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Karnataka govt cracks down on illegal timber trade in Hassan forest division

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Bengaluru: A day after reports exposed a large-scale timber smuggling network worth several crores in the Hassan Territorial Forest Division, the state govt on Wednesday cracked down, ordering strict action against forest officials allegedly involved in the racket. Forest minister Eshwar Khandre directed the department to register criminal cases, seize vehicles used in the operation and initiate disciplinary proceedings against those found colluding with the culprits.

Acting swiftly on reports of illegal transportation of Senegalia catechu (kaggali mara) wood from Hassan, the minister instructed senior officials to take immediate action against the

culprits. "The govt has taken serious note of the alleged smuggling and complaints of alleged collusion by department officials. A thorough probe must be conducted, and strict action will follow," Khandre said.

Sources in the Hassan forest circle said the alleged racket was operating within the Holenarasipura forest range, where timber worth crores of rupees was being illegally felled from govt and forest lands and transported using forged permits. Environmental activists alleged that the operation functioned under the protection of certain officials, raising concerns of institutional complicity.

Local residents claimed that fake transit permits were routinely generated to facilitate the movement of timber to other states. Despite prior knowledge of such activities, officials at the local and zonal levels allegedly failed to take effective action.

The issue gained traction following an incident on March 28, 2026, when locals alerted the forest mobile squad about a truck carrying illegally sourced catechu timber. The vehicle, bearing registration number AP 68 C 0139, was reportedly loaded with timber. However, instead of being intercepted, the truck was allegedly allowed to pass, triggering outrage among activists.

Sources also alleged that despite submitting photographic evidence and detailed inputs to senior officials, including those in the enforcement wing, no stringent action was taken. The case was reportedly downplayed and registered as an undetected case, drawing sharp criticism from whistleblowers.

Flagging violations in the entire incident, environmentalists from Hassan cautioned about long-term ecological damage due to unchecked felling. "This is not just smuggling — it is a systematic plunder of forest resources. Accountability must be fixed at all levels," an activist said.

In a directive to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force), Khandre ordered a high-level inquiry. "The incident must be probed by a team led by a Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF)-rank officer. If any forest official is found involved, they must be immediately suspended and chargesheets filed as per rules," he said. The minister also directed officials to promptly seize vehicles used in illegal transportation and ensure that similar incidents are prevented through stricter monitoring and enforcement.