

**FIFTY-FIRST REPORT
COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS
(SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA)**

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FORESTS & CLIMATE CHANGE

(Presented to Lok Sabha on 09.08.2023)



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

August, 2023/Sravana, 1945 (Saka)

CPB No. 1 Vol. LI

© 2023 BY LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT

Published under Rule 382 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha (Sixteenth Edition).

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|-------|
| COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS | (ii) |
| INTRODUCTION..... | (iii) |

REPORT

| | |
|--|---|
| Representation of Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issues related therewith. | 1 |
|--|---|

ANNEXURE

Minutes of the 29th sitting of the Committee on Petitions held on 08.08.2023.

(i)

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

Shri Harish Dwivedi - *Chairperson*

MEMBERS

2. Shri Anto Antony
3. Shri Hanuman Beniwal
4. Prof. Sanjay Sadashivrao Mandlik
5. Shri P. Ravindhranath
6. Dr. Jayanta Kumar Roy
7. Shri Brijendra Singh
8. Shri Sunil Kumar Singh
9. Shri Sushil Kumar Singh
10. Shri Manoj Kumar Tiwari
11. Shri Prabhubhai Nagarbhai Vasava
12. Shri Rajan Baburao Vichare
13. Vacant
14. Vacant
15. Vacant

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri T.G. Chandrasekhar - Additional Secretary
2. Shri Raju Srivastava - Joint Secretary
3. Shri Harish Kumar Sethi - Under Secretary

**FIFTY-FIRST REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS
(SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA)**

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on Petitions, having been authorised by the Committee to present on their behalf, this Fifty-First Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) of the Committee to the House on the representation of Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issues related therewith.

2. The Committee considered and adopted the draft Fifty-First Report at their sitting held on 8 August, 2023.

3. The observations/recommendations of the Committee on the above matters have been included in the Report.

NEW DELHI;

**HARISH DWIVEDI,
Chairperson,
Committee on Petitions.**

08 August, 2023

17 Sravana, 1945 (Saka)

REPORT

REPRESENTATION OF SHRI PHILLIPSON REGARDING ENCROACHMENT OF FOREST LAND IN NORTH-EASTERN STATES, ESPECIALLY IN MEGHALAYA AND ASSAM AND OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATED THEREWITH.

Shri Phillipson submitted a representation dated 14.03.2022 to the Hon'ble Chairperson, Committee on Petitions, Lok Sabha regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issues related therewith.

2. Shri Phillipson, in his representation, *inter-alia* stated as under:-

- (i) The North-Eastern States, especially Meghalaya and Assam have inherited the traditions of scientific forest management introduced almost a century ago. However, a new National Forest Policy was enunciated in the year 1952, based on the Forest Policy of 1894. It prescribed the maintenance of forests over 66 percent of the total area of hill States. A State Forest Policy was thereafter formulated in 1980 to meet the requirements of North-Eastern States which was further revised in the year 1988. It lays special emphasis on environmental stability, maintenance of ecological balance and meeting the needs of the local people living near forest areas.
- (ii) The legal title of forest areas not entered in the revenue records is unclear, which often leads to disagreements between the DFFC and the Revenue Department. In the past, Class-III Forests were turned into agricultural and other types of land through grant of *Nautor* rights by the Revenue Department which encouraged the people to take advantage of disputed land titles by encroaching upon other forest lands, especially Class-III forest land.
- (iii) As per official records, only a negligible portion of forest land in the North-Eastern States has been encroached upon but the real figure is estimated to be much higher than that which is around thousands of hectares. Most of the lands in the Himalayas are used to be thought of as unsuitable for agriculture due to steep slopes and being distant from habitations but the adoption of organic farming and cultivation has made it possible as a source of new found wealth and encouraged the farming on previously rejected forest lands.
- (iv) The absence of clear demarcation in respect to forest lands has made the detection of exact encroachment into more difficult. The Courts have been helpless in establishing the question of rights since that lands were not surveyed

and demarcated. Although some progress has been reported in the eviction of the encroachers under the Act.

- (v) Protection and Management of Forests is primarily the responsibility of the concerned State Government as per the provisions of various Acts such as Indian Forest Act, 1927; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and relevant State Acts and Regulations. However, the implementation of these Acts in Meghalaya and Assam is lethargic due to which the problem of encroachment of forest land has taken a serious dimension and the Central Government has failed to monitor the entire situation.
- (vi) In spite of setting up of check posts, use of Information and Communication Technology, improved mobility of the field staff, survey, demarcation of forest areas and construction of boundary pillars, etc., no desired results have been produced and day-by-day, the encroachment of forest land in Meghalaya and Assam is increasing.

3. The representationist, Shri Phillipson further submitted that the matter of encroachment of forest land was rampant during the last decade and the details of the forest land occupied by tribal/tribal dwellers and non-tribal people in Meghalaya and Assam are not maintained either at the State level or the Central Government level. The representationist, Shri Phillipson had, therefore, requested to look into the matter by examining the issues/points raised in the representation.

4. The Committee on Petitions took up the representation for examination under Direction 95 of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha. Accordingly, the representation received from Shri Phillipson was forwarded to the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change for furnishing their initial comments on the issues raised therein.

