

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

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST & CLIMATE CHANGE

(Presented to Lok Sabha on 19.12.2023)



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
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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. Shri Bharat Ram Margani
14. Vacant
15. Vacant

SECRETARIAT

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. Shri Raju Srivastava | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. Shri Tenzin Gyaltzen | - | Deputy Secretary |

* *Resigned his Lok Sabha seat w.e.f. 15.12.2023.*

**SIXTY-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 Sixty-First Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) of the Committee to the House on the Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) in their Fifty-First Report on the representation of Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North-Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issue related therewith.

2. The Committee considered and adopted the draft Sixty-First Report at their sitting held on 18 December, 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

18 December, 2023

27 Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)

REPORT

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS (SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA) IN THEIR FIFTY FIRST REPORT ON THE REPRESENTATION RECEIVED FROM SHRI PHILLIPSON REGARDING ENCROACHMENT OF FOREST LAND IN NORTH - EASTERN STATES, ESPECIALLY IN MEGHALAYA AND ASSAM AND OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUE RELATED THEREWITH.

The Committee on Petitions (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) presented their Fifty First Report to Lok Sabha on 09 August, 2023 on the representation received from Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North- Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issue related therewith.

2. The Committee had made certain observations/recommendations in the matter and the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change were asked to implement the recommendations and requested to furnish their action taken notes thereon for further consideration of the Committee.

3. Action Taken Notes have since been received from the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change in respect of all the observations/recommendations contained in the aforesaid Report. The recommendations made by the Committee and the replies furnished thereto by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change are detailed in the succeeding paragraphs.

4. In paragraphs 19 and 20 of the Report, the Committee had observed/recommended as follows:-

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

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.

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 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 Government/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."

5. The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, in their action taken reply, have submitted as follows:-

"Forest Survey of India (FSI), an organization under the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, has been effortlessly, working in tandem with

State/UTs for digitization and demarcation of boundaries of Recorded Forest Area (RFA) by the respective State Forest Departments (SFD's). Forest Survey of India is provided with digitized RFA boundary by the SFD's. In absence of digitized RFA boundary, digitized green wash layer (1:50,000) is used for analysis by FSI. At present, the Ministry has also involved Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N), a premier institute to work in collaboration with Forest Survey of India for better outcome in digitization and demarcation of boundaries for forest area.

In this connection with Help of North Eastern Space Application (NESAC) and support of this Ministry, the boundaries of Reserve Forest and Protected Area of Assam have been digitized by the State Forest Department. The boundaries are generated from the OSM Toposheet and preliminary notification provided by the states' Administration. As intimated by Assam Forest Department, the original boundary pillars in almost all the cases are missing and thus the digital boundaries are indicative / approximate, based on perceived boundary transects. The digitized boundaries of Reserve Forest and Protected areas are in the process of authentication by the respective DFOs.

Further, in the State of Meghalaya it may be mentioned that the Government owned recorded forest areas have been digitized and have been communicated to the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun. The boundaries of registered private forests and community forests, scared grove, Biodiversity Heritage site 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) had been entrusted the task to delineate such areas through remote sensing technique which has been completed and now the field verification is being undertaken."

6. In paragraphs 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 of the Report, the Committee had observed/ recommended as follows:-

"Removal of encroachment from forest areas

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.

In this context, the Committee note from the submission made by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change that various actions are taken to remove encroachment as per the provision 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 a view to preventing encroachment of forest areas, various measures have been taken by the State forest departments such as, Setting up of Check post, 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 of infrastructure for forest protection. besides, local communities are also been involved in conservation, protection and management of forest through joint forest management.

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.

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.

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.

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 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 areas regularly and also to intimate Forest Survey of India, Dehradun in this regard."

