

SALT PAN - ENVIRONMENT

News: The Maharashtra government has sanctioned the development of approximately 256 acres of **decommissioned salt pan land** in Mulund, Kanjurmarg, and Bhandup for the **Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP)** to relocate inhabitants who are not eligible for rehabilitation within Dharavi.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

1. Definition:

- Salt pan lands are large, flat, low-lying areas where seawater is collected and left to evaporate under the sun.
- As the water evaporates, salt is left behind and harvested for commercial use.

2. Location in Mumbai:

- In Mumbai, many salt pans were historically used for salt production and came under the control of the Salt Commissioner.
- The Salt Commissioner is a Central Government authority responsible for regulating salt production.

3. Current Status:

- With the decline in traditional salt-making in Mumbai, these lands are no longer actively used for salt production.
- As a result, large portions of these salt pan lands have been decommissioned and are now available for other (non-agricultural) uses.



4. Ecological Importance:

- These areas are environmentally sensitive due to their natural role in water management.
- Salt pans absorb excess rainwater during heavy rains, helping to mitigate the risk of urban flooding.
- Some salt pan areas may also support diverse plant and animal life, contributing to local biodiversity.

5. Environmental Concerns:

- Environmentalists and critics are concerned that altering these areas might disrupt local micro-ecosystems.
- Changes in the land use could potentially increase the risk of flooding by reducing natural water absorption.
- There are also concerns about the long-term ecological impact of developing on such land.

Government's Stand on Mumbai Salt Pans (Mulund, Kanjurmarg, Bhandup):

1. Location Outside Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ):

- The government has clarified that the selected salt pan land parcels in Mulund, Kanjurmarg, and Bhandup lie outside the boundaries of the CRZ.
- This means these lands are not subject to the strict environmental regulations that apply to CRZ-designated areas.

2. Not Classified as Wetlands or Bird Habitats:

- According to official surveys, these plots are not recognized as wetlands or known habitats for migratory birds or other wildlife.
- This reduces the ecological restriction on land use change in these locations.

3. Decommissioned Lands:

- The lands in question were officially decommissioned for salt-making activities nearly a decade ago.
- Since then, they have not been used for any traditional or ecological function related to salt production.

4. Available for Development:

- Given their status and location, the government considers these salt pans suitable for development projects such as housing, infrastructure, or public utilities.

What is a Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)?

1. Definition:

- CRZ refers to specific coastal areas regulated by the government to protect natural ecosystems from excessive or harmful development.
- These zones are governed under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

2. Purpose of CRZ Regulations:

- To conserve coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs, and coastal forests.
- To ensure sustainable development by preventing over-exploitation of coastal resources.
- To protect the livelihood and rights of communities dependent on fishing and coastal ecosystems.

3. Legal Framework:

- The first CRZ notification was issued in February 1991 by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- The rules have been revised several times, with major updates in 2011 and 2018 to address changing environmental and developmental needs.

Four Types of Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ):

1. CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas):

- **Includes:** Mangrove forests, coral reefs, sand dunes, national parks, marine parks, and wildlife sanctuaries.
- **Protection Level:** Highest level of environmental protection.
- **Development Allowed:** No development or construction is allowed, except for very specific cases like defense or critical public utilities.

2. CRZ-II (Urban Areas):

- **Includes:** Urban and developed areas within municipal limits that are already substantially built up.
- **Development Rules:** Permits regulated and authorized construction, such as buildings for public use, but bans illegal or unauthorized structures.

3. CRZ-III (Rural and Undeveloped Areas):

- **Includes:** Predominantly rural areas, agricultural lands, and open natural spaces.
- **Development Rules:** Allows limited construction, mainly for essential needs like small-scale public infrastructure, agriculture, or housing for local communities.

4. CRZ-IV (Water Bodies):

- **Includes:** Water areas like seas, rivers, bays, creeks, and backwaters that are affected by tidal movements.
- **Protection Focus:** Prevents pollution and regulates development that could harm marine life and fishing activities.

Iodine

- Iodine is a vital **micro-nutrient** for the optimal mental and physical development of human beings.
- Deficiency of iodine can result in a range of disabilities and disorders such as **goitre, hypothyroidism, cretinism, abortion, still-births, mental retardation, and psychomotor defects** (defects in which there is a slow down in thought process and a reduction of physical movements in an individual).

- In 1992, India made fortification of salt with iodine mandatory, for direct human consumption.
- In 2011, the Supreme Court also mandated **universal iodization** for the control of iodine deficiencies.
- A recent initiative in this regard named **Jeevan Bindi** (an iodine patch designed like a regular bindi) was started to help one lakh **tribal women** in north-west Maharashtra battle iodine deficiency as these tribals did not consume iodized salt.

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