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ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: Deccan Herald ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 13/12/20

Wildlife Board okays Hubballi-Ankola rail project

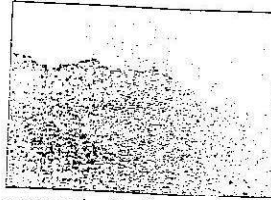
1.78 lakh trees face
the axe for Rs 3,749-
crore project

BENGALURU, DHNS

Making a strong pitch for 'development' than retaining forest cover amidst debate over climate change, the state government on Friday gave its nod for the controversial Hubballi-Ankola Railway project worth Rs 3,749 crore.

With the approval, Karnataka is all set to lose about 1.78 lakh trees in the biodiversity-rich Western Ghats of Uttara Kannada district. Surprisingly, the government cleared the project reportedly based on the report by the scientists of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

Ironically, the same scientists, using advanced techniques, had cautioned about the frequent degradation and rapid change in the land use



pattern in the forest-rich Uttara Kannada district.

Determined to clear the project, which was previously rejected by several statutory bodies, including SC-appointed Central Empowered Committee, the state government had convened the State Wildlife Board meeting on Friday. Much to the surprise of many, the Wildlife Board, in the absence of several of its members, including the Forest minister Anand Singh, cleared the project. According to sources, only five out of the 13 members of the Wildlife Board were present during the meeting and there were more non-members during the meeting.

Despite the members apprising CM B S Yediyurappa of the irreparable loss and ecological damage to the region, BSY reportedly replied to the members, "All of you have

given your opinion and explanation. But leaders from the North Karnataka have been telling that the project would help develop the region. Let's send it to the Centre and they will look into it." The meeting was attended by Commerce and Industries minister Jagadish Shettar, Labour and Sugar minister Shivaram Hebbar, former minister RV Deshpande among others.

Sources revealed that those present in the meeting pointed at IISc report while pushing for the project even as majority members appealed to CM that it would affect rainfall pattern, inflow into rivers in the region, besides jeopardizing the wildlife. The project, spanning 168 km, is only a step away from achieving a reality. Following the approval, the Prime Minister headed National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) will take up the project for approval.

It's double whammy for the conservationists of Karnataka in a week's time. First they lost a pitched-battle to safeguard the Bannerghatta National Park after its eco-sensitive zone was reduced by over 100 sq km.