

NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL ORDERS VIGIL ALONG COASTAL AREAS

PUNE: The National Green Tribunal, western zone bench, Pune on Tuesday, directed all collectors and police commissioners of the coastal zone areas and districts in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa, to instruct police stations to step up vigil to stop illegal sand mining in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ).

The directives have come in the wake of increasing activities by the sand mafia and extensive extraction of sand for construction.

The tribunal also directed the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Regulatory Authority (MCZMA), collectors and commissioners of all coastal zones and districts to submit status reports along with cases registered and sand seized, apart from taking strict action against sand mafias and those responsible for illegal extraction.

The tribunal bench, comprising Justices V R Kingaonkar and Ajay Deshpande also suggested that these authorities take assistance from local fishermen, community members, homeguards and social organizations to comply with the directions.

The order added, "The state government may, if so required, depute homeguards to assist the Coastal Police Force (CPF) to monitor the activities of keeping vigil and registering cases against sand mafias."

The order came in response to a petition filed by Mumbai-based non governmental organization (NGO) Awaaz Foundation against the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board, Ministry of Environment and Forest, Maharashtra Maritime Board, collectors of Raigad, Thane, Navi Mumbai, Sindhudurg, and Mumbai Municipal Corporation, among others.

Advocate Asim Sarode, representing the Awaaz Foundation, told TOI that the NGO's petition challenges the illegal business of sand dredging and mining in foreshore lands, creeks, tidal waters and other areas and sand extraction.

"The tribunal has granted ad-interim relief for banning forthwith all sand mining in areas falling within CRZ in the coastal districts of Thane, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Sindhudurg and Navi Mumbai districts, and also restraining the collectors, MPCB, Maharashtra Maritime Board from issuing any further auction notices, granting licences and permissions for mining sand in areas that fall within CRZ in the coastal districts of the state," added Sarode.