

## **Ex-Forest Min approaches CEC on cleared projects in protected areas**

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PANJIM: Former State Environment Minister and BJP MLA Alina Saldanha has approached Central Empowered Committee (CEC) raising her serious concern with regards to Central government's approval for three projects in the protected areas of Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and the Mollem National Park.

"I have serious concerns regarding the clearance granted for projects, passing through Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and the Mollem National Park, cleared by National Board of Wildlife. These three projects- a highway expansion, railway line double tracking and power line, are in Goa's largest protected areas and cannot be looked in isolation, as they have synergistic effects of livelihood, ecology and watershed services," she said.

The MLA said these projects pose immediate risk to the Western Ghats, which is one of the most resilient ecosystems that will help us fight climate change.

Saldanha, who had raised objection to passing of the project during State Wildlife Board meeting held in December 2019, pointed out before the CEC that two of the three projects, were granted clearance during the lockdown, when a site-specific inspection as well as public consultation was not possible.

"Public spirited decisions are crucial while considering such projects as there are many people who are completely opposed to these with reasons, but their voices have not been represented when deliberating on these projects," she said.

The former forest minister raised apprehension that numerous Schedule I and Schedule II endangered species such as the tiger, dhole, mouse deer, gaur and Indian Pangolin will be threatened, apart from the many endemic species to the Western Ghats and some new species that have been described in science.

"We must also bear in mind that the livelihood security around Dudhsagar waterfalls, which is one of the tallest waterfalls of India and the protected area, will be disrupted," Saldanha said adding 'there are numerous river feeders that originates in this forest and are the lifeline for the State's water supply'.

She has urged CEC to listen to the concerns raised by the citizens, scientists, writers, residents and stakeholders from all walks of life to protect Goa's future, which is at crucial juncture. "Safeguarding the integrity of Mollem National Park and Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary, is not only about protecting these forests but it is central to the identify, ecology and livelihood every Goan," she said.

Source: <https://www.heraldgoa.in/Goa/ExForest-Min-approaches-CEC-on-cleared-projects-in-protected-areas/163082>