

Row over reserve forest declaration in Chinnakkanal

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A row is brewing over the government's decision to declare a large area of revenue land as a reserve forest at Chinnakkanal near Munnar in Idukki.

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Kerala, the farmers' wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Idukki MP, Dean Kuriakose, have opposed the government's decision to declare 364.39 hectares in Chinnakkanal village under the Devikulam forest range in Idukki a forest reserve.

AIKS State vice-president Mathew Varghese asked how the government can declare revenue land as reserve forest land.

"The Forest Minister A. K. Saseendran should tell the public whether the Forest Department took this decision with his support. The government should immediately freeze the decision to declare the area as a reserve forest," said Mr. Varghese.

Mr. Varghese alleged that the revenue and forest officials from Thiruvananthapuram were behind the anti-farmer decisions.

“We suspect some people who want to set-up an elephant sanctuary in Chinnakkanal to be behind the move. It is suspected that such decisions are aimed at making the entire Idukki district as forest land,” said Mr Varghese.

Mr. Kuriakose alleged that the CPI(M) district leadership was directly aware of the government’s decision.

“The lease agreement with Hindustan Newsprint Limited(HNL) was completed in 2020, and the revenue land was declared a reserve forest. Now the (CPI(M) leadership is trying to evict settler farmers,” said Mr Kuriakose.

“The Congress will not allow eviction of farmers and we will conduct protests against this anti-farmer decision,” said Mr. Kuriakose.

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