

Centre raps govt for diverting 44 acres forest land

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Guwahati: An affidavit filed by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change in connection with a case filed before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over construction of a new commando battalion headquarters allegedly on forest land in Assam's Hailakandi district in Barak Valley has revealed that the use of forest land for non-forestry activities was allowed without permission of the Union government, which is in contravention of the statutory provisions and rules under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

The NGT principal bench was hearing a case on Tuesday over alleged diversion of 44 hectares of protected forest land in

Assam's Hailakandi district.

The ministry in the affidavit said the detailed site-inspection report sent by the regional office of the ministry located in Shillong was examined and it was observed that the use of forest land for non-forestry activities was allowed without permission of the Centre. The regional office, Shillong, in its site inspection report filed last month with respect to the forest area in question, had stated that the "construction is largescale and of permanent concrete structures, considering the area of build-up area is 11.5 hectares and the plinth are being close to 30,000 sq metres".

Taking note of the report, the ministry said the state govt was directed to stop and discontinue the alleged construction forthwith. The court noted that the "affidavit clearly reflects that the construction has been done in utter violation of norms".

Assam advocate general D Saikia submitted before the court that construction has now stopped and sought four weeks' time to file a response in the matter, which has been granted. The next hearing is on August 2.

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