Assam wetland at risk till dumping stops: activists

'Notification alone will not help'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Green activists in Assam say that the Environment Ministry's recent notification on the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary is meaningless unless the government puts an end to the dumping of garbage near the wetland.

The 4.1 sq.km. sanctuary is within the Deepar Beel, a wetland on the south-western edge of Guwahati that expands up to 30 sq. km in summer and reduces to about 10 sq. km in the winter. It is Assam's only Ramsar site, a wetland designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Environment Ministry's notification of August 25 specified an area "to an extent varying from 294 metres to 16.32 km" as the eco-sensitive zone, with the total area being 148.97 sq.km.

"The notification is meaningless if the government does not stop the dumping of garbage perilously close to the wetland. Seepage from this dump and sewage from Guwahati have already made the sanctuary toxic," said Bakul Rongpi, president of Deepar Beel eco-development committee.

Greater adjutant storks at a dumping site near the Deepar Beel wetland.

He is from Mikirpara Chakardeo, where residents have for long resisted development projects around the wetland in vain.

"A thorough study of the notification showed the ESZ will serve no purpose. The minimum distance for polluting units should have been 5 km from the boundary of the sanctuary," Chakardeo-based dairy farmer and green activist Pramod Kalita told *The Hindu*.