

Experts flag diversion of fresh water from Brahmani river

High salinity could pose a threat to the mangroves in Odisha, they say

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Environmentalists on Friday expressed concern over the massive diversion of fresh water from the Brahmani river basin, which could pose a grave threat to the famous mangrove vegetation in Odisha.

Bhitarkanika – a notified Ramsar wetland – is spread over 195 sq. km and is home to 62 mangrove species. Besides, 1,600 salt water crocodiles crawl on the mudflats of the Bhitarkanika mangrove forest.

Mangroves grow in brackish water. Proportionate fresh water flow from the

Brahmani river basin and the Kharasrota river keep the salinity level of the water along the shore down.

The brackish water becomes ideal for the mangroves to grow and stay healthy.

Guzzler industries

The Wildlife Society of Orissa (WSO), an environmental pressure group, had drawn public attention on the excess water allocation for industries, which is likely to reduce fresh water discharge to the sea.

“The Talcher-Angul coal mines, steel and power plants as well as the Kalinga-



Alarm sounded: The Sunderbans mangrove forest was badly hit after the Farraka barrage was commissioned. ■ FILE PHOTO

nagar steel and power hub are drawing enormous quantities of fresh water from the Brahmani river,” said Biswajit Mohanty, secretary, WSO.

“Against an available 4,400 mcum of fresh water stored by the Rengali reservoir, 4,318 mcum, that is al-

most equal to the available water supply shall be withdrawn from the river,” he said.

According to the WSO secretary, 105 million litres, as per government claims, would be withdrawn for the mega drinking water project.

Mr. Mohanty said, “The reduction in water flow would lead to drastic changes in the water regime of the Bhitarkanika mangroves. The Sunderbans mangrove forest was drastically affected after the Farraka barrage was commissioned.”

Stating that the lack of normal flow of fresh water would increase saline ingression upstream, the WSO secretary said it would affect the local flora and fauna as well as the livelihoods of the farmers and fishermen.

Besides, there could be a quantum increase in the man-crocodile conflict since the estuarine crocodiles would leave the core sanctuary area and migrate upstream once salinity increases, he said.