7. The Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change in their action taken reply, have submitted as follows:-

"To check encroachment in forest land, the State Forest Department has set up check post, barriers, improved mobility of the field staff by providing vehicles for patrolling, beat system inspection and randomly beat inspection, demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries with modern technology such as wireless networks, remote sensing and Geographical Information System, Global Positioning Systems, construction of boundary pillars and strengthening infrastructure to

monitor and protect forests. Involvement of local communities in conservation, protection and management of forest through Joint Forest Management Committee.

This Ministry has directed the State Governments/UT Administrations, to take proper initiative and measures to remove encroachment as per the existing Acts/Rules and to ensure that no further encroachment takes place. In order to prevent and control encroachments, the States and UTs also take various measures such as demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries, strengthening infrastructure for forest protection, involving fringe area forest communities through Joint Forest Management Committees, Eco Development Committees etc. Encroachment on forest areas, whenever detected are taken care through drawing of Offence Reports, Serving of eviction notice and eviction drives.

In view of the above this Ministry has issued advisories to all concerned State/Uts vide letter No. 17/11/2021-FPD, dated 2nd August 2021, letter No.17-8/2020-FPD dated 7th March 2022, and letter No. 17/11/2021-FPD dated 26th September 2022, also revised Advisory has been issued vide letter No. 6/5/2022-FPD dated 19th September 2023 is attached, wherein a format is also enclosed for monitoring and updating quarterly progress report on area under encroachment, area under new encroachment and Eviction status of forest land from all State/UTs as suggested by the Committee."

8. In paragraphs 27 and 28 of the Report, the Committee had observed/recommended as follows:-

"Effective utilisation of allocated funds under Centrally Sponsored Schemes

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.

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 a decreasing trend. Also, as regards the works undertaken under CAMPA, the Committee are dismayed to note that afforestation activities have been carried out only in 3058.30 ha. in the year 2021-22 as compared to 4498.80ha. in the year 2020-21. In 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 Governments (s) of the North Eastern States, being 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 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 North Eastern States while ensuring optimum utilisation of 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."

9. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in their action taken reply, have submitted as follows:-

"Under Centrally Sponsored Scheme, i.e., Development of Wildlife Habitat, Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme, Project Tiger and Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) from the year 2019-2020 to the year 2021-2022, the reason for the decrease in trend of fund release was due to Streamlining of Public Financial Management System (PFMS) system and presence of unspent balance with the State, the fund were not released.

This Ministry also issue letters to all State/UTs for proper utilization of fund with respect to Centrally Sponsored Schemes. Further this Ministry also, Monitor and Scrutinize the implementation and progress of Schemes through various meetings with all the State and UTs.

Under the Centrally Sponsored "Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme (FPM)" the details of fund release to State Government of North Eastern regions during last five year 2019-20 to 2023-24 are as follows:

(Rs. In Lakh)						
S. No.	States	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (as on 13.09.2023)
1	Assam	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2	Arunachal Pradesh	0.00	0.00	89.77	198.12	198.12
3	Manipur	55.34	316.61	86.53	106.61	106.61
4	Meghalaya	73.94	73.31	0.00	38.17	46.72
5	Mizoram	108.12	112.46	87.19	30.87	17.27
6	Nagaland	79.95	87.80	64.52	28.82	192.24
7	Sikkim	293.77	0.00	89.73	47.91	48.21
8	Tripura	103.43	45.62	82.26	47.48	47.64
	Total	714.55	635.80	500.00	497.98	656.81

Presently the fund released under Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme show an increasing trend in the North –Eastern region.

