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Supreme Court orders 1km eco-sensitive zone for protected forests

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GUWAHATI: The Supreme Court on Friday directed that every protected forest should have a 1km eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) where no development projects will be allowed.

A bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao, BR Gavai and Aniruddha Bose held that mining should not be allowed in wildlife sanctuaries and national parks and stressed that activities currently going on within ESZ limits can continue only with the permission of the chief conservator of forests of the state concerned.

This order will be applicable across the country and impact the state. Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve is among a handful of national parks in the country, which is without a declared eco-sensitive zone.

Without a declared ESZ, which is essential for protection of wildlife, a radius of 10 km outside the park has been enforced by the Supreme Court since 2006.

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The Assam cabinet in March approved a draft notification for an integrated eco-sensitive zone of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve and its adjoining seven protected areas and 11 reserve forests for recommending it to the ministry of

environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC). Once the ministry approves this recommendation, the ESZ around Kaziranga park will be notified.

The seven protected areas are KNP Tiger Reserve, Bura-Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary, Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Garampani Wildlife Sanctuary, Nambor-Doirung Wildlife Sanctuary, East Karbi-Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary and the proposed North Karbi-Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary. The 11 reserve forests under the proposal are Haitapahar DC, Koiloni, Bagser, Kamakhya Hill, Kukrakata, Bhumuraguri, South Diyu, North Diyu, Panbari, Kochmara and Deopahar.

This is the third proposal from the state government to the ministry. The first proposal was submitted in 2009. In 2015, the second proposal was submitted to the ministry, which, after consideration, asked the state government to revise the proposal integrating KNP and its adjoining eight protected areas. The cabinet also approved another draft notification for delineation and recognition of nine animal corridors to the south of Kaziranga National Park.