



Date: 20 March 2017

To,
Mr. E. Rajendran
District Forest Officer – Hosur Forest Division
Mathigiri Cattle Farm
Hosur

Dear Sir,

Sub: Dabaguli Annual Fair 2017

The annual festival at Dabaguli, in Bilikal RF, Urigam Range was conducted on Feb 11 & 12 2017. Hosur Forest Division (HFD) and KANS worked together on mitigating the environmental impact of the festival.



Below is statistics collected during the activity. An estimated **1500 people** visited Dabaguli

No. of vehicles entering at Kestur Checkpost & at Dabaguli:

2 Wheelers	4 Wheelers	LCV / HTV / etc.	Coracle
141	20	32	400 people

State-wise (based on vehicle registration number):

Karnataka	TamilNadu
112	79

This activity was conducted by a team of people comprising of FD Staff from Anchetty, Jawalagiri, and Urigam Ranges and KANS volunteers. 11 volunteers from KANS and participated in this activity. It involved the following:

- Checking for plastic and liquor items at the checkpoints
- Demarcating no-entry zones to prevent people from venturing deep into the forest
- Putting up notices in Tamil, Kannada and English to warn the people against littering and other illegal activities
- Patrolling around the event venue and warning people from selling tobacco products and to ensure that there was no litter
- Repeated announcements over mike to instruct people to not to litter

In addition to the above, KANS also contributed 19 LPG cylinders to dissuade people from using firewood from the forest. From previous observations, we have noticed that around 3-4 tractor loads of firewood were being used.



KANS review:

The Dabaguli fair is a recent phenomenon, beginning somewhere around 2004-05 due to few people's vested interests in promoting the temple and to have fun and frolic in the forest. In due course of time, what existed as a small simple temple is growing into a big and modern temple with amenities such as a shed for storing cooking items, borewell, house for the temple staff, full-time watchman, shop for the temple visitors, electricity etc. Smaller temples have also sprung around this.



The only activity that was allowed in this place, as per the RF notification, is a 'fire procession', which happens even to this day. But this simple ritual has grown into a 2 day fair and as per the organisers, from next year they are plans to extend this to 3 days.

Other than this fair, there are other functions and congregations regularly happening at this place, primarily due to the conveniences available.

The growing popularity of the Dabaguli and the consequent restriction of people at Mutati in Cauvery WLS, has seen a huge increase in picnickers from Bangalore, Kanakapura and nearby areas of Karnataka throughout the year. The fact that the FD is also understaffed and that there is no mobile connectivity or wireless facility, leaves the limited staff helpless in regulating the unruly crowd.

Despite continuous warnings for the past few years as to not to use plastic and sell tobacco products, the stalls blatantly flout these rules and it is almost impossible to regulate this 100%. The stalls, which earlier used to be a carts selling tea, coffee and snacks have grown bigger and more organised with semi-permanent structures and this year there was also a stall selling mineral water bottles. The Health department and BDOs put up carts at several places so that people can dispose waste in them but people were still throwing the left-over plates on the river bank. When people have such mentality, expecting them to adhere to rules is impossible.



Despite best efforts at the checkpoints to confiscate alcohol, people are still able to sneak in these items, especially when they come in huge numbers in buses and tractors etc.



The uncontrollable presence of people in 1000s also results in illegal activities such as poaching. In addition, the fair also happens towards the onset of summer. At a time when most of the water holes begin to dry in the CNWLS (northern part of Melagiris), many wildlife begin to visit the Cauvery more frequently. And the same applies to the CWLS on the opposite river bank. A continuous movement of people in this region can cause a huge stress on the wildlife, especially Elephants.



Based on experiences in other temples located inside Forests, any attempt to curtail the activities are

met with stiff resistance and the main reason given by them are 'if FD is stopping us from conducting festivals in the temple, why did they allow such these structures to be constructed in the first place?'. In addition, local politicians also step in to cash in on people's 'sentiments'. Therefore, before Dabaguli grows into such an uncontrollable place, the FD has to step in and act firmly.

Some of the immediate steps that can be taken up are:

- Demarcate the temple boundary and remove the encroachments
- Close the Balagadapallam checkpoint permanently
- Close the Kestur checkpoint from 6 PM to 6 AM on weekends and on holidays and depute additional staff
- Instruct TNEB to regulate power supply

Some of the other steps that can be taken up gradually are:

- Disallow any functions from being held after 6 PM
- Inform the Dabaguli fair committee that henceforth only the 'fire-procession' will be allowed inside the forest and every other activities should be moved out of the forest.

For,
Kenneth Anderson Nature Society

(Laxmeesha Acharya)

Copy to:

1. Conservator of Forests, Dharmapuri Circle
2. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & Chief Wildlife Warden
3. District Collector, Krishnagiri
4. District Sub-Collector, Hosur