Under the Centrally Sponsored "Development of Wildlife Habitats" the Details of funds released to the State Governments of North Eastern Region for the last four year 2019-20 to 2022-2023 are as follows:-

(Rs. in lakh)

S. No.	Name of States	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
1	Arunachal Pradesh	512.69	312.5865	419.80617	276.44062
2	Assam	164.26	0	0	209.1464
3	Manipur	396.455	241.12	142.50646	180.64379
4	Meghalaya	238.839	263.507	530.51253	0
5	Mizoram	431.79	339.60855	198.9678	190.1977
6	Nagaland	953.69	260.00105	342.0315	725.6565
7	Sikkim	557.355	349.623	182.97174	239.66048
8	Tripura	90.317	260.679	0	0
	Total	3345.396	2027.1251	1816.7962	1821.74549

Under Project Tiger the details of funds released to the North Eastern Tiger Range States under the ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH) for last four years 2019-20 to 2022-23 are as under:-

(Rs. in lakh)

S. No.	State	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
1	Arunachal Pradesh	846.31	803.76	869.08	787.19
2	Assam	2198.76	2513.90	1476.75	2559.78
3	Mizoram	337.70	161.53	374.13	78.75

The State, CAMPA funds transferred to various North Eastern States are based on their share of compensatory levies deposited by user agencies against diversion of forest land in the respective state and are aimed to compensate forest and ecosystem services by raising compensatory afforestation against the forest land diverted.

In Nagaland there was no diversion of forest land as per the provision of Forest (Conservation) act, 1980 and therefore no CAMPA Funds were deposited.

The transfer of State share of CAMPA funds of NE States for last four years 2019-20 to 2022-23 are given below:

(Rs. in crore)

S. No	State/UT	2019-20			2020-21			2021-22			2022-23		
		APO approved	Fund released	Fund utilised	APO approved	Fund released	Fund utilised	APO approved	Fund released	Fund utilised	APO approved	Fund released	Fund utilised
1	Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	3.19	155.46	142.8	0	240.85	240.16	0	196.93	189.8	189.4

2	Assam	55.89	0	32.02	88.34	88.34	66.19	79.12	79.12	43.35	162.57	100	83.89
3	Manipur	30.97	30.36	30.97	27.79	27.79	27.79	25.09	25.09	25.09	22.59	22.59	22.59
4	Meghalaya	0	0	0	33.97	22.43	22.01	36.4	36.4	36.4	26.67	8.9	8.9
5	Mizoram	19.23	0	0	32.66	25.99	25.99	18.08	17.65	17.65	16.74	12.47	10.01
6	Nagaland	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
7	Sikkim	44.96	44.96	39.46	47.72	47.72	54.84	70	70	70	92.85	80	70.57
8	Tripura	20.84	6.5	17.38	21.51	18.35	17.92	35.24	29.87	24.22	52.9	128.82	34.85
	TOTAL	171.89	81.82	123.02	407.45	373.42	214.74	504.78	498.29	216.71	571.25	542.58	420.21

10. In paragraphs 29 and 30 of the Report, the Committee had observed/recommended as follows:-

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

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.

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 related to forests and environment.”

11. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in their action taken reply, have submitted as follows:-

“The FC amendment Bill 2023 was introduced in the Parliament (Both houses) on 29.03.2023. After that it was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

The Committee has issued a Press Communiqué on 03.05.2023 for inviting the comments on FC Amendment Bill, 2023 from the States/UTs/public/NGOs and other stake holders. Accordingly, the Ministry has replied all comments as received by the JPC.

Moreover, the Committee has held several meetings including study tour from 2nd to 6th June, 2023 at Srinagar, Guwahati and Bhubaneswar on the proposed Amendment Bill.

The details of the meetings held by the JPC are as below:

Details of the meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Committee			
S. No.	Date	Particulars of meeting	Participants
1.	25.04.2023	Introductory meeting	Officials of MoEF&CC
2.	16.05.2023	Ministries	Ministry of Home, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Tribal Affairs
3.		States	Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Telangana
4.	17.05.2023	Ministries	Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Sanitation and Drinking Water and DoNER
5.	30.05.2023	Experts	NGOs and Experts persons/Organisations)
6.	2.06.2023	Organisation	BRO and BSF Army Northern Command, DRDO Ministry of Defence
7.	3.06.2023	States/UTs	Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh Uttarakhand and Punjab