5. In response thereto, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change *vide* their communication dated 24 May, 2022 forwarded the point-wise comments of the Department of Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya dated 20 May, 2022 and the Environment & Forest Department, Government of Assam dated 6 May, 2022 in the matter, which are as under:-

(A) *Comments of the Department of Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya:*

- (I) As on 31st December, 2021, the total forest area which has been encroached is approximately 98.16 sq.km which is about 8% of recorded forest area of the State. However, it may be mentioned that on account of unique land tenure system in Meghalaya which is a VI Schedule State, large portions of forest land are owned by private individuals and communities in the State which are administered by the Autonomous District Councils on account of express provisions, to that effect, in the VI Schedule of Constitution of India. The boundaries of such areas have not been delineated and demarcated because of ownership issues which account for substantial portion of forest area of the State that remain unrecorded. The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 records the forest cover area of the State as 17,744 sq.km. With reference to the forest cover area of the State as recorded in ISFR 2021 the percentage of forest area under encroachment in the State is only 0.5%.
- (II) For the protection and management of Forests in Meghalaya, the State has enacted the following Acts/Rules:-
- (a) Meghalaya Forest Regulation, 1973 which has been amended comprehensively in 2021 vide Meghalaya Act No.12 of 2021;
 - (b) Meghalaya Tree Felling (Non Forest Areas) Rules, 2006;
 - (c) Meghalaya Tree Preservation Act, 1976 and Meghalaya Tree Preservation Rules, 1976;
 - (d) Meghalaya Protection of Catchment Areas Act, 1990;
 - (e) The Meghalaya Forest (Ejectment of Unauthorized Person from Reserve Forests) Rules 1979;
 - (f) Meghalaya Forest (Removal of Timber) (Regulation) Act 1981 and Meghalaya Forest (Removal of Timber) (Regulation) Rules 1982.

The State Forest Department is implementing the provisions of these Acts and Rules, among others, in right earnest.

- (III) (a) **Demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries:-**Government owned recorded forest areas have been digitized and have been communicated to Forest Survey of India, Dehradun. The boundaries of registered private forests and community, sacred groves, Biodiversity Heritage Sites etc., have also been digitized. The process of identification and demarcation of remaining forests under

control of private and community is in progress. North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) was entrusted to delineate such areas through remote sensing technique which has been completed and now the field verification work is being undertaken.

(b) **Strengthening infrastructure for forest protection** - In order to check forest offences the State of Meghalaya has established 19 Forest Check Gates across the State as per the following details:-

List of Check Gates in Meghalaya

Khasi Hills Division

| S. No. | Name of Forest Check Gate | Location | Date of Notification |
|--------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Riat Khwan (Check Gate) | Riat Khwan | No.FOR.133/88/94 dated 30.03.1991 |

Ri-bhoi District

| S. No. | Name of Forest Check Gate | Location | Date of Notification |
|--------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Byrnihat (Check Gate) | Byrnihat | No.FOR.133/88/94 dated 30.03.1991 |
| 2. | 33rd Mile (Check Gate) | 33rd Mile | |
| 3. | Umsaw (Check Gate) | Umsaw | |
| 4. | Kyrdemkulai (Check Gate) | Kyrdemkulai | |
| 5. | Umtasor (Check Gate) | Umtasor | |
| 6. | Morok (Check Gate) | Morok | |

East Jaintia Hills District

| S. No. | Name of Forest Check Gate | Location | Date of Notification |
|--------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. | Umkiang (Check Gate) | Umkiang | No.FOR.133/88/94 dated 30.03.1991 |
| 2. | Garampani (Umrangso) Saphai (Check Gate) | State Highway 8th Mile to Saphai | No.FOR.138/81/353 dated 07.08.1997 |

For better communication, the Department has distributed 360 CUG SIM cards to officers and field staff. The field officers have been provided motor vehicles, motor boats, etc., for greater mobility. For improving protection infrastructure watch towers and patrolling paths have been constructed. Further construction of Range and Beat Offices has been taken up along with improvement of amenities for the frontline staff. For strengthening the protection work Department has engaged Forest Village Protection Force in Garo Hills region and also deployed Home

Guards particularly in sensitive Divisions. Funds received from NPV component has also been utilized for conservation and preservation purposes particularly for the frontline staff. The details of amount spent on Forest Conservation and Preservation under NPV component for the last 3 years are as under:-

| Year | Amount spent under NPV |
|---------|--|
| 2019-20 | NIL |
| 2020-21 | Rs.17,19,71,590/- |
| 2021-22 | An amount of Rs.34,08,06,917/- was released to Implementing agencies through BEAMS during March 2022 |

Similarly, details of funds received for purposes of strengthening forest infrastructure under Forest Protection Scheme and Integrated Forest Management Scheme are as under:-

Expenditure on Integrated Forest Management and Forest Protection Scheme & Work

(A) 2017-2018:

| Scheme | General | | Sixth Schedule | | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| | State Share | CSS | State Share | CSS | |
| Integrated Forest Management | 9,34,000 | 15,05,000 | - | 89,68,000 | 1,14,07,000 |
| Forest Protection Scheme & Work | - | - | 10,68,64,015 | - | 10,68,64,015 |

(B) 2018-2019:

| Scheme | General | | Sixth Schedule | | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| | State Share | CSS | State Share | CSS | |
| Integrated Forest Management | - | - | 14,56,750 | 1,10,57,250 | 1,25,14,000 |
| Forest Protection Scheme & Work | - | - | 11,26,41,855 | - | 11,26,41,855 |

(C) 2019-2020:

| Scheme | General | | Sixth Schedule | | Grand Total |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|----------------|-----------|-------------|
| | State Share | CSS | State Share | CSS | |
| Integrated Forest | - | - | 7,55,000 | 69,24,000 | 76,79,000 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--------------|---|--------------|
| Management | | | | | |
| Forest Protection Scheme & Work | - | - | 12,77,85,772 | - | 12,77,85,772 |

(D) 2020-2021:

| Scheme | General | | Sixth Schedule | | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| | State Share | CSS | State Share | CSS | |
| Integrated Forest Management | - | - | 8,14,555 | 64,75,640 | 72,90,195 |
| Forest Protection Scheme & Work | - | - | 15,98,33,348 | - | 15,98,33,348 |

(E) 2021-2022:

| Scheme | General | | Sixth Schedule | | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------|---|-----|--------------|
| | State Share | CSS | State Share | CSS | |
| Integrated Forest Management | - | 8,55,360 | - | - | 8,55,360 |
| Forest Protection Scheme & Work | - | - | 12,80,75,887 (Cash A/c expenditure upto Feb/22 & Salary component upto Dec/2020) | - | 12,80,75,887 |

About 1,981 boundary pillars have been erected after due survey and demarcation spread across 26 Reserve Forests and 4 Protected Forests many of which have been erected during recent years to replace the damaged boundary pillars.

