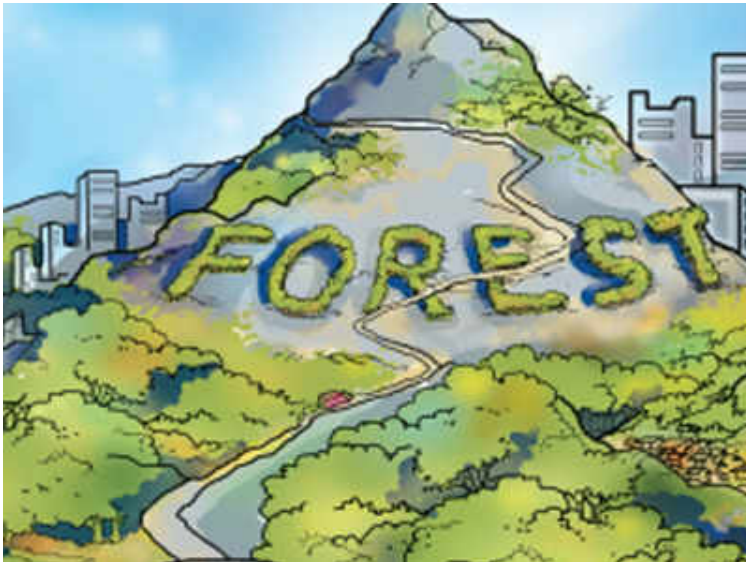


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# Centre releases coastal zone management plan, allows development in buffer zones on private land

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MUMBAI: The Centre has released guidelines for the preparation of a Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) for states on the seaboard, including Maharashtra. With this, the Union ministry of environment and forests and climate change has paved the way for opening up buffer zones around mangroves on private land for development and reducing the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) in Mumbai from 500 metres to 50 metres from the high tide line. This may sound the death knell for mangroves on private land. Mumbai has around 1,800 hectares of private land notified as covered with mangroves. Another 700 hectares is yet to be notified.

N Vasudevan, additional principal, chief conservator of forests, and head of the mangrove conservation cell, said if the law is properly implemented, mangroves on private land can be protected.

While there are very few vacant plots in CRZ areas in Mumbai, the 2019 CRZ notification will, however, open up housing societies and slums for redevelopment. These areas will get the same floor space index (FSI) as the rest of the city. This means Mumbai's coastline will be awash with highrises.

Shrianka Kardile, a consultant to the real estate industry on environmental norms, said the reduction of CRZ area to 50 metres means more development closer to the coast and while this may be good news for the real estate industry, it spells bad news

for the environment. "Rising sea levels on account of climate change will mean more natural calamities along the coast and we are not ready to tackle such devastation," she said.

Vaishali Thambat, another consultant, suggested that in case of mangroves that are yet to be declared as reserved forest, buffer zones can be converted into bio-diversity parks, recreation centres and even research centres. She said marking existing structures on the map will do away with the need for developers to prove that the structure is authorised, which will ease the way for development. "No-development zone in CRZ-III areas will be further reduced to 20 metres from the high tide line," she said.

In case of bay areas, CRZ area will be reduced to 50 metres from the high tide line, while in creek areas, it will be decided by the width of the creek. "So, if the creek is 5m wide, then CRZ area will be 5m from the high tide line," said Kardile.

While the Centre has mandated that the CZMP be ready in six months, it is unlikely as there are few agencies than can prepare such maps.