

# Just for an acre of biodiversity; let the natural habitat flourish



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**W**ith several trillion dollars to be invested in infrastructural development in the country in the coming few years, it is inevitable that huge land masses would come under urban and industrial use. While environmental clearance is mandatory for all such projects, the silent death of all the biodiversity in such project areas whether under SEZ or roads, airports or other urban infrastructure has remained unnoticed. Not a single tear is shed for such a loss.

A recent decision by Gujarat government, however, has broken this silence. Most people might have missed this news but for the sake of in-situ conservation of biodiversity, this decision must be complemented and replicated all over the country and perhaps the world. The decision is to leave an acre undisturbed under all projects requiring environmental project clearance.

I hope the government can make this obligation effective retrospectively so that owners and managers of large ports and SEZ projects in the state are persuaded to comply with this requirement voluntarily without getting into legal disputes. Why is it important to conserve the grasses, shrubs, the insects and other biological life support systems in small patches as they exist.

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## **MINDS ON THE MARGIN**

we have ex-situ gene banks in the country, they cannot substitute the need for in-situ conservation. Because biodiversity is not a static phenomena.

Constant evolution through mutation and natural selection provides adaptive advance in nature. Certain species which fail to adopt become extinct while others continue to grow or subsist. But extinction has become a major threat to the conservation because of large scale urbanisation and infrastructural growth which, in many cases, are indeed required.

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Without losing the economic advantage of such infrastructure, cannot we create a constituency for in-situ conservation? It is in such a context that this decision is an extraordinary gift on the eve of 50 years of Gujarat.

I hope no industrialist or real estate developer would go to court to thwart this small step for conservation. Ideally, at least one per cent of the area should be left as wilderness, accessible to scientists for research and to children for education wherever possible. A large number of drugs around the world have emerged from micro organisms collected from such places.

Once such organisms selected by SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions) from Gujarat has led to a consortium of Karnataka Antibiotics, CDRI, IMTECH to work together to develop next generation antibiotics with the support from department of science and technology, New Delhi.

Thousands of such leads remain to be developed which can further contribute towards conservation. I hope the central government will take this initiative forward and all state governments will join hand to support such a step for conservation in all the areas whether for mining, roads, airport, industry, ports or other uses.