(c) Involving fringe forest communities through Joint Forest Management Committees - The State of Meghalaya has constituted about 366 Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) who look after plantations created under various schemes largely in community lands of the state. The area covered under JFMC's is about 30,741 Hectares. It may be noted that 95% of forest land in Meghalaya is owned and managed by the private owners, community and Autonomous District Councils. Management of notified forest areas through JFMC's is very limited compared to the geographical area of the State.

(IV) Forest villages have been constituted under Section 23 of Meghalaya Forest Regulation 1973 for the purpose of administering them. All the residents/households of the forest villages have been registered and their

activities are being monitored. The details of forest villages in the State of Meghalaya are as under:-

| S. No. | Name of Forest Village | No. of Households | Population |
|--------|------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1. | Adokgre | 13 | 120 |
| 2. | Rajasimla | 7 | 61 |
| 3. | Bolmeddang | 8 | 60 |
| 4. | Chilpara | 9 | 51 |
| 5. | Tengasot | 8 | 52 |
| 6. | Chismapal | 34 | 202 |
| 7. | Dangkhong | 24 | 134 |
| 8. | Nagor | 29 | 207 |
| 9. | Rongjeng | 59 | 379 |
| 10. | Dambu | 39 | 227 |
| 11. | Dasugiri | 21 | 271 |
| 12. | Chissobibra | 35 | - |
| 13. | Chidekgre | 46 | 387 |
| 14. | Rongmalgre | 18 | 150 |
| 15. | Ganingbibra | 32 | 292 |
| 16. | Baghmara | 62 | 362 |
| 17. | Rangajhora | 49 | 310 |
| 18. | Bhobanipur | 39 | 195 |
| 19. | Badanbari | 4 | 23 |
| 20. | Khondok | 19 | 128 |
| 21. | Rakhipara | 17 | 150 |
| 22. | Telliakali | 34 | 412 |
| 23. | Hollaidonga | 37 | 300 |

- (V) The Forest Department Meghalaya has not received any specific complaints regarding encroachment of forest land by outsiders for construction of farm house etc., in Shillong area.
- (VI) The State of Meghalaya has enacted the Meghalaya Forest (Ejectment of Unauthorized Person from Reserve Forests) Rules, 1979 for eviction of encroachers from the Reserve Forests of the State. Action involving eviction of fresh encroachments including attempts to encroach is a continuous and an on-going process for which the Department is fully committed considering that forest encroachments are attempted on a continuous basis and the encroachers are prosecuted accordingly. Offence reports have also been drawn against the encroachers in accordance with the provisions of Meghalaya Forest Regulation,

1973. A total of 1271 offence reports have been filed against the encroachers till date.

- (VII) In regard to the information about the area under encroachment at the beginning of the years 2020 and 2021, encroachment made, encroachment removed and encroachment balance during these years, the Forest Department, Meghalaya furnished as under:-

| Particulars | Year 2020 | Year 2021 |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Area (in Hectares) under encroachment at the beginning: | 9803.59 | 9811.01 |
| Fresh Encroachment Area (in Hectares): | 12.03 | 17.038 |
| Encroachment removed (in Hectares): | 4.61 | 11.746 |
| Encroachment balance area (in Hectares) at the end of: | 9811.01 | 9816.31 |

- (VIII) The Forest Department, Meghalaya has not constituted/deputed any team of experts to study encroachment of forest land in ecologically sensitive regions of the State so far.
- (IX) The State of Meghalaya has diverted forest area to an extent of 295.409 hectares for mining under the provision(s) of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 with due approval of the Central Government as envisaged in the said Act as per the details given under:-

| S. No. | Division | Forest Area Diverted |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. | East Khasi Hills & Ri-Bhoi (T) Division, Shillong | 116.589 |
| 2. | Jaintia Hills (T) Division, Jowai | 178.82 |
| | Total | 295.409 |

- (B) **Comments of the Environment and Forest Department, Government of Assam:-**

A total of 4,55,974 in (4559.74 sq. km.) forest land is encroached in Assam. Since total forest cover in Assam is 28,311.51 sq. km., the percentage of encroached forest cover is 16.11%. There are approximately 1,92,000 household present over the above said encroached forest land.

The total encroachment area removed from forest land from 2016 to March, 2022 is 10823.294 ha. During 2021, a total of 2281 ha. encroachment area has been evicted as given below:-

| Name of Forest Division | Name of Reserve Forest | Area encroached (in ha.) |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Nagaon South | Lumding RF | 1410.00 |
| Karimganj | Patheria, Tilbhum, Longai, Badshahitilla, Singla & Barak WLS (West Block) | 448.50 |
| | Badshahitilla RF | 98.00 |
| | Longai RF | 81.00 |
| | Singla RF | 17.00 |
| | Patheria Hills RF | 15.00 |
| Hailakandi | Innerline RF | 200.00 |
| Cachar | Barak RF | 5.00 |
| Goalpara | Dohikata RF | 2.00 |
| | Kumarkhali RF Dhamar RF & Saroani ORF | 3.00 |
| | Kahibari RF | 1.50 |
| Total | | 2281.00 |

Apart from this, all the fresh encroachment attempts are being tackled immediately and eviction are carried out by frontline staff regularly. In order to remove the encroachment from various Reserve Forest, a detail Reserve Forest-wise eviction plan has been prepared with financial requirement for eviction and plantation of evicted area and submitted to the Government on 27 April, 2022. Abstract of the same is given below:-

Total area under encroachment : 4,55,974 ha.
Amount required for eviction : Rs.647.70 crore
Amount required for Plantation and its maintenance up to 5 years : Rs.5,678.35 crore

6. Up on examination of the preliminary comments received from the Department of Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya and the Environment and Forest Department, Government of Assam, the matter was placed before the Hon'ble Chairperson, Committee on Petitions and it was decided to take up the instant representation for detailed examination during

the Study Visit of the Committee on Petitions to Guwahati, Shillong and Guwahati from 30 May to 2 June, 2022.

7. Accordingly, in order to have a holistic view on the issues of encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States especially in Meghalaya and Assam, a detailed List of Points was drawn up and subsequently forwarded to the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change for furnishing their appropriate replies in the matter.

