

# NGT JUNKS PLEA TO RETAIN WALL ON ELEPHANT CORRIDOR

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Degradation - Wildlife related issues

The National Green Tribunal has dismissed a review petition by a refinery in Assam for retaining a concrete boundary wall with barbed wire on a part of a reserve forest, stating that elephant corridors need to be protected.

Dismissing a review petition filed by Numaligarh Refinery Limited, a Bench headed by NGT chairperson Adarsh Kumar Goel said, "The counsel for the review petitioner submits that the entire wall need not be demolished as the same is not a part of the Deopahar Reserve Forest. We are of the view that in view of categorical finding already recorded by the tribunal, that the area where the wall came up and the area where proposed township is to come up is a part of the Deopahar Reserve Forest, rehearing on merits is not permissible."

The NGT gave its order after hearing a plea filed by Assam-based green activist Rohit Choudhury, who had sought directions to demolish the 2.2 km wall constructed by the refinery near the reserve as it was obstructing the movement of elephants.

Based on an earlier petition by Mr. Choudhury, the NGT had in August 2016 asked NRL to demolish the wall around an extended part of its township acquired for residential complexes.

The green panel had also imposed an environmental compensation of Rs. 25 lakh on the refinery for constructing a boundary wall for a golf course, that had led to the flattening of a hill measuring 5 hectares and destruction of forest.

## Close to National Park

The refinery, close to Kaziranga National Park and about 260 km east of Guwahati, was expected to demolish the wall within a month. It wasn't until March this year the Golaghat district administration and forest department demolished about 220 metres of the wall.

But the refinery filed the review petition saying that the tribunal had not taken into account the clearance of the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority for the project.

Noting the death of 12 elephants due to the "barbed-wire and razor's edge fencing" atop the boundary wall, the tribunal said it was clear that the NRL constructed the barrier in 2011 in the way of an elephant corridor and encroaching upon Deopahar as well as a no-development zone the Ministry of Environment and Forest had notified around Kaziranga National Park in 1996.

Apart from the high-rise wall, the NGT noted that the refinery had flattened a tree-rich hill covering about 5 hectares to make a golf course without approval of the Centre or compensatory afforestation, "thereby leading to environmental degradation".

The NRL had in 1996 acquired 750 bighas (107.14 hectares) of land for its old township and secured it with a boundary wall. It acquired another 67 bighas (9.57 ha) of tea estate land in 2008 for expansion of the township.

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