

Five-year ban on BBC from India’s national parks for its film on Kaziranga’s anti-poaching policy

The Centre said its decision stemmed from the ‘irreparable damage done to India’s reputation’ because of the broadcaster’s documentary

The British Broadcasting Corporation has been barred from filming in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries across India for five years, reported The Indian Express on Friday. In a letter issued by the Centre on April 10, the BBC was informed that the ban, which is effective immediately, has been put in place for “irreparable damage done to India’s reputation”.

The order comes in the backdrop of a documentary shot by BBC correspondent Justin Rowlett at Kaziranga National Park, which highlights the government’s aggressive policy to protect endangered rhinos from poachers. The fresh order is an update to the National Tiger Conservation Authority’s showcase notice to the broadcaster, which prohibited it from filming in the country’s tiger reserves. The authority had issued a memorandum saying that the BBC had not submitted the



documentary to the environment and external affairs ministries for a mandatory review.

The new order stated that the Environment Ministry had “examined the matter” and found that the BBC had “projected a negative, malicious and sensational portrayal of India’s conservation success story at Kaziranga Tiger

Reserve”. Ministry officials told The Indian Express that it has denied at least four filming applications by the BBC and its Natural History Unit since March.

A BBC spokesperson had said that such an order would be a big disappointment. “The programme was balanced, impartial and accurately reported what we found on

arrival. It covered both the successes achieved through India’s conservation policies and the challenges. We approached the relevant government authorities to ensure their position was fully reflected, but they declined to take part,” the spokesperson had said.

On February 14, the NTCA had issued a notice

against airing the programme without approval from the ministries. The documentary was telecast on February 11. Killing for Conservation showed that rangers are allowed to shoot people to stop poaching. According to Rowlett, this shoot-at-sight policy had led to the killing of 23 people by forest guards, even as 17 rhinos have been poached at the park in the past year.

Earlier, the Environment Ministry had recommended blacklisting the BBC. “They [the BBC] have misrepresented facts and selectively over-dramatised interviews and old footage,” Park Director Satyendra Singh had said. “They had a different agenda fuelled by certain foreign NGOs and local elements opposed to conservation.”

The Kaziranga National Park is a world heritage site and considered the most prestigious wildlife reserve in India.

DR. ELSALYCIAS JOEL & JAEYOUN KIM

ENERGY CRISIS

Rooftop solutions

“Solar power is the last energy resource that isn’t owned yet - nobody taxes the sun yet”

With climate change on one hand giving enough reasons for humans to worry about a safe future, there is an inevitable increase in the demand on the world’s natural resources for want of energy. Renewable energy being the way of the future, all eyes are up on the huge object that illuminates our globe, holding in place of gravity for millions and millions of years. Though there are speculations about sun burning out, may be after 5 or 7 billion years, harnessing solar energy and finding better ways to do it seems the rule of the day because sun seems to be infinite source of renewable energy. If only 2% of the solar energy is harnessed its time we focused on improving the ability to harvest, store and distribute solar energy.

In Hindu mythology, Surya represents the sun god who is associated with life,

healing and good fortune. In central India the Sun is still invoked as the Holy One, the Creator, and Preserver. Thus, sun has always taken its rightful place. No wonder, India is one of the countries with the higher solar electricity production per watt installed, with an insulation of 1700 to 1900 kilowatt hours per kilowatt peak (kWh/KWp). India’s demand for renewable energy is expected to grow seven times by 2035, according to the latest edition of BP Energy Outlook. As of 28 February 2017, the country’s solar grid had a cumulative capacity of 9.57 gigawatts (GW).

Across the world, the fire and light of the sun is seen as the manifestation of a divine and omnipotent power triumphing over darkness. In every sense, sun is the solution to worldwide energy crisis.

Institute of Energy Studies, Anna University,

Chennai under the leadership of its director R Velraj did it’s bit to tackle the mismatch between demand and supply of renewable energy. He is the principal investigator of projects that focus on generating power in villages by adapting a micro grid concept. Power generated from solar and wind should be transferred to all houses and offices of the villages through the local transmission line called micro grid. Thus energy storage concept can be introduced as well independence from Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited can be enjoyed.