8. The Committee during their Study Visit to Shillong on 1 June, 2022 held informal discussion with the representatives of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change and the Departments concerned of the State Governments of Meghalaya and Assam to have a realistic assessment of the issues/points raised in the representation of Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issues related therewith.

9. On being asked by the Committee to furnish the details of the Recorded Forest Areas (RFA) in each of the North Eastern States in terms of Reserved Forest, Protected Forest and Un-classed Forests, as per the India State of Forest Report (ISFR), the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in their written reply, submitted as under:-

"As per the Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR), 2021 the total Recorded Forest Areas (RFA) in each of the North Eastern States in terms of Reserved Forest, Protected Forest and Un-classed Forests as per States records is given below:-

Recorded Forest Areas (RFAs) in North Eastern States as per State Records

(in sq. km.)

| Sl. No. | State/ UT | Geographical Area (GA) | RFA (in different categories) | | | Total RFA (2021) | % of GA |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------|
| | | | Reserve Forest | Protected Forest | Un-classed Forests* | | |
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 83,743 | 12,371 | 11,857 | 27,312 | 51,540 | 61.55 |
| 2. | Assam | 78,438 | 17,864 | 0 | 8,972 | 26,836 | 34.21 |
| 3. | Manipur | 22,327 | 984 | 3,254 | 13,180 | 17,418 | 78.01 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 22,429 | 1,113 | 12 | 8,371 | 9,496 | 42.34 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 21,081 | 4,499 | 1,823 | 1,157 | 7,479 | 35.48 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 16,579 | 234 | 0 | 8,389 | 8,623 | 52.01 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 7,096 | 5,452 | 389 | 0 | 5,841 | 82.31 |
| 8. | Tripura | 10,486 | 3,588 | 2 | 2,704 | 6,294 | 60.02 |
| Total | | 262,179 | 46,105 | 17,337 | 70,085 | 1,33,527 | |

* *Un-classed Forest includes all forest other than Reserve Forest and Protected Forest as reported by the State Forest Departments."*

10. The Committee thereafter asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to furnish the details of forest area under encroachment in each of the North Eastern States. In reply thereto, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change submitted as under:-

"North Eastern States have reported that the following area under encroached:-

| Sl.No. | State | Area under encroachment (In Ha) |
|---------------|-------------------|--|
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 53450.4321 |
| 2. | Assam | 455974 |
| 3. | Meghalaya | 9816.13 |
| 4. | Mizoram | 10708 |
| 5. | Manipur | 2257.61 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 4991 |
| 7. | Tripura | 3621.804 |
| 8. | Sikkim | 632.79 |

11. Keeping in view the fact that the protection and management of forests are primarily the responsibility of State/UT concerned, the Committee desired to know from the Ministry the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change about the details of action taken by the Governments of North Eastern States to remove the encroachment from the forest areas as per the provisions under various Acts, viz., Indian Forest Act, 1927, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980 along with State specific Acts and Rules. The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"The various actions are taken to remove encroachment as per the provisions under various Acts such as Indian Forest Act, 1927; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, various Rules are made under these Acts and State specific Acts and Rules. Further, to prevent encroachment, various measures are taken by the State Forest Departments such as setting up of check posts, barriers, use of modern technology (that includes wireless network, remote sensing, Geographical Information System, Information Technology, Global Positioning System and Differential Global Positioning System), improved mobility of field staff by providing vehicles for patrolling, demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries, construction of boundary pillars and strengthening infrastructure for forest protection. Local communities are also involved in conservation, protection and management of forest through Joint Forest Management."

12. On being asked by the Committee as to whether the Governments of North Eastern States have witnessed that in spite of various existing Acts and Rules, there are various factors which are responsible for further encroachment of forest land and to furnish a brief note on this aspect, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"North Eastern States have reported that various factors are responsible for encroachment of forest land:-

- (i) Jhum Cultivation for livelihood- The traditional practice of slash and burning of patches of land is posing greater challenge on account of rise in population among those resorting of Jhum Cultivation. However, Jhum induced encroachments are not permanent and the encroachers move on by abandoning the Jhum land after harvesting from such lands.*
- (ii) Livelihood issues arising out of poverty and literacy, particularly rural areas where alternate source of livelihood is limited and impacts encroachments. Forest land in many of these remote areas is being used for areca nut and betel plantations.*
- (iii) Increase in pressure on forest land on account of population explosion in areas contiguous to the Reserve Forests, Protected Forests etc., and lack of pecuniary capacity of the inhabitants therefore coupled with poverty and other economic issues also impact encroachment of forests.*
- (iv) The boundaries of most of the Reserve Forests are contiguous with villages and other human habitation apart from the fact that rivers and highways pass through such Reserve Forest's where some of them serve as mode of communication for the encroachers.*
- (v) The major reasons for the encroachment is customary ownership of forest land by the local communities and increase of population. The floods are the natural phenomena in the State of Assam and hence the flood victims having the tendency to reside comparatively higher land for their safety and as a result encroaching towards the forest area.*
- (vi) The main reason of encroachment are accessibility and ever-increasing price of land."*

13. The Committee, thereafter, asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to furnish the details of measures taken by each of the North Eastern States to contain the encroachment of forest land in respect to (i) Demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries; (ii) Strengthening infrastructure for forest protection; (iii) Involving fringe area forest communities through Joint Forest Management Committees; and (iv) Eco Development Committees. In response thereto, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"Demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries:-

Forest Survey of India (FSI), an organization under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has informed that Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have provided partially digitized boundaries of Recorded Forest Area. Tripura has provided the complete digitized forest boundaries.

Strengthening infrastructure for forest protection, Involving fringe area forest communities through Joint Forest Management Committees & Eco Development Committees:-

To prevent encroachment various measures are taken by the State Forest Departments such as setting up of check posts, barriers, use of modern technology (that includes wireless network, remote sensing, Geographical Information System, Information Technology, Global Positioning System and Differential Global Positioning System), improved mobility of field staff by providing vehicles for patrolling, survey and demarcation of forest areas and construction of boundary pillars. Local communities are also involved in conservation, protection and management of forest through Joint Forest Management."