8.	5.06.2023	Organisation/States	Organisations Directorate General of Hydrocarbons Oil and Natural Gas Corporations M/o Petroleum and Natural Gas States Tripura, Manipur, Sikkim and Nagaland
9.	6.06.2023	States	Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram & Arunachal Pradesh
10.	7.06.2023	Organisation	Organisation Indian Bureau of Mines States Odisha and Andhra Pradesh

After that a detailed report has also been given by the Committee which is available on the Parliament Website in the public domain.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 26.07.2023 and Rajya Sabha on 04.08.2023. The Bill has also been notified by the Ministry of Law and Justice in the official of Gazette of India on 04.08.2023.

In view of the above it is submitted that the concern raised by the Committee in its recommendation has already been take care by the JPC (Joint Parliamentary Committee)."

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Need for time bound identification, survey, demarcation and digitisation of forest boundaries

12. The Committee had aptly pointed out that the identification, demarcation and digitisation of the boundaries of Recorded Forest Areas as well as registered private forest and community is a crucial and ongoing process and therefore, the said exercise is the underlying pre-requisite for conclusively implementing Government Schemes and/or policy measures in such areas. The Committee had consequently urged the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to ensure that all State Governments/UTs Administration, including North Eastern Region/States Institutions to co-ordinate amongst themselves for expediting the works relating to identification, survey and demarcation along with subsequent digitalization of the boundaries of all the Recorded Forest Areas under their geographical territories.

13. The Committee note from the action taken reply that Forest Survey of India (FSI), an Organisation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, has been working with State/UTs regarding the digitisation and demarcation of boundaries of Recorded Forest Areas by the respective State Forest Departments (SFDs). Further, the Committee are satisfied to note that the Ministry have also involved Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N) to work in collaboration with FSI for ensuring concrete outcomes in digitization and demarcation of boundaries for forest areas. The Committee also note that with the requisite help of North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) working along with the Ministry, the boundaries

of reserve forests and protected areas of Assam have been swiftly digitized by the State Forest Department.

14. The Committee while appreciating the efficient utilisation of technology (*and other technical apparatus*) towards achieving tangible outcomes, reiterate their earlier recommendation to the extent that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change should ensure successful and continuous delineation of forest areas through remote sensing technique (*and other advanced technologies*) so that the field verification work is completed at the earliest. The Committee in this regard, would also like to recommend that wherever possible, latest advanced technology should be fairly utilized towards protection and digitisation of reserve forest and protected areas for conservation of valuable flora and fauna. The Committee would appreciate if they are apprised of the outcome of action taken in this regard.

Removal of encroachment from forest areas

15. The Committee had noted from the submissions made by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change that various action/steps have been taken to remove encroachment as per the provisions under various Acts, *viz.*, Indian Forest Act 1927, Wildlife Protection Act 1972, Forest Conservation Act 1980 and various related Rules made thereunder along with States specific Acts and Rules. The Committee had further noted that preventing encroachment of forest areas is of paramount importance and in this context, various measures have been taken by the State Forest Departments. These steps include setting up of check posts, barriers, use of modern technology (*that includes wireless network remote sensing*

Geographical Information System [GIS], Information Technology, Global Positioning System [GPS] and Differential Global Positioning System) improved mobility of field staff by providing vehicles for patrolling, demarcation and digitisation of forest boundaries, construction of boundary pillars and strengthening of infrastructure for forest protection, while also engaging local communities in conservation, protection and management of forest through joint forest management.

16. The Committee note that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in its action taken replies, have stated that regarding the issue pertaining to the checking of encroachment in forest land, the State Forest Departments have also taken various steps, viz., setting up of check posts, barriers along with providing improved mobility to the field staff through vehicles for patrolling, beat system/ inspections including random beat inspection, demarcation and digitisation of forest boundaries with use of such modern technology as wireless networks, remote sensing and geographical information system, GPS, construction of boundary pillars and strengthening infrastructure to monitor and protect forest.

