

F. No. 6-18/2011/WL-I
Government of India
Ministry of Environment and Forests
(Wildlife Division)

Room No.116
Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003
Dated 12.10.2012

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject: Permission for erection of structure within Tillangchong Sanctuary, Andaman and Nicobar Islands for temporary use by Indian Navy – reg.

A proposal of Indian Navy was received in the Ministry of Environment and Forests for consideration of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), seeking recommendation for use of 2m x 2m area within Tillangchong Wild Life Sanctuary, A & N Islands, for erection of a structure as target for practice missiles from sub marines, for 7 to 10 days in a year. The location is proposed to be used for firing of the practice versions of the missiles to be conducted (no explosives) as a part of acceptance trials of upgraded systems of Indian Navy. The alternatives considered included the Isles of Man Island, which does not meet the trials firing parameters, and the Little Nicobar Island, which has large number of dwelling units, therefore not permitted by A & N Administration. It has been informed that the area of impact is less than 50 ha with use of 2m x 2m for erection of target and a circular error of probability of 50 meters.

2. The area has been notified as a Wild Life Sanctuary in 1985. Island is about 15 km long and 1 km in width, with a total area of 16.83 sq km. In the report of the Wildlife Warden, proposed diversion measures to 4 sq km, with an effective requirement of 50 sq km. The island supports tropical evergreen vegetation.

3. The proposal was considered in the 23rd meeting held on 14th October 2011 wherein a site inspection was prescribed and entrusted to Dr A Rahmani, Member, along with the Chief Wildlife Warden, A & N Islands, for submitting a report to the Committee. Site inspection was carried out by Dr Rahamani on February 12, 2012, along with the representatives of A & N Forest Department and Indian Navy. Dr Rahmani reported that the area is important for presence of the endemic Nicobar Megapode, *Megapodius nicobariensis nicobariensis*, a sub species of the Nicobar Megapode, occurring on seven islands of the Noncowry group. The population of this sub species has declines to less than 200 from above 2000 breeding pairs in 1990s and Tillangchong is the only island holding the safest population of the sub species. He also reported presence of a few other endemic species in the area like Nicobar bulbul, Nicobar Sparrowhawk, coconut crab etc. The island is considered sacred by the Nicobarese communities and hunting of birds is not allowed. They had expressed their opinion against the proposal of the Navy. Dr Rahmani recommended that the proposal should not be recommended due to the unique status of this habitat, and potential destruction of the habitat in the nearby area in case of misfire. The report was considered in the 25th meeting held on 13th June 2012. In the meeting it was generally felt that the area, being among the last remaining habitats of an endemic bird, must be preserved. In the meeting, was also considered to permit one pilot testing to understand the impact.

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4. Subsequently several representations and more information have been received in the Ministry related to the conservation value of the island. It is indicated that the proposed missile testing is likely to have highly damaging consequences on the ecosystem including the endemic species. At the same time, the local customs and culture, wherein customary practice of use and conservation are still vibrant, need to be respected.

5. In the deliberations on the issue in 25th Standing Committee meeting, the matter was extensively discussed and several members expressed their strong opposition to the proposal. Representative of the Indian Navy made a very persuasive presentation of the importance of the project. The matter has been considered in context of the facts detailed above.

6. Accordingly it is recommended that the proposal for use of forest land for installation of a structure as target for use of the practice versions of the missiles to be conducted for acceptance trials of upgraded missiles systems in the Sanctuary can not be permitted. The proponents, Indian Navy, are requested to identify alternate locations, where high conservation values of this nature are not at stake, for ensuring the defence preparedness and security of the country.

7. This issues with the approval of the Minister of State (Independent Charge) Environment and Forests, and the Chairperson of the Standing Committee for NBWL.

(Dr S K Khandur
Inspector General of Forests
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- i) Chief Secretary, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Port Blair.
- ii) Principal Secretary, Forests and PCCF, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Port Blair.
- iii) Principal Secretary (WL) and Chief Wildlife Warden, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Port Blair.
- ✓ iv) Copy to: Technical Director (NIC) for uploading the O.M. on the Ministry website.