14. On being enquired by the Committee about the financial assistance provided by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for protection and development of Protected Areas including measures aimed at prevention of encroachment, to each of the North Eastern States during the last five years, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"The Government of India provides financial and technical assistance to the State/UT Governments under various Centrally Sponsored Scheme i.e., Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, Project Elephant, National Afforestation Programme (NAP), National Mission for Green India (GIM), Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme and Project Tiger. This Ministry has provided financial assistance to North Eastern States

under various Centrally Sponsored Scheme and the details of Scheme-wise fund released during the last five years are given as under:-

Details of funds released to NER States under CSS-'Development of Wildlife Habitats' during last five years:-

(Rs. in lakh)

| Sl. No. | Name of States/UTs | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 269.9348 | 344.42 | 512.69 | 312.5865 | 419.80617 |
| 2. | Assam | 275.827 | 265.32 | 164.26 | 0 | 0 |
| 3. | Manipur | 425.6644 | 405.60 | 396.455 | 241.12 | 142.50646 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 114.061 | 312.00 | 238.839 | 263.507 | 530.51253 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 487.44544 | 430.00 | 431.79 | 339.60855 | 198.9678 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 565.871 | 882.20 | 953.69 | 260.00105 | 342.0315 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 202.154 | 394.00 | 557.355 | 349.623 | 182.97174 |
| 8. | Tripura | 0 | 0 | 90.317 | 260.679 | 0 |
| | Total | 2340.95764 | 3033.54 | 3345.396 | 2027.1251 | 1816.7962 |

Details of funds released to NER States under CSS-'National Afforestation Programme (NAP)' during last five years:-

(Rs. in lakh)

| Sl.No. | Name of States/UTs | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|--------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 86.66 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 2. | Assam | 0.00 | 58.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 3. | Manipur | 320.00 | 438.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 165.00 | 74.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 580.00 | 779.00 | 0.00 | 740.00 | 514.00 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 585.00 | 641.00 | 235.00 | 427.00 | 1065.00 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 0.00 | 598.00 | 0.00 | 88.00 | 0.00 |
| 8. | Tripura | 494.00 | 0.00 | 376.00 | 133.00 | 375.00 |
| | Total | 2229 | 2587 | 611 | 1387 | 1954 |

Details of funds released to NER States under CSS-'Project Elephant' during last five years:-

(Rs. in lakh)

| Sl. No. | Name of States/UTs | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---------|--------------------|----------|---------|-----------|---------|----------|
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 118.8504 | 0.00 | 103.26831 | 282.256 | 157.7615 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 2. | Assam | 0.00 | 354.35103 | 0.00 | 35.284 | 126.716 |
| 3. | Manipur | 10.80 | 9.072 | 10.944 | 0.00 | 5.40 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 162.849 | 217.8792 | 177.8976 | 9.36 | 141.75 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 25.20 | 141.219 | 213.9498 | 92.50 | 279.759 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 8. | Tripura | 10.08 | 43.92 | 45.38 | 24.71 | 0.00 |
| | Total | 327.7794 | 766.44123 | 551.43971 | 444.11 | 711.3865 |

Details of fund released to the North Eastern States under Centrally Sponsored Forest Fire Prevention & Management (FPM) Scheme during the last five years:-

(Rs. in lakh)

| Sl. No. | States | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. | Assam | 0.00 | 93.23 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 2. | Arunachal Pradesh | 102.00 | 89.08 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 89.77 |
| 3. | Manipur | 219.88 | 230.54 | 55.34 | 316.61 | 86.53 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 104.63 | 113.53 | 73.94 | 73.31 | 0.00 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 90.59 | 110.47 | 108.12 | 112.46 | 87.19 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 92.56 | 83.12 | 79.95 | 87.80 | 64.52 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 148.59 | 0.00 | 293.77 | 0.00 | 89.73 |
| 8. | Tripura | 66.00 | 109.73 | 103.43 | 45.62 | 82.26 |
| | Total | 824.25 | 829.70 | 714.55 | 635.80 | 500.00 |

Funds to North Eastern States under CSS-'Project Tiger'during the last five years:-

(Rs. in lakh)

| Sl.No. | State | Tiger Reserve | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|--------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. | Assam | Kaziranga | 1462.25 | 1030.25 | 1290.03 | 1732.81 | 673.09 |
| 2. | Assam | Manas | 439.79 | 502.39 | 501.16 | 418.22 | 417.85 |
| 3. | Assam | Nameri | 143.36 | 119.98 | 154.72 | 63.69 | 132.59 |
| 4. | Assam | Orang | 264.21 | 267.00 | 252.85 | 299.18 | 253.22 |
| 5. | Arunachal Pradesh | Namdapha | 209.46 | 334.46 | 109.23 | 239.02 | 297.36 |
| 6. | Arunachal Pradesh | Pakke | 285.38 | 442.95 | 537.68 | 404.57 | 435.90 |
| 7. | Arunachal Pradesh | Kamlang | 147.10 | 152.35 | 199.40 | 160.17 | 135.82 |
| 8. | Mizoram | Dampa | 215.32 | 318.84 | 337.70 | 161.53 | 374.13 |
| 9. | Nagaland | AITE | 496.90 | 24.86 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Total | | 3663.77 | 3193.08 | 3382.77 | 3479.19 | 2719.96 |

Funds released to North Eastern States under National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystem during the last five years:-

(Rs. in Lakhs)

| State | Name of wetland | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | Satang Senyi | 0 | 0 | 120.757 | 0 | 0 |
| Manipur | Yaral pat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 680.67 |
| Manipur | Ultra pat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 110.9473 |
| Manipur | Jaimeng | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 153.72 |
| Manipur | Waithou-Phumnom Pat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1265.476 |
| Manipur | Loktak | 92.8 | 385.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mizoram | Palek | 52.56 | 66.53 | 96.8508 | 75.3525 | 154.212 |
| Mizoram | Tamdil | 45.9 | 55.0 | 95.4387 | 202.95 | 262.665 |
| Nagaland | Doyang | 0 | 0 | 362.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sikkim | Gurudokmar | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sikkim | Khechuperi | 83.353 | 73.205 | 106.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Sikkim | Tamzey | 100.387 | 178.613 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sikkim | Tembao | 0 | 60.0 | 50.0 | 0 | 40.408 |
| Sikkim | Nakuchu | 0 | 0 | 104.0882 | 0 | 0 |
| Tripura | Rudrasagar | 0 | 0 | 312.8295 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 274.613 | 579.935 | 781.2465 | 278.3025 | 2627.6903 |