17. The Committee, with regard to the overall supervisory efforts made, had pointed out some lacunae towards the efforts made by Central Government and consequent implementable efforts made by the State Governments of North Eastern States for containing the encroachment of forest land. In this context, the Committee feel that the forest area under encroachment in the North Eastern region is still of noticeable proportions in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Such areas under these States stand at 53450 ha., 455974

ha., 10708 ha. and 9816 ha., respectively. The Committee had pointed out that relying only on machine and manpower might have a limited impact in curbing the problem of encroachment of forest land and therefore, recommended a robust multi-level post monitoring feedback mechanism be put in place. The Committee, therefore reiterate that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change should persuade all the State Governments of North Eastern States to devise a comprehensive and professionally managed post monitoring system along with incentive driven feedback mechanism towards curbing the menace of encroachment of forest land in addition to the timely eviction in a fast track and time bound manner. The Committee further reiterate that the Ministry should impress upon the State Government of North Eastern States to provide actual implementation status in respect of the eviction of encroached forest land regularly along with intimating the outcomes to FSI, Dehradun.

18. The Committee would also like to reiterate that a comprehensive control and prevention of forest encroachments including demarcation and digitization of forest boundaries along with strengthening forest *(and its protection related)* infrastructure, engagement of local communities *(including fringe area forest communities)* should be ensured. To this extent, involvement of local populace with regard to safeguarding through joint forest management Committees, eco-development Committees, etc., may be effected. The Committee would like to be apprised of the necessary and appropriate steps taken/proposed to be taken on the above aspects.

Effective utilisation of allocated funds under the Centrally sponsored Schemes

19. The Committee, in their recommendation, had expressed their concern on the decreasing trend of funds released under the scheme for Development of Wildlife Habitats, Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FPM) and Project Tiger for the year(s) 2019-20 and 2021-22. The Committee had further expressed their displeasure regarding the works undertaken under CAMPA by stating that the afforestation activities have been carried out only in 3058 hectares in the year 2021-22 as compared to 4498 hectares in the year 2020-21. Also, as on the 31 March 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 ₹4108 crore.

20. The Committee had put forth its views regarding the effect of scarcity of funds on the implementation and consequent effectiveness of Centrally Sponsored Schemes and had therefore, desired that Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in its capacity as the Nodal Ministry for overall supervision and implementation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme towards conservation, protection and development of environment and forest, should initiate urgent remedial measures. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their recommendation that the Ministry should endeavour to ensure timely availability of funds allocated under relevant Schemes along with pro-actively supervising effective implementation of the same in coordination with the State Governments of North Eastern States while ensuring optimum utilisation of such funds. The Committee further reiterate that the Ministry should ensure that the State Governments of North Eastern States furnish the report on progress made regarding the implementation *vis-a-vis*

utilization of funds in respect to Centrally Sponsored Schemes being administered by them on a regular basis. To this extent, the Committee would like to be apprised of the necessary and appropriate steps taken/proposed to be taken on the above aspects.

New Delhi;

18 December, 2023
27 Agrahayana, 1945 (Saka)

HARISH DWIVEDI,
Chairperson
Committee on Petitions

15. The Committee, thereafter, took up for consideration the following draft Action taken Reports:-

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|-------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| (i) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (ii) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (iii) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (iv) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (v) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (vi) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| (vii) | *** | *** | *** | ***; and |

(viii) Action Taken Report on the action taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) in their Fifty-First Report on the representation of Shri Phillipson regarding encroachment of Forest Land in North- Eastern States, especially in Meghalaya and Assam and other important issue related therewith.

16. After discussing the above mentioned eight draft Action Taken Reports in detail, the Committee adopted these Reports without any modification and authorised the Chairperson to finalise the draft Action Taken Reports and present the same to the House during the ensuing Session.

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| 17. | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| 18. | *** | *** | *** | *** |

The Committee, then, adjourned.

*** Does not pertain to this Report.