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# Strike a balance between conservation, development, forest official says

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VISAKHAPATNAM: Environmental protection and development are not mutually exclusive and can go hand-in-hand as long as there are enough safeguards that are put in place, said Dr SK Khanduri, inspector general of forests, Union ministry of environment and forests, said here on Saturday while speaking at a two-day UNDP seminar on coastal and marine biodiversity.

"The ecosystem can be conserved despite development projects. Where conservation can be brought into effect in a full-fledged manner, it will be and where damage can be mitigated, the agencies will do their best to do so. We need to understand and take steps to mitigate the damage factor," he said, pointing out that the focus should be on bringing more stake holders into play, educating them and ensuring that development does not spill over to entirely ruin an ecosystem.

Talking about marine and coastal ecosystems, Dr Khanduri said these ecosystems cannot be demarked as they are fluid with no fixed demarcation. "In such systems, there will be a lot of internal conflict between various stake holders, like the conflict of interest between fisherfolk, who depend on the sea for their livelihood, and bigger fishing companies who fish in deep waters. Our agenda is to bring them all on to a common platform to ensure that there is a civilised debate with the help of which people can work together," he explained.

On the issue of green credits, Dr Khanduri said that a holistic calculation mechanism is yet to be brought into place and that one of the main reasons for the difference in opinion is the fact that biodiversity differs from region to region, with no uniform code in place. While pointing out that the concept was yet to catch on in India, he said that countries like India had made it clear that the painstaking efforts that go into making of a green landscape must also be considered when credits are given.

When asked if the coastal corridor project would cause a great deal of damage to the local ecosystem, Khanduri said: "Such a project would not get the approval of the MOEF if it were so anti-nature and anti-biodiversity. Checks and balances have been put in place to ensure that certain rules are followed expressly."

However, Dr Khanduri admitted that a full-fledged report on the impact of giving pattas to native residents of forests was yet to be received.

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