

## **'Government to Set Up Panel to Study Forest Ownership Issue in NE'**

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SHILLONG: A committee will be set up to conduct a detailed study on the issue of forest ownership in Northeast region where vast areas of forests are privately-owned, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar today said.

The panel would work towards ensuring protection to forests and benefits to communities besides sustainable development, the Union Minister said.

"I will appoint a committee to go into details on the issue of community forests and private forests, and what are the ways in which people will be benefited and the forests are protected," he said after inaugurating the regional office of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

He said the committee will submit its report within three to four months, and the official who will head the committee will be appointed shortly. Stating that the Northeast region has a peculiar problem of forest-holding system, Javadekar said the committee will see to it that sustainable development takes place while at the same time ensure that the forest covers are protected.

Admitting that India's forest cover is just about one percent of world's forest cover, Javadekar said the ministry will soon conduct mapping of all forests in the country plot-by-plot and this process could take at least two years for all states to complete.

He also said the Centre is likely to introduce Minimum Support Price for minor forest produce as is done in Madhya Pradesh, which will give justice to the people dependent on these produce. On the decentralisation of the forest department, Javadekar said the ministry will conduct a review of the MoEF regional empowered committee in January.

He said the regional committees are empowered to grant permission for any project of public importance of up to 40 hectares after fulfilling certain criteria and standard guidelines.

He said the decentralization was done with the faith that due diligence will be done and conditions of forest protection will be followed and added that 36 cases were disposed off within one year from the office.

Elsewhere, the minister said at least 800 cases were disposed off at these regional offices as part of the decentralisation of powers under the NDA government.

Earlier, state Environment Minister Prestone Tynsong and Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council chief executive member P N Syiem outlined the forest covers in the state and their ownership and urged the Union Minister to ensure that the Forest Act does not come in the way of any developmental programs.

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