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Tourism Ministry wants coastlines opened up

Suggests modifying CRZ regulations to attract hoteliers, build eco-friendly resorts and provide job opportunities to locals

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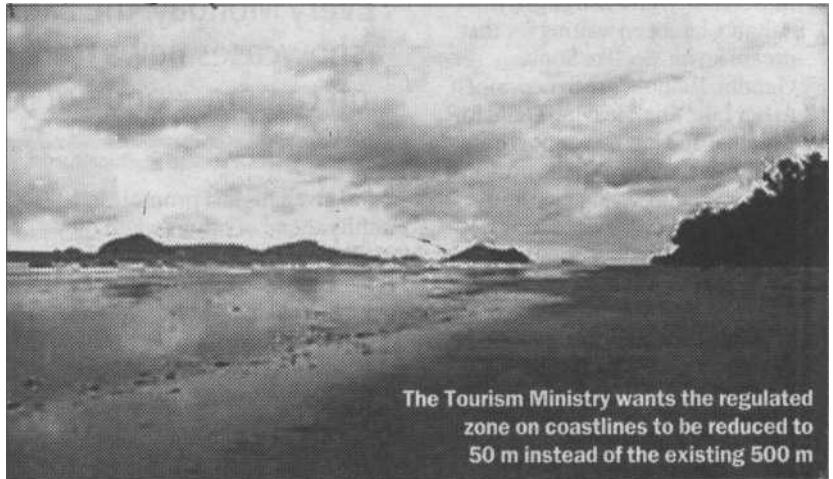
IN A move that will make environmentalists see red, the Tourism Ministry has recommended that Environment Minister D Raja reduce the 500 metres regulated zone along the Indian coast to a mere 50 metres if tourism is to benefit locals.

Tourism officials say if the government is serious about encouraging tourism as a primary source of livelihood, it must de-regulate the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) which stipulates there will be no industrial development along India's vast coastline, in the Lakshadweep archipelago and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

India has a coast about 7,516 km long with 4,198 islands, spread along the main coast of Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep.

Officials say, for instance, if the islands of Andaman or Lakshadweep are to be considered for tourism development, the CRZ rules ensure there is no land available to build pleasure resorts or any other recreational amenities.

"There is the coast on one side and forests on the other, so there is no question of development if the regulations are followed," says an official. "And with



The Tourism Ministry wants the regulated zone on coastlines to be reduced to 50 m instead of the existing 500 m

the CRZ rules, our resorts have no charm and no hotelier is willing to invest 500 m inland."

Now, the Tourism Ministry has recommended that the CRZ rules be modified on a case-to-case basis; in turn, it will strictly ensure that eco-friendly resorts are built, and that recreational activities on the sea and coast are environment-friendly.

The ministry is already hopeful, going by the recommendations of the Dr MS Swaminathan Committee which was appointed to "examine and review" the CRZ notification.

The committee has recommended that the entire coastal belt be mapped and the CRZ be applied according to the prevailing conditions of the region.

The CRZ came in response to the Environment Protection Act of 1986, later notified in 1991, and was introduced by the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to regulate the coast.

This was in response to environmentalists' call against blatant destruction of the coastal area by developers, contractors and hoteliers, leading to degradation of coastal ecosystems and diminishing living resources.