Funds released to North Eastern States under National Mission for a Green India during the last five years:-

| Fund released in NER Head from 2015-16 to 2021-22 | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| (Amount in crore) | | | | | | | |
| Sl. No | States | FY 2017-18 | FY 2018-19 | FY 2019-20 | FY 2020-21 | FY 2021-22 | Total |
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 13.43 | 13.43 |
| 2. | Manipur | 6.42 | 4.89 | 4.16 | 6.74 | 9.93 | 32.13 |
| 3. | Mizoram | 20.00 | 22.36 | 17.71 | 2.99 | 29.86 | 92.93 |
| 4. | Sikkim | 0.00 | 3.32 | 3.12 | 2.19 | 7.77 | 16.41 |
| | Total | 26.42 | 30.58 | 25.00 | 11.92 | 60.99 | 154.90 |

15. On being categorically enquired by the Committee as to whether the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change have received any report from the North Eastern States, thereby, indicating that there has been an increase in cases related to encroachment in Wildlife Sanctuaries and Protected Areas and about the details of action taken by the Ministry thereon, the Ministry, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"This Ministry has not received any report from North-Eastern States thereby indicating increase in cases related to encroachment in Wildlife sanctuaries and Protected Areas."

16. Considering the fact that there has been decrease in forest cover in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, as per the India State of Forest Report, 2019 (ISFR), the Committee asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to furnish the details in respect to all the North Eastern States in this regard, in a tabulated format. In pursuance thereof, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change furnished the following details:-

"The area of Forest Cover for North Eastern States as per ISFR-2019 and ISFR-2009 as provided by FSI Report:-

| | | | | | <i>[area in sq. km.]</i> |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sl. No. | State | Geographical Area (GA) | ISFR-2009 Forest Cover | ISFR -2019 Forest Cover | Change in forest cover |
| 1. | <i>Arunachal Pradesh</i> | 83743 | 67484 | 66688 | -796 |
| 2. | <i>Assam</i> | 78438 | 27692 | 28327 | 635 |
| 3. | <i>Manipur</i> | 22327 | 17280 | 16847 | -433 |
| 4. | <i>Meghalaya</i> | 22429 | 17321 | 17119 | -202 |
| 5. | <i>Mizoram</i> | 21081 | 19183 | 18006 | -1177 |
| 6. | <i>Nagaland</i> | 16579 | 13464 | 12486 | -978 |
| 7. | <i>Sikkim</i> | 7096 | 3359 | 3342 | -17 |
| 8. | <i>Tripura</i> | 10486 | 7985 | 7726 | -259 |
| Total | | 262179 | 173768 | 170541 | -3227 |

17. The Committee, thereafter, desired to know as to what extent the Governments of North Eastern States have undertaken afforestation activities under various programmes/schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Compensatory Afforestation Funds under Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in a written reply, submitted as under:-

"Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (Mahatma Gandhi NREGS) is a demand driven wage employment programme which provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Details of funds released to the North Eastern States under Mahatma Gandhi NREGS in the financial years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 are as under:-

| (Rs. in lakh) | | | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| S. No. | States | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 20679.65 | 19800.64 | 21020.01 | 34027.69 | 45374.43 |
| 2. | Assam | 112366.54 | 103097.37 | 168752.49 | 260233.46 | 222026.01 |
| 3. | Manipur | 15778.89 | 28698.66 | 61074.66 | 130673.85 | 56310.74 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 87060.44 | 78903.38 | 102443.59 | 128416.59 | 112166.07 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 20081.04 | 39783.58 | 52507.57 | 59045.38 | 54891.55 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 110492.88 | 19322.98 | 33044.70 | 48382.14 | 56945.51 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 10571.15 | 9586.17 | 8269.34 | 11016.55 | 11241.97 |
| 8. | Tripura | 40440.50 | 43543.49 | 73113.77 | 119498.53 | 98888.29 |
| Total | | 4,17,471.08 | 3,42,736.28 | 5,20,226.12 | 7,91,294.19 | 6,57,844.57 |

The CAMPA fund are being utilized by States/UTs for compensating the loss of forest & tree cover, ecological services and hydrological regime due to diversion of forest land by undertaking afforestation activities and various activities for protection of forests, biodiversity and wildlife as per Annual Plan of Operations duly approved by the Executive Committee of National CAMPA. Plantations taken up under CAMPA fund are regularly monitored by State/UT Forest Departments through their Forest Officers, Monitoring & Evaluation Wing and independent third party agencies.

Information on afforestation activities undertaken by the Governments of North-Eastern States under CAMPA from 2018-19 to 2021-2022 are as under:-

| Sl. No. | Name of States/UTs | Compensatory Afforestation undertaken (Area in Ha) | | | |
|--------------|--------------------|--|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| | | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 897 | 419.7 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. | Assam | 374.11 | 880.78 | 31.12 | 0 |
| 3. | Manipur | 223.86 | 0 | 2916.34 | 1125.0 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 0 | 0 | 26 | 0 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 346.74 | 0 | 1236.5 | 1303.78 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 87 | 171.64 | 106.04 | 183.98 |
| 8. | Tripura | 125.58 | 484.34 | 182.8 | 445.54 |
| Total | | 2054.29 | 1956.46 | 4498.8 | 3058.30 |

Information on funds spent by the Government of North Eastern States on afforestation activities under CAMPA during year 2018-19 to 2021-22 are as under:-

