

KOCHI

Cabinet approves Forest dept. proposal on ESZ

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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1-km buffer zone norm around protected areas to be nullified

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved the proposals put forward by the State Forest Department to fully exclude the human habitation, agricultural holdings and public and government institutions from the ambit of the Ecologically Sensitive Zones (ESZs) around the 23 protected areas in the State.

The proposal was earlier submitted to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for notification.

With the government ratifying the Forest Ministry's proposal on Wednesday, the earlier proposal by which an area up to 1 km from the boundary of the protected areas were marked as ESZ, will be nullified.

Incidentally, an order issued by the State government on October 31, 2019, had approved the inclusion of human habitations located close to the protected areas and up to the 1-km mark from the forest boundaries in the purview of the ESZ.

Modified proposals

However, the demand for excluding the human habitations from the ESZ was raised by various organisations at that time. Later, a meeting convened by the State Forest Minister on September 28, 2020 had urged the Centre to exclude the populated areas, farmlands and public officers that were located within the 1-km boundary from ESZ and submitted modified proposals to that effect to the Centre.

A government order issued by Rajesh Kumar Sinha, the Principal Forest Secretary, on the day also empowered the Forest Department to get the revised proposal for ESZ, excluding the human habitation, agricultural holdings and public and government institutions from the ambit of the Zones approved by the Centre.

The government also authorised the Forest Department to move the Supreme Court for getting the human habitation, agricultural holdings and public and government institutions excluded from the zone.

The June 3 order of the Supreme Court insisting that there shall be a minimum ESZ of 1 km for all the protected areas from the forest boundaries, had ignited widespread protests

from various parts of the State, especially from the districts located close to the protected areas.

However, the apex court had permitted the States to approach the Union Ministry and the Central Empowered Committee to seek relaxation in the ESZ considering the public interest involved in such cases.

THE HINDU

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