

State govt. cannot withdraw reserve notification, say forest officials

They say notification can be withdrawn only with the approval of Centre and Supreme Court. Government last week declared 364.39 ha as reserve forest at Chinnakkanal but suspended further proceedings following public protests

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While the State government has suspended further proceedings on Section 4 notification for the Chinnakkanal reserve forest in Idukki in the face of public protest, forest officials say the notification can be withdrawn only with the approval of the Centre and the Supreme Court.

The government had last week declared 364.39 hectares of revenue land as reserve forest at Chinnakkanal near Munnar. Following protests, the government suspended further proceedings of the reserve declaration on Monday.

Former Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar had submitted in a reply in the Lok Sabha stating that “the power to notify any area as forest land as well as to denotify forest lands is vested with State governments under the Indian Forest Act, 1927. However, denotification of any forest land requires prior approval by the Central government under the Forest(Conservation) Act, 1980 as well as the approval of the Hon’ble Supreme Court in accordance with the order dated 13.11.2000”.

“The order indicates that the State government cannot withdraw the order. Only the settlement officer, a revenue department official, can approve the original rights in the area during the settlement process,” says a forest official.

The All India Kisan Sabha, Kerala, farmers’ wing of the Communist Party of India, demanded action against forest officials behind the reserve forest proposal.

State vice-president Mathew Varghese said the State government could withdraw the reserve forest notification as per the new Forest Act amendment. “Some revenue and forest officials are making anti-people laws without informing the Ministers concerned. Their ultimate aim is to change Idukki district into a reserve forest,” he said.

Meanwhile, environmentalist M.N. Jayachandran said the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the State government were trying to cheat people citing the decision to suspend reserve forest proposal proceedings.

“The government is aware that once Section 4 notification of a reserve forest land is issued for notification, it can only be denotified with the approval of the Central government and the Supreme Court. The government should take steps to complete the settlement process and declare the Chinnakkal area as a reserve forest,” he said.