(Rs. in crore)

| Sl. No. | Name of States/UTs | CAMP A funds spent on Compensatory Afforestation | | | |
|---------|--------------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 1.22 | 0.61 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. | Assam | 4.90 | 8.21 | 2.88 | 0 |
| 3. | Manipur | 1.30 | 0 | 5.48 | 1.96 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 0 | 0 | 1.34 | 0 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 2.44 | 0 | 7.75 | 3.47 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 2.04 | 3.88 | 3.16 | 6.60 |
| 8. | Tripura | 0.71 | 1.34 | 0.39 | 0.56 |
| | Total | 12.61 | 14.04 | 21.00 | 12.59 |

Information on financial assistance provided to the Governments of North-Eastern States for protection and Development of Protected Areas under CAMP A during last five years are as under:-

(Rs. in crore)

| S. No. | Name of States/UTs | CAMP A Fund transferred as on 31.03.2022 |
|--------|--------------------|--|
| 1. | Arunachal Pradesh | 2201.66 |
| 2. | Assam | 560.81 |
| 3. | Manipur | 346.19 |
| 4. | Meghalaya | 163.31 |
| 5. | Mizoram | 212.98 |
| 6. | Nagaland | 0.00 |
| 7. | Sikkim | 392.36 |
| 8. | Tripura | 231.64 |
| | Total | 4108.95 |

18. The Committee, thereafter, specifically desired to know as to whether the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change are in receipt of the comments from the North Eastern States on a Public Consultation Paper containing the details on the proposed amendments in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, circulated in October 2021 for inviting comments/suggestions from various stakeholders including the North Eastern region, in pursuance of the suggestions earlier received from various Ministries, State Governments and stakeholders regarding amendments in the Act *ibid*. In this context, the Committee further asked the Ministry to furnish the relevant details in the matter. The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in their written reply, submitted as under:-

"The Ministry is in the process to amend certain provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The Ministry had sought comments of all State Governments, Union Territory Administrations and other stakeholders by circulating a Public Consultation Paper, in Hindi, English and vernacular languages and placed them in public domain for one month. The paper invited views, comments and suggestions with a view to incorporate appropriate suggestions in the draft amendment. The proposed amendment is intended to strengthen the efforts of forest conservation and to make the implementation of the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 more effective.

The Ministry also wrote to the Chief Ministers of the State Governments, Administrators/Lt. Governors of the Union Territories and Chief Secretaries of the States and UTs requesting to send comments of their respective Governments/Administrations. More than 5600 comments have been received in the Ministry from various stakeholders, including Northern Eastern Region States.

In this regard, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura have submitted their view/comments on various issues and aspects highlighted in the Public Consultation Paper. Views/comments of the States/UTs are under examination and needful is being done."

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Need for time bound Identification, Survey, Demarcation and Digitization of Forest Boundaries

19. The Committee, while carefully examining the representation of Shri Phillipson in the light of the comments/written replies received from the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Department of Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya and Environment & Forest Department, Government of Assam thereon, observe that as per information furnished by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland had provided partially digitized boundaries of 'Recorded Forest Area', whereas, Tripura had provided the complete digitized forest boundaries. In the context of Meghalaya, the Committee also note that the boundaries of registered private forests and community, sacred groves, Bio-diversity Heritage sites, etc., have already been digitized, with the exception that the process of identification and demarcation of remaining forests under the control of private entities and community is in progress. Further, the North Eastern Space Application Centre has also been entrusted to delineate such areas through remote sensing technique which has been completed and at present, the field verification work is being undertaken.

20. The Committee are also given to understand that the identification, demarcation and digitization of the boundaries of Recorded Forest Area(s) as well as registered private forests and community are ongoing process. In this context, it is needless to say that identification/delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Forest Area is the first and foremost thing for implementing any of the Government schemes and/or policy measures effectively in all such areas. The Committee, therefore, urge the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to impress upon all the State Governments/UT Administration including the State Government(s) of North Eastern region to put in their

concerted efforts while ensuring better coordination amongst themselves to expedite the works relating to identification, survey and demarcation and subsequent digitization of the boundaries of all the Recorded Forest Area(s) coming under their geographical territories. Besides, the Ministry should also proactively advise all the State Governments of North Eastern States to seek necessary assistance from the North Eastern Space Application Centre for delineation of forest areas through remote sensing technique so that the field verification work is completed at the earliest. The Committee would like to be apprised of the concrete actions initiated by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change in the matter which could result into tangible outcomes, within three months from the date of presentation of this Report to the House.

Removal of encroachment from forest areas

21. Based on the information furnished by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Department of Forests & Environment, Government of Meghalaya and Environment & Forest Department, Government of Assam, the Committee take note of the fact that out of the total Recorded Forest Area, i.e., Reserve Forest, Protected Forest and Un-classed Forests in eight States of North Eastern Region, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura of 1,33,527 sq. kms., the total area under encroachment is 5,414.517 sq. kms., which is approximately 4% of the total Recorded Forest Area. Especially, as regards the State of Meghalaya, the total encroachment area at the end of year 2021 was 9,816.31 ha. as compared to 9,811.01 ha. at the end of year 2020. Further, as regards to the State of Assam, a total of 4,55,974 ha. area of forest land was under encroachment which is 16.11% of the total forest area of the State.

22. In this context, the Committee note from the submission made by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change that various actions are taken to remove

encroachment as per the provisions under various Acts such as Indian Forest Act, 1927; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and various Rules made there under and also under various State specific Acts and Rules. The Committee further note that with a view to preventing encroachment of forest areas, various measures have been taken by the State Forest Departments such as, setting up of check posts, barriers, use of modern technology (*that includes wireless network, remote sensing, Geographical Information System, Information Technology, Global Positioning System and Differential Global Positioning System*), improved mobility of field staff by providing vehicles for patrolling, demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries, construction of boundary pillars and strengthening infrastructure for forest protection. Besides, local communities are also been involved in conservation, protection and management of forest through Joint Forest Management.

23. The Committee note from the submission made by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change that there are various factors which are responsible for encroachment of forest land in North Eastern States such as traditional practice of *Jhum* Cultivation, livelihood issues arising out of poverty, increase in pressure on forest land on account of population explosion in areas contiguous to the Reserve Forests, Protected Forests, etc., transportation/commutation through forest areas, customary ownership of forest land, migration due to floods, accessibility and ever-increasing price of land.

