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SAVE OUR WETLANDS - Another feather in city's wetlands cap

Subhro Niyogi

Kolkata:

'Among World's 2 Most Precious Waterbodies'

The secretary-general of Ramsar Convention, Martha Rojas-Urrego, has recognised East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) among two of the world's most precious natural resources for waste water treatment and a desired model for optimum reuse of water to combat the global water crisis. The other site is Nakivubo Swamp in Kampala, Uganda.

In a statement issued on World Water Day , the Ramsar top boss remarked: “Nakivubo Swamp filters all the sewage and industrial waste for free. A treatment plant to do the same would cost over \$2 million per year. EKW also treats waste from Kolkata and has saved on the cost of building and maintaining a treatment plant.“ The sewage treated at EKW is 10 times that of Nakivubo.

The recognition of EKW is significant as the wetlands has recently been confronted with existential threat following doubts on its utility. City mayor and environment minister Sovan Chatterjee, who has taken over as the chairman of the wetland's management authority , wants to utilise the land for urban projects. He has already convened a meeting of stakeholders, including Ramsar representative Lew Young, to push for modification of rules governing the site.

“The Ramsar statement makes EKW a matter of national pride. It is a timely reminder that we have in our backyard something that any other world city would die to have,“ said ecologist Dhrubajyoti Ghosh, who in 1981 stumbled upon the remarkable use of EKW by the local population that farmed table fish with the waste water through a process that led to its natural treatment before being discharged into the Bay of Bengal.

Ghosh believes EKW is even more significant than Nakivubo Swamp as the latter is not community-based. What makes EKW unique is that the practice was developed by locals who may not have had scientific knowledge but had deep insight into local ecology .“EKW not only treats waste water, it is a source of livelihood for nearly 1 lakh people. EKW subsidises living in Kolkata. It's the reason why cost of living is lower than other metros,“ he said.

Environment activist Bonani Kakkar of Public, whose PIL in 1992 against a government plan to construct a World Trade Centre in the area is considered the most critical move that saved the wetlands, termed the latest pronouncement a validation of Justice Umesh Banerjee's judgment. "He had talked about Kolkata's ecological balance, way before it became the buzzword. EKW's economic value cannot be estimated as the city owes its very survival to it. There is no recurring cost on sewage treatment plants due to EKW. Today, when Kolkata is faced with extremities of climate change, EKW is all the more relevant," said Kakkar.

LIFELINE FOR SURVIVAL



<p>What is Ramsar site?</p> <p>➤ Wetland designated of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, which is an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by Unesco. It provides for national action and international cooperation regarding the conservation of wetlands</p>	<p>EKW facts</p> <p>12,500 hectare Area demarcated as EKW</p> <p>BHERI COUNT</p> <p>264 Fully functional</p> <p>14 Partially functional</p> <p>64 Disappeared</p> <p>MOUJAS WITH MAXIMUM ENCROACHMENT</p> <p>➤ Bhagabanpur, Karimpur, Deyara under Sonarpur PS; Chowbagha, Pashchim Chowbagha under Anandapur PS</p>
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