

**Shri Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forests & Climate Change visits Havelock & Port Blair on his three day visit to A&N Islands**

Shri Prakash Javadekar, the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forests & Climate, Govt. of India immediately on his arrival on his three day visit to these Islands laid the wreath at Martyrs Column at National Memorial Cellular Jail, Port Blair and proceeded to Havelock Island to discuss the issues related to Environment & Forests, Eco-tourism and other matters related to welfare and development of the people on 16.1.2016. He was accompanied by Shri Bishnu Pada Ray, Member of Parliament, Shri Omkar Singh, PCCF & Principal Secretary (E&F) and senior officers of the Administration. At Radha Nagar Beach, he interacted with the tourists/visitors and took a round of Mangrove areas by boat on way back from Elephant Beach. He appreciated the efforts made by the Administration in upkeep and maintenance of one of finest beaches in the country and impressed upon the need for promoting eco-tourism in some more Islands with adequate environmental safeguards for providing much needed employment to the local people. He also held a meeting at Dolphin Resort with Members of the PRIs wherein the Member of Parliament was also present.

The Union Minister, on his return, held meeting with the Chief Secretary, PCCFs and other senior officers of the Department of Environment & Forests at Raj Niwas and discussed various issues pertaining to the management of tropical forests, wildlife and their habitat including the regulatory regime, in the presence of the Member of Parliament. He appreciated the efforts made by the Department in maintaining the Tropical Rain Forests and the increase in the extent of forests and tree cover of the territory as also the increase in the extent of Dense Forests and Mangroves as per the assessment made by the Forest Survey of India, in its India- State of Forest Report-2015 released recently.

Appreciating the long felt need for allowing extraction of higher quantity of sea sand, the Union Minister impressed upon the Administration to re-visit the issue and come up with a comprehensive proposal indicating that availability based on scientific data on accretion of sea sand in the Islands which has country's one fourth of shoreline. On the issues of declaration of Eco-sensitive Zone, use of Deemed Forests for developmental purposes and harvesting of timber from the un-worked areas, the Union

Minister desired that issues be re-visited and a comprehensive proposal with full scientific justification keeping the peoples aspiration at fore be sent to the Ministry for its consideration. He also took a note of the CRZ proposals awaiting clearance and notification of the Ministry and assured for their early clearance. Recognizing the efforts made by the Department in conservation of endangered and threatened marine species like Dugong, Sea Turtles, Corals and recently de-listed avifauna, edible nest Swiftlet, the Union Minister assured to extend all possible support for protection and conservation of these flagship species and also released a booklet on "Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve".

With the urbanization and tourism picking up in these Islands, the Minister strongly felt the need of having a proper institutional mechanism both for urban and rural areas for collection, transportation and disposal of solid waste and sewage for keeping these Islands environmentally safe.

The Member of Parliament, Shri Bishnu Pada Ray, also raised certain issues related to mainly Post-78 encroachers, providing road connectivity, de-listing of Trochus and Sea cucumbers, modernization of saw mills besides other forestry issues to which the Union Minister suggested that the proposals be sent to the appropriate authority for their consideration.

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