ensure the protection of ecosystems and customary rights of indigenous & local communities; in this regard:
  - disallowing proliferation of tourism establishments on the peripheries on forest, protected areas
  - strengthening the CRZ Notification, 1991, dealing sternly with violations and scrapping the proposal to replace the CRZ Notification, 1991 with the CMZ Notification
  - reinstating tourism in the list of the developmental activities that require environmental clearances under the EIA Notification, 2006

*We demand that the tourism and travel industry walk their talk on their commitment to the environment by:*

- Respecting and complying with laws and regulations to ensure long term sustainable equitable and sensible tourism and not only pushing for short term rewards
- Demonstrating environmentally responsible practices by adopting codes of conduct on spatial spread, design and architecture, use of material for construction, renewable energy use, low carbon footprints, low resource use, responsible waste management and respect for local culture , practices and sensibilities.



EQUATIONS was founded in 1985 in response to an urge to understand the impacts of development particularly in the context of liberalised trade regimes, the opening up of national economy, structural adjustments and neo-liberal policies. An unbridled tourism is often banked on as the inevitable engine of growth without heed to its consequences. Through research campaigning and advocacy on tourism and development issues in India, our work has focused on tourism impacts on women, children, ecosystems, and communities

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