

A Platform of Organizations and People Supporting Environment
RA 449 Sector IV Salt Lake, Kolkata 700105
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Ref: SM/ R-Sarovar/ 110

Dt. 18 Nov 2020

To
The Hon'ble Chief Minister,
Government of West Bengal
Nabanna

Sub: Feared environmental degradation and destruction of biodiversity at Rabindra Sarovar and Subhas Sarobar during ensuing Chhat Festival

Respected Madam,

At the outset please accept our festive greetings. You may be aware that Sabuj Mancha is the largest platform of organizations and individuals concerned for environment of the state, and has been consistently trying since 2009 to generate an informed and united voice regarding the critical environmental issues in the state, and share inputs and opinions to government for facilitating actions against range of environmental violations. .

We like to draw your kind attraction that Rabindra Sarovar, one of the most important National Water bodies and few of the rarest major patches of green and water left in the city, is under threat. You yourself raised the issues regarding Rabindra Sarobar in the past. Rabindra Sarovar plays a major role in maintaining ecological equilibrium in the city, particularly in its southern part, and has never been associated with practicing any religious or social rituals. However during last few years, the Sarovar has been severely affected environmentally; often in the name of culture and religion especially during Chhat Puja. **We take this opportunity to remind that a committee involving primarily government officials and experts, set up under NGT order, highlighted the threat to Rabindra Sarobar and recommended the ban on such events in Rabindra Sarobar; based on which NGT passed the 'ban Chhat puja' order.**

The Honorable High Court and National Green Tribunal have passed various orders to preserve the water body, greenery and the environment of this National Water Body. The NGT order passed by Hon'ble Judge S.P Wangdi and Prof.(Dr.) P C Mishra on 15 Nov, 2017 strictly prohibited any Puja, Community Picnic or organization of other social events in and around the Rabindra Sarovar and appointed KMDA as the custodian of the Lake.



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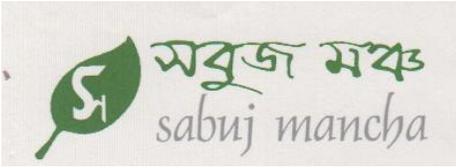
According to the NGT order, CEO of KMDA convened a meeting on 20.09.2019 attended by Municipal Councilors, Police Authority, Bihar Nagarik Samaj and other stake holders including us. In that meeting on behalf of KMDA it was announced that NGT order of prohibition would have to be complied. It was assured that KMDA would arrange several alternative spots for performing Chhat Puja rituals for which posters and leaflets were issued in both Bengali and Hindi languages. Expenses were incurred for providing arrangements at the proposed water bodies including transport facility. Subsequently on 27.09.2019 an action taken report was submitted on behalf of KMDA, specifying that the arrangement has been made so that no Chhat Puja rituals would take place at Rabindra Sarovar.

But after all these important submissions, it was observed that on the date of Chhat Puja i.e. 2nd Nov, few hooligans, despite the presence of police force, forcibly and illegally broke the gates of Rabindra Sarovar and entered in the Sarobar area; and led other devotees to enter. Many hundreds performed the rituals polluting the area and water, blatantly violating the NGT Orders.

This year the situation has worsened. KMDA itself went to NGT requesting allowance for Chhat Puja in Rabindra Sarobar; which was turned down by NGT. In the meantime, based on a public petition, primarily considering Covid 19 situation; Calcutta High Court has also directed vide its order dated November 10, 2020 that “... **As far as the Subhas Sarobar and Rabindra Sarobar are concerned, in view of the subsisting order of the NGT, these water bodies will be out of bounds for Chhath Puja celebrations.**”

In spite of this, it is bizarre to note that Department of Environment circular dated 11 Nov 2020 (EN/1493O-44/2019) to relevant departments and officials, apparently to convey Calcutta High Court orders of Nov 5 and 10, 2020, conspicuously made no reference to blanket ban on Chhat in Rabindra Sarobar and Subhas Sarobar, as spelt out by Honble High Court and mentioned in earlier paragraph. We strongly oppose the move, which we consider intentional and tantamount to misrepresentation of High Court order and demand that the same to be rectified at the earliest ; as otherwise it will only help to facilitate the violation in these two water bodies and adjunct green verges.

From media reports, we have come to know that the state has moved to Supreme Court for obtaining clearance for Chhat in Rabindra Sarobar ; the final order regarding which is yet to come. While we acknowledge State’s right to move to apex court; but it neither looks ethical nor proper for state to hold brief for pollution and not acknowledge environmental concerns as clearly stated by an expert committee primarily consisting government officials.



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Madam, we feel worried that in spite of all the legal directives and admitted need to save both Rabindra Sarovar and Subhas Sarovar, Chaat Puja will take place in these areas violating judicial verdict like last year blatantly violating the court orders; and hence earnestly request you to take immediate steps **to stop violation of the orders and prioritise environmental agendas which are key to survival of the city and its residents.**

Best regards,

Naba Dutta
Secretary, Sabuj Mancha

Copy to :

1. Mr. Firhad Hakim, Hon'ble Minister-in-Charge, Urban Development & Municipal Affairs Department for information and taking necessary action.
2. Mr. Niraj Singhal, Chief Environment Officer, Department of Environment, Govt. of West Bengal.

Naba Dutta,
Secretary, Sabuj Mancha