

No Construction and No Felling of Trees in Sipasarubali Area- Directs National Green Tribunal

While disposing a Petition filed by Mr. Prafulla Samantara, President of Lokshahi Abhiyan, the Eastern Zone Bench of National Green Tribunal at Kolkata directed the Odisha state govt not to understate any activities in Sipasarubali (Puri district) area where Shamuka Tourism Project is proposed to be set up in violation of the provisions of EIA Notification 2006 and Office Memorandum dated 19.8.2010 of the govt of India, Ministry of Environment and Forest, till the grant of Environment clearance and Coastal Regulatory Zone clearance by the respective Statutory Authorities in favour of the project.

It is pertinent to mention here that last year on World Environment Day, 5th June 2015, IDCO and Puri District Administration, in the presence of 14 platoons of armed police started felling thousands of trees in Siapsarubali Mouza to clear the ground for the proposed Shamuka Tourism Project. The people led by Upakuliya Jami-O-Jangal Surakshya Samiti (UJJSS) have protested and opposed this move. Disregarding this, the authorities went ahead with their move 27 persons mostly women were arrested by police in this context. They felled the trees, started constructing the Approach Road and the Boundary Wall of the Project. In this back drop. Mr.Prafulla Samantara has approached the NGT on July 15, 2016 and on the same day the Tribunal has stayed the construction and felling of trees by the administration and sought compliance report from the Chief Secretary of Odisha.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Shamuka Tourism Project is an ambitious, profit-oriented and dream project sought to be promoted by the state tourism department for the construction of luxurious hotel and golf course in an area of 920 acre, in this ecologically sensitive coastal area a Puri District.

The council Mr. Samkar Prasad Pani, appearing for the petitioner argued that the ongoing construction work and tree felling in Sipasarubali for Shamuka project is illegal as the project has not been granted Coastal Regulation Zone and Environment clearance under Environmental Protection Act 1986. The petition further contended that around 28 percent of the total land is covered with trees (as per DFO's report more than one lakh trees) which serve as a barrier against cyclonic storms and coastal erosion and the setting up of project will wreck havoc on the ecology of the area.

Mr. Sura Prasad Misra, the Advocate General who re-presented the Odisha State govt has agreed that the state not to go ahead with any construction activities and felling of trees in the Sipasarubali area until the Environment and CRZ clearance were granted.

The UJJSS has welcomed the Green Tribunal's order. It demanded the area be declared as ecologically sensitive area and all construction in the area be demolished immediately. The officers responsible for such illegal construction should be penalised. As promised, the district administration should start replantation (Ten plants are plant it felled) in the same area so as to maintain the coastal forest. The order of NGT justifies the people's opposition to the construction by IDCO and it is a partial victory for the people's movement to save coastal ecology threatened by the proposed setting up of Shamuka project. The UJJSS hopes to strengthen the peoples movement in the days ahead to protect the environment and the right of people over the land.