24. In this sequel, the Committee are concerned to note that in the State of Meghalaya during the year 2020, encroachment could be removed only from 4.61 ha. of forest land area and 11.746 ha. in the year 2021 whereas, in the State of Assam, during the year 2021, encroachment has been removed from 2281 ha. forest land area.

25. In this context, the Committee further note that as regards to the State of Assam, Department of Environment & Forests has prepared a detailed Reserve Forest-wise eviction plan for removal of encroachment from various Reserve Forests with a financial requirement of Rs.647.70 crore and submitted to the Government on 27 April, 2022.

26. The Committee are dismayed to note that despite the overall supervisory efforts made by the Central Government and implemental efforts made by the State Governments of North Eastern States for containing encroachment of forest lands, the forest area under encroachment in the North Eastern Region is still of mammoth dimensions, especially in the States of Arunachal Pradesh (53450.4321 ha.), Assam (455974 ha.), Mizoram (10708 ha.) and Meghalaya (9816.13 ha.). In this regard, the Committee are of the considered view that the availability of technology, machine and manpower might have a limited impact in curbing the acute problem of encroachment of forest land in the North Eastern Region unless a robust multi-level post-monitoring feedback mechanism is put in place. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change should take a lead role in persuading all the State Governments of North Eastern States to devise a professionally managed post-monitoring, incentive-driven feedback system for not only curbing the menace of encroachment of forest land but also getting evicted the encroached forest land in a fast track mode. The Committee further urge the Ministry to impress upon the State Governments of North Eastern States to furnish the actual implementation report/status in respect to eviction of encroached forest land area regularly and also to intimate Forest Survey of India, Dehradun in this regard. The Committee would like to be apprised of the necessary and appropriate steps taken/proposed to be taken on the above aspects within three months from the date of presentation of this Report to the House.

Effective utilisation of allocated funds under Centrally Sponsored Schemes

27. As per the information furnished by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, the Government of India provides financial and technical assistance to the State/UT Governments under various Centrally Sponsored Scheme, i.e., Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, Project Elephant, National Afforestation Programme (NAP), National Mission for Green India (GIM), Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme and Project Tiger. Further, the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAMPA) funds are being utilized by States/UTs for compensating the loss of forest and tree cover, ecological services and hydrological regime due to diversion of forest land by undertaking afforestation and various activities for protection of forests, bio-diversity and wildlife as per the Annual Plan of Operations duly approved by the Executive Committee of National CAMPA. The plantation activities taken up under the CAMPA fund are monitored by the State/UT Forest Departments through their Forest Officers, Monitoring & Evaluation Wing and independent third-party Agencies.

28. The Committee are constrained to note that from the year 2019-20 to the year 2021-22, the funds released, especially, under the Scheme for Development of Wildlife Habitats, Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme (FPM) and Project Tiger have been on a decreasing trend. Also, as regards the works undertaken under CAMPA, the Committee are dismayed to note that the afforestation activities have been carried out only in 3058.30 ha. in the year 2021-22 as compared to 4498.80 ha. in the year 2020-21 whereas, the funds spent on the Compensatory Afforestation Activities was to the tune of Rs.12.59 crore in the year 2021-22 as compared to Rs. 21.00 crore in the year 2020-21. In this connection, the Committee take note of the fact that as on 31.03.2022, the total amount of funds transferred to all the North Eastern States for protection and development of forest areas under CAMPA was to the tune of Rs. 4108.95 crore. Notwithstanding the above, in the considered opinion of the Committee, the State Government(s) of the North Eastern States, being the implementing agency in respect of

Centrally Sponsored Schemes related to conservation, protection and development of environment and forests, may not be able to implement them effectively in case of scarcity of funds. The Committee, therefore, desire that the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change being the nodal Ministry for overall supervising the implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes in respect to conservation, protection and development of environment and forests should, on one hand, ensure that there should not be any dearth of funds allocated under relevant Schemes and on the other hand, should pro-actively supervise the effective implementation of the same in coordination with the State Governments of the North Eastern States while ensuring optimum utilisation of the released funds. In this connection, the Committee would also like to urge the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to entrust the State Government(s) of North Eastern States to furnish the progress made on the implementation *vis-a-vis* utilisation of funds in respect to Centrally Sponsored Schemes being administered by them on a more regular basis. The Committee would like to be apprised of the necessary and appropriate steps taken/proposed to be taken on the above aspects within three months from the date of presentation of this Report to the House.

Amendment(s) to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

29. Based on the information furnished by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, the Committee note of the fact that the Ministry was in the process to amend certain provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in order to strengthen the efforts of forest conservation and to make the implementation of the provisions of the Act more effective. The Ministry had sought comments of all State Governments, Union Territory Administrations and other stakeholders by circulating a Public Consultation Paper, in Hindi, English and vernacular languages and placed them in the public domain to invite views, comments and suggestions with a view to incorporating appropriate

suggestions in the draft amendment. In response thereto, more than 5600 comments were received by the Ministry from various stakeholders, including North Eastern Region States. The Committee further note that the Governments of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura had submitted their views/comments on various issues and aspects highlighted in the Public Consultation Paper and the same were under examination of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.

30. The Committee, in this regard, desire that the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change should put in their concerted efforts to seek views/comments from the remaining States/UTs Governments on the draft amendment(s) of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and consider the same along with the views/comments of other stakeholders in the right earnest so that a fine piece of legislation in the form of draft amendment bill is passed by the Parliament and also the rules may be formulated there under at the earliest. The Committee would also like to urge the Ministry to ensure that the provisions of the Act *ibid* (as amended) are not inconsistent with any other provisions of the laws of the land which relate to forests and environment. The Committee would like to be apprised of the progress made in this regard and proposed action taken in the matter within three months from the date of presentation of this Report to the House.

NEW DELHI;

HARISH DWIVEDI,
Chairperson,
Committee on Petitions.

08 August, 2023

17 Sravana, 1945 (Saka)