

Sat, 27 Oct 2018

## **MoEF okays DRDO's strategic surveillance project: 49.978 acres of forest land to be diverted**

*Land diversion to cost Rs 1,000 cr*

After a long wait of over five years, the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) has finally approved the project of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to establish infrastructure facilities for strategic surveillance system including land-based long-range missile facility at Rutland Island in South Andaman. As per sources, DRDO will now have to obtain environment and coastal regulation zone (CRZ) clearances before commencing the project. The proposal has reportedly been cleared at all levels of the Andaman and Nicobar administration. As per reports, DRDO has submitted the Environment Impact Assessment study report and joint inspection carried out by DRDO and Divisional Forest Officer of Port Blair. To compensate the forest loss, an extent of 100 acres of degraded forest area at Burmachad, Paschimsagar range, Diglipur has been identified for compensatory afforestation.

Defence personnel says that the project is crucial as Rutland Island is located at a vintage location of about 220 km from the Strait of Malacca that connects Indian Ocean with South China Sea. In May last year, the standing committee of National Board of Wildlife approved the project with conditions including preparation of marine and terrestrial wildlife conservation plan, placing essential deflectors and anti-radiation screens around satellite antennas as the proposed area is close to ecologically-sensitive Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park. At a meeting on September 27, Regional Empowered Committee of Regional Office (South Eastern Zone) of the ministry has recommended for clearance to divert 49.978 acres of forest for the project, which is being conceived at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore. The proposal involves diversion of 49.978 acres forest of which 0.84 ha falls in the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park and 49.138 ha reserve forest within 10km of the Eco Sensitive Zone. Rutland Island is vital to DRDO's long-term plans to have a comprehensive testing facility to identify and track long-range missile tests as the island is located at an ideal distance from the mainland where tests are typically launched from. As of now, long-range missile tests are being carried out from the Odisha coast and are tracked by naval vessels on a trajectory into the Bay of Bengal. Most of the long-range tests for missiles like Agni IV and V have to be tracked over sea, with specialised vessels noting the 'hit zone' into the water.

DRDO requires a land-based test area as well to accurately track its long range missiles, with the island in the Andamans being ideally located due to its distance from mainland. DRDO is also looking at setting up tracking stations along the Andaman Islands to track incoming test missiles. Besides, a special purpose vessel for tracking missile launches is currently under construction at the Vizag based Hindustan Shipyard Limited.

In July 2014, the former Defence Minister, Mr Arun Jaitley informed Lok Sabha that the Ministry of Defence has identified