Only large industrial facilities rely on captive power generation to stand shortages of electricity from the grid. Blessed with 300 clear sunny days in a year, India is among the top 5 destinations worldwide for solar energy development. To turn our backs to fossil fuels, every

family should have a solar panel on their roof. “India lives in her villages”. Quite rightly, Pandri, a village in the Purulia district of West Bengal was installed with first solar-powered electricity and also became the first in the country to evolve as a decentralized solar power village. For every other village to follow suit, people should be educated about solar energy, tapping it and the advantages of decarbonizing the power sector. That Solar Energy can be tapped via two routes solar thermal and solar photovoltaic is knowledge but educating villagers about nanogrids-the technology involved in the project and how people’s health and life would improve as a result of better access to water and employment generated with 24*7 electricity is an urgent need. Unbelievably there are more than 10,000 villages that are not electrified in the real sense.

Reasons why solar panels are finding their way on the roofs of commercial, government and institutional buildings despite awareness, are many. Terraces and roof tops are used for other purposes like drying clothes, installing water tanks and split ACs. Solar companies neither want to invest in plants less than 10 KW capacity nor wish to get into the complexities of dealing with multiple residents or stakeholders for every power plant. Jaipur-based Ray Power Infrastructure has installed 55 KW-60 KW of solar rooftop power in the residential sector making solar power a reality in just 6 homes and Delhi-based company 8Minutes, has installed rooftop solar plants in a few homes.

For rooftop solar to go mainstream, home owners to feel comfortable that the technology itself has been proven and that we have reached sort of a tipping point here with solar energy being very affordable, reliable, and clean, governments should advocate the relevance of solar energy and subsidies that come with it.

El Niño Returns: What else does Monsoon 2017 hold in store

As we move further closer to the Southwest Monsoon 2017, speculations about its performance have also started doing rounds. Monsoon rains hold prime importance in India, as around 60% of its population is engaged in agricultural activities.

Skymet Weather has predicted that the upcoming Southwest Monsoon 2017 is likely to be below normal at 95% (with an error margin of +/-5%) of the long period average (LPA) of 887 mm for the four-month period from June to September.

The culprit to be blamed is the notorious El Niño, whose effect will be visible July onwards. Most of the weather models are indicating towards 60% chance of El Niño coming into existence during the second half of the Monsoon. As reiterated earlier, evolving El Niño is equally harmful for the performance of Monsoon.

According to Jatin Singh, CEO, Skymet Weather, “Rising sea surface temperatures are already reflecting that El Niño is in the evolving stage. There is 25% chance of below normal rains and 15% chance of drought.”

El Niño is invariably linked with the poor Monsoon rains in the country. As per the latest reports, El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) neutral conditions have started developing. The Pacific Ocean has already started heating up and the Niño index has reached the positive value of 0.3 on March 20, 2017.

According to Skymet Weather, these neutral conditions may continue till the onset of Monsoon. Thereafter, we expect El Niño to develop during the latter part of August or September, which can have adverse effect on the

performance of the Monsoon. However, presence of positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and heating of land mass of Central India would also influence the Monsoon rains. But whether they would be able to withstand El Niño is the question. The positive IOD is linked with good Monsoon rains, while the negative IOD has an adverse effect on the same. Besides this, whenever there is intense heating of Indian land mass, a heat low develops over central parts of the country that pulls the Monsoon current towards Indian land mass. Weathermen are already predicting extremely

hot summers this season on account of lesser number of pre-Monsoon activities.

Both the factors are beneficial for the good Monsoon rains. Although both the factors are prevailing this season, however, historically it is seen that whenever there has been El Niño or La Niña condition, IOD has become insignificant. There has been only one incidence in the history when despite the presence of strong El Niño, Monsoon rains in 1997 were above normal on account of a positive IOD.

(www.skymetweather.com)

Extreme and unusual weather in 2017: UN weather agency

Extreme weather and climate conditions, including Arctic “heatwaves”, have continued into 2017, after global temperatures set record last year and the world witnessed exceptionally low sea ice and unabated ocean heat, the UN weather agency said.

While global temperatures hit a remarkable 1.1 degree-Celsius above the pre-industrial period, global sea-level touch record highs and the planet’s sea-ice coverage dropped more than four million square kilometres below average in November - an unprecedented anomaly for that month, according to the World Meteorological Organisation’s (WMO) statement on the state of the Global Climate in 2016.

“This increase in global temperature is consistent with other changes occurring in the climate system,” WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said.

“With levels of carbon



dioxide in the atmosphere consistently breaking new records, the influence of human activities on the climate system has become more and more evident,” Taalas said.

Each of the year since 2001 has seen at least 0.4 degree-Celsius above the long-term average for the 1961-1990 base

period, used by the UN agency as a reference for climate change monitoring.

The 2016 heating was further boosted by the powerful El Niño weather system, during which global sea-level also rose very strongly.

Similarly, carbon dioxide (CO2) levels in the atmosphere

reached the symbolic benchmark of 400 parts per millions in 2015 - the latest year for which WMO global figures are available - and will not fall below that level for many generations to come because of the long-lasting nature of CO2.

“The extreme weather patterns are continuing in 2017

adding that at least three times so far this winter, the Arctic saw what can be called the Polar equivalent of a heatwave, with powerful Atlantic storms driving an influx of warm, moist air,” WMO said.

“This meant that at the height of the Arctic winter and the sea ice refreezing period, there were days which were actually close to melting point,” it said.

In the US alone, 11,743 warm temperature records were broken or tied in February, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said the UN agency.

“Even without a strong El Niño in 2017, we are seeing other remarkable changes across the planet that are challenging the limits of our understanding of the climate system,” said World Climate Research Programme Director David Carlson.

“We are now in truly uncharted territory,” Carlson added.

(PTI)

Environment ministry to hire PR firm for image makeover

The PR firm will spread awareness about the ministry’s environment-related initiatives and why it is important to address these issues, among others

The Union environment ministry is often accused of only being a clearance ministry. To dispel this notion, perhaps, the ministry has now decided to hire a public relation firm to manage its image.

The PR firm will be expected to spread awareness about the ministry’s responsibility towards the environment, the importance of addressing environment-related issues and the impact that the current environment crisis has already had on people’s lives and livelihoods.

Inviting bids for work, the ministry has specified that the agency would have “to effectively propagate and publicize its messages and initiatives” to regional, national and international media. The bids were invited last week and the last day for submitting them is 24 April. The contract would be for a period of one year.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) was created in 1985. But it was rechristened in 2014 when Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government took over and added Climate Change to its portfolio, making it the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

MoEFCC’s mandate primarily includes overseeing implementation of India’s

environmental and forestry policies and programmes. It is responsible for the survival and sustenance of India’s countless, varied range of natural resources like lakes and rivers, biodiversity, forests, animals and wildlife. Prevention and abatement of pollution and climate change too come within its scope of work.

As per the bid document, the agency will have to depute three people at MoEFCC’s premises in Delhi—an English content person for communication in urban cities, a Hindi content person for the Hindi speaking belt and a media coordinator-cum-social media expert who will be in charge of news, dissemination and media coordination.

The selected agency will be expected to produce and circulate a monthly newsletter to inform the media, citizen’s groups and other target communities about the latest developments. Besides, there will be a “separate newsletter for schools” for dissemination of the initiatives of the ministry. Workshops/training programmes to familiarise teachers with key issue related to environment will also be organised.

The chosen firm will also be responsible for arranging press briefings, one-to-one meets and press conferences. Until now, this work was being

handled by the officials of the Press Information Bureau (PIB) which functions under the ministry of information and broadcasting.

Since the NDA government took over in May 2014, the use of social media by the government to propagate its work has gained huge importance. Keeping up with that policy, the selected firm would also be responsible for the social media engagement of the ministry.

It would be expected to inter-link all the social media profiles of MoEFCC and promote ministry’s events on the online platform, leveraging the news points in newsgroups, blogs, social networks and online medium.

“This will help Netizens to flow through the various social media platforms of the embassy which will further help track and increase regular followers (including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc),” the bid document said.

It said that blogger engagement will be a useful medium to create visibility about the key initiatives/developments of the ministry and blog writers will be identified (with maximum reach and with the right kind of following) for interactions with ministry officials.

(www.livemint.com)

Break the Grand Feudal Pakistani Alliance

The roots of export of terror from Pakistan lie in the Grand Feudal Alliance that the leaders of that country have cobbled up. Nehru had implemented land reforms in India. That broke the backbone of rural feudal lords. He also put private businesses on the leash by declaring that commanding heights of the economy will be held by the public sector. Indira Gandhi carried that movement forward by the nationalization of banks and the coal industry. That broke the stranglehold of the capitalists on the country. Such was not done in Pakistan. Feudal landlords ruled the countryside and trade and industry were controlled by a small coterie of business houses. The political parties pandered to these ruling families. They needed an issue that would divert the attention of the people from the inequities perpetrated by this Alliance. The issue of Kashmir came in handy for this purpose. The people, instead of opposing the Alliance for its anti-people policies, turned around and supported the Alliance for its stand on Kashmir. The Pakistan army extended support to this Feudal Alliance. They found they could get large amounts of arms and money as long as the Kashmir issue was kept burning. The ruling parties and the army propped up jihadi groups to push the Kashmir issue on the center stage. Kashmir and jihadis, therefore, are integral part of the strategy to divert the people’s attention from the economic inequality that is pervasive in Pakistan.



one more member was co-opted in the Grand Alliance—the American Multinational. My assessment is that the people of Pakistan are not happy with the Americans. They are more inclined to make friendship with China. Thus, the ruling Alliance walks on a tightrope between America and China. They seek financial and military support from both America and China to keep the other at bay.

Generally speaking, economic reforms mean that businesses will compete with each other and bring prices down. Not so in Pakistan. Here economic reforms mean that a cartel of MNCs and local businessmen would be free to charge exorbitant prices and fleece the people. In the result Pakistani society got split into two mutually hostile parts. The naked and jobless common man stood on one side. On the other side stood a grand alliance of Feudal Landlords, Business Houses, Multinational Corporations, and the Pakistan Army with the American Government standing ready in attendance to help if and when required. Pakistan Government and Army have roped in the jihadis to bolster their bargaining power against the Americans, and, at the same time, deflecting the attention of the common man from the poverty and other problems. Their purpose is secured by ‘optimal’ terror—big enough to be invoked as a trump card before the Americans and small enough that it does not push India to take a definitive action.

The perception of China as a friend among the Pakistani people causes a schism between them and India. In their view, India is their enemy since India is a friend of their enemy America. Again, in their view, India is their enemy since India is an enemy of their friend China. The anti-India sentiment in Pakistan is being fuelled by the support of the Alliance to the jihadis. It is being strengthened by the perception of India being a friend of America and enemy of China.

Government of India wants to put pressure upon the Pakistan Government to take action against the jihadis. This

policy will not deliver. The jihadis have a vital role in the survival of the Alliance. They deflect the attention of the people from the anti-people doings of the Alliance. The anti-people agenda being followed by the Alliance will get exposed if the jihadis go low. We are asking the Alliance to dig its own grave by putting a leash on the jihadis.

We are wasting our energies in trying to turn the Alliance against the jihadis. Instead of trying to create a schism between the Alliance and the jihadis, we must try to create a schism between the people on the one side and the Alliance and the jihadis on the other. The solution will come from weakening the Alliance itself just as we did with Sheikh Mujib in Bangladesh.

We should provide big financial support to International Donors and route the funds to people’s civil liberties organizations of Pakistan to raise the issue of economic inequality against the ruling Alliance and foster internal dissension. Global donors regularly give funds to foster internal dissension against governments that do not toe their line. We should do the same. We should try to establish a pro-common man government in Pakistan which will create a soft society and remove the need for the Government to rely on the jihadis to deflect the attention of the people from poverty. In one go, we shall liberate the Pakistani people from the tyranny of the Grand Alliance and also secure friendly government across our borders.

Second, we must reexamine our pro-American anti-China stance. Here we can take a lesson from China. That country has often taken an anti-American stance, such as in respect of North Korea, yet obtained advanced commercial technologies from American Multinationals. It has also developed advanced military hardware despite lack of cooperation from America. We must do the same. We must extend our hand of friendship to China. We can create a pro-Indian sentiment among Pakistani people if we become friends with China and enemies with America. We have to make a hard choice whether we want to lose the support of Pakistani people by being seen as supporters of their enemy America and enemy of their friend China; or we will befriend the Pakistani people by distancing ourselves from America and embracing friendship with China.