

CONSERVATIONIST JOINS PANEL ON ELEPHANT CORRIDOR CASE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Jumbo hub: One of the main elephant corridors in the Nilgiris at Masinagudi. M. Sathyamoorthy

The Supreme Court on Wednesday appointed conservationist Nandita Hazarika as Member of a Technical Committee constituted by it on October 14 last year to hear complaints by land owners against the action taken by the Nilgris Collector, which included sealing of their buildings and allegations about the “arbitrary variance in acreage of the elephant corridor.”

The order came after a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde was informed of the death of one of the committee members, Ajay Desai, through an application filed by the Hospitality Association of Mudumalai.

On October 14, the top court upheld the Tamil Nadu government's authority to notify an 'elephant corridor' and protect the migratory path of the animals through the Nilgiri biosphere reserve. The reserve is the largest protected forest area in India, spanning across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

A three-judge Bench led by CJI Bobde had said it was the State's duty to protect a “keystone species” such as elephants, immensely important to the environment.

The corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau, which connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats and sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity.

It has the Nilgiri Hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar River Valley on its north-eastern side. The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water.

The Supreme Court judgment was based on 32 appeals filed by resorts/private land owners, including Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty, against a Madras High Court decision of July 2011.

The High Court had confirmed a State government order of August 2010, notifying the corridor.

The three-member Technical Committee of the National Elephant 2 Action Plan also includes former Madras High Court judge, Justice K. Venkatraman; and Praveen Bhargava, trustee of Wildlife First.

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