

# SC directs Centre to preserve over 2 lakh wetlands

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**New Delhi:** In a major direction to preserve ecologically crucial wetlands threatened by encroachment in many parts of the country, the Supreme Court directed the Centre on Wednesday to frame a policy to protect wetlands by June 30.

The court's direction will cover over 2 lakh wetlands across India which were identified through satellite imagery by ISRO and the Centre has been asked to draw up a phased plan of action to conserve the water bodies. Emphasising the important role of wetlands in maintaining ecological balance, a bench of Justices Madan B Lokur and Prafulla C Pant directed the Centre to notify all 2,01,503 wetlands and asked the states to provide details too.

The bench set a deadline of June 30 to frame policy for preservation of wetlands that are seen as effective carbon sinks to mitigate climate change and support a wide variety of wildlife and fauna. With wetlands en-

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dangered by land grabbing activities for commercial development, environmentalists approached the SC seeking measures to protect the ecosystems. The SC has passed various orders on the issue since 2001.

The Centre informed the court it had formed a comprehensive National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-systems (NPCA) to restore lakes and wetlands. "The ministry has so far identified 115 wetlands and 63 lakes in 24 states and 2 union territories for conservation and management under the scheme. So far, since 1987-88 an amount of Rs 780 crore has been released for undertaking various conservation activities," the government said.

# Secys panel set up to hasten Namami Gange

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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The Centre today constituted a committee of secretaries to speed up the implementation of the Namami Gange Programme.

Chairing the first meeting of the Empowered Task Force on River Ganga here today, Union Minister of

Water Resources Uma Bharti said the committee includes secretaries from Water Resources, Environment and Forests, Water and Sanitation Ministries.

Ms Bharti said the committee would meet at least once a fortnight to fast track the Gange programme. She said the government would first complete the old liabilities and then take up new initiatives.

Reviewing the progress of the Namami Gange programme, Ms Bharti emphasised on the need for speedy approval of its projects.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the slow progress in obtaining NoCs from various states, specially Uttarakhand and UP, she said the issue has to be sorted out at the earliest.