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Forest clearance hinders oil exploration project in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh

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ITANAGAR: Petroleum exploration activities in the Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh has had to be put on hold for want of necessary clearances from the State Forest Department as well as the Union Environment Ministry, a minister told the Assembly here on Thursday. A standing committee of National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) too, is yet to give its nod to the project, which was to be undertaken in the vicinity of a national park, State Geology and Mining Minister Kamlung Mossang said in response to a question by Congress MLA Wanglin Lowangdong.

Mossang also said that Oil India Limited (OIL) had initially submitted two clearance proposals to the State Forest Department and the Union Environment Ministry in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

The stage-1 clearance was accorded by the Centre in August, 2020 but stage-2 wasn't, he said.

As the Dihing-Pataki wildlife sanctuary, located 10 km from petroleum exploration site at Deomali, was declared a national park in June last year by the Assam Government, an NBWL clearance was also needed, the proposal for which is pending with the neighbouring State, the minister explained.

Mossang also said that the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had in 1998 given its approval for granting Petroleum Exploration License (PEL) to OIL for an area of 356.16 sq km at Deomali in the Tirap district.

Responding to another query, Environment and Forest Minister Mama Natung said that the project won't progress till the time an area around the park is marked as eco-sensitive zone.

Work can be undertaken only beyond the demarcated zone.

The Supreme Court has directed that every national park and wildlife sanctuary in the country will have to have mandatory eco-sensitive zone.

Lowangdong, as he raised the question, had urged the Government to pursue the matter with the Centre, stating that Arunachal Pradesh could immensely benefit from the petroleum exploration project, which would not just enrich the State coffers but also create job opportunities for youth.

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