

## Centre seeks report from Assam on forest land diversion in Geleky

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*The diversion of 28 hectares of land in Geleky reserve forest. (NE Now)*

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has sought a report from the Assam government regarding the alleged diversion of forest land in Sivasagar district along the Assam-Nagaland border, Northeast Now report stated. In a letter dated April 25, 2024, addressed to Assam's additional chief secretary (Forests), Suneet Bhardwaj, Assistant Inspector General of Forests at MoEF&CC, has requested a detailed factual report on the alleged illegal clearing of 28 hectares of land within Geleky Reserve Forest in Sivasagar district for setting up a commando battalion camp.

The Ministry has also directed both the MoEF&CC's regional office in Shillong and the sub-office in Guwahati to coordinate with the Assam government and provide the requisite information with comments at the earliest.

The diversion of 28 hectares of land in Geleky reserve forest was approved by then Assam's principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF), MK Yadava, who was also the head of forest force (HoFF), in 2022 for a commando battalion camp.

According to the official notification vide No FG 46/Border/Nagaland/Pt-11 dated November 15, 2022; the piece of land was diverted for setting up a commando battalion camp along the Assam-Nagaland border of Geleky Reserve Forest for the "protection and conservation of reserved forest land and conservation of forest resources". MoEF&CC has recently directed action against MK Yadava, for allegedly allowing the construction of a commando battalion unit within Inner Line Reserve Forest on the Assam-Mizoram border through the diversion of around 44 ha of forest land in 2023.

It may be recalled that Nagaland Post had on January 12, 2011, reported that the Assam government gone ahead and despoiled some tracts of the disputed Geleki reserved forest within the traditional area of the Wamaken village.

After despoiling huge tracts of forest area under Geleki reserve forest located in the Disputed Area Belt (DAB) sometime during 2010-11, the Assam government handed it over to ONGC from where tons of crude oil have been extracted. As per the interstate border agreement, the status on the DAB between Assam and Nagaland is to be maintained.

With new technology available with ONGC to extract oil horizontally, millions of tons of crude can be pumped out from Assam side. Estimates of oil reserves indicate that the Tzurangkong (under Tuli sub-division, Mokokchung) belt falling under Wamakan-Amguri area adjoining the Geleki reserve forest, has an estimated 50 to 60 million metric tons of crude oil.

It is believed to have the highest and yet to be proven crude oil reserve within Nagaland. The estimated reserve at Changpang, where ONGC had been drilling oil since the eighties and from where one million ton of crude was extracted as against the permit for 18 kiloliters on experimental basis, has around 20-30 million metric tons.