

## **India: Bullet Train Allowed To Run Through Thane Flamingo Sanctuary And Leopard Park In Mumbai**

07/02/2019 14:17 by admin

India's ambitious bullet train project between Ahmedabad-Mumbai has been drawing public ire since its announcement. Questions have been raised over the investment and that if India, the nation with highest number of stunted children, really needs a bullet train.

The Rs 98,000 crore-project has earlier hit roadblocks like land acquisition following stiff resistance from local communities and tribal villages in Maharashtra.

Landing in another controversy, the pushy project has been given wildlife clearance that encroaches upon a flamingo sanctuary and the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, the home to leopards, in Mumbai.

The Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary hosted more than 1.2 lakh flamingos last month, up from 45,000 in October last year. However, the birds have been affected by the construction near Sewri.

According to a report by The Hindu, "The proposal involves diversion of 3.2756 ha of forestland from the Thane Creek Flamingo Wildlife Sanctuary and 97.5189 ha of land close to the boundary of the forest's protected area."

The green signal was given at a meeting chaired by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe inaugurated the project in Ahmedabad in September, 2017. The project is expected to be ready by 2022.

The report, citing an unnamed person privy to meeting, said the project was accorded wildlife clearance on January 10.

The 1,690-hectare bird haven - 896 hectares of mangrove forests and 794 hectares of a water-body "is on the western bank of the creek, between the Airoli and the Vashi bridges that connect Mumbai and Navi Mumbai.

The National Board of Wildlife, while according forestland for industrial development, has laid pre-conditions for the bullet train project. These include paying Rs 10 crore for habitat improvement of the sanctuary, barricading the work site to ensure no debris falls outside the project area and providing site and funds for plantation of at least five times the number of mangroves plants anticipated to be lost in the project as a penalty.

Of the 508 kilometre of the train corridor that will have 12 stations, 349 kilometre will pass through Gujarat and 154 kilometre through Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, around 7 kilometre will pass through Mumbai, 39 kilometre will pass through Thane and 110 kilometre through Palghar.

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