

KAZIRANGA ELEVATED ROAD PLAN AWAITS NOD

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An elephant and a calf waiting to cross a road at the Kaziranga parkfile photo-

The Assam government is awaiting the Centre's clearance for an elevated road over nine corridors used by the animals of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve usually during high floods.

The 35-km elevated road will run along an existing arterial highway.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said the Centre had virtually cleared the 35-km project worth Rs. 6,000 crore. But officials of the Public Works Department said they were awaiting clearance from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). "But we expect the clearance in a fortnight or so," a senior official said.

One of the reasons why the MoRTH took longer to process the project was the State government's alignment report for a two-lane road that was deemed to be short-sighted. The Ministry sought a revised report, advising the State authorities to think "100 years ahead" and go for a four-lane project.

"We will have to prepare a detailed project report to the Ministry after receiving its go-ahead. The next stage entails obtaining clearance from the Environment Ministry and the National Board for Wildlife," the official said.

According to the blueprint, the "Kaziranga project" will have two tunnels — one with an estimated length of 1.5 km and the other of 600 metres.

"The alignment was fixed in coordination with the Wildlife Institute of India. Apart from the engineering aspect, the designing was done to ensure minimum harm to the wildlife and human settlements along the highway," the official said.

'Clear encroachments'

Kaziranga's field director P. Sivakumar said the project would not benefit the park known as the best address of the one-horned rhino if the settlements and encroachment on the animal corridors were not cleared. "People settled on or near the corridors need to be relocated and compensated," he said.

The highway along the southern edge of Kaziranga has often proved fatal for animals fleeing the park during floods for the safety of the hills of the Karbi Anglong district further south. Speed restrictions during the monsoon often fail to prevent the animals from being run over.

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