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ROCKETS AT THE GAHIRMATHA ROOKERY?

Protests by the inhabitants of Baliapal, in Balasore district, Orissa, over the setting up of the national rocket testing range have caused the site to be abandoned. The proposal to shift the range to Satbhaya, in the Kendrapara subdivision of Cuttack district, in the same state, however, is to be viewed with concern by conservationists, as it lies within the 70 sq.km. Bhitar Kanika Wildlife Sanctuary.

Gazetted in 1975 for the endangered saltwater crocodile, Bhitar Kanika is one of the few mangrove forests left on the eastern coast of India. Satbhaya is situated on the 35 km. Gahirmatha beach, which forms the eastern boundary of the sanctuary, and is perhaps the biggest and one of the world's most important olive ridley rookeries where an estimated 800,000 turtles nested in the 1984 season.

Location of the rocket testing range in Bhitar Kanika, or it's vicinity would spell disaster to the unique and fragile mangrove and marine ecosystems and ecologists and environmental crusaders will, no doubt, fight against so myopic a move.

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TEST RANGE FOR BALASORE CLEARED

(Indian Express, 22/5/86)

New Delhi, May 21 (PTI) The Government has finally cleared the plan for establishing an instrumented test range in Balasore district of Orissa as national facility for testing space launch vehicles and rockets and missiles for the defence services.

Following objections raised by politicians and the people of the area, land requirements of the project have been reduced from 115 to 68 sq. km. for the range itself and from 45 to 34 sq. km. for the safety zone.

As a result, the number of affected families stand reduced from a out of 11,600 to 6,100 families. Cultivation and fishing will be allowed in the safety zone when there is no test firing.

According to Dr. V.S. Arunachalam, scientific adviser to the Defence Minister, the range will become fully operational by about 1990. An interim test range facility has already been set up in the area.

The range will meet a long felt need to develop and improve indigenously produced missiles and space vehicles and reduce India's dependence on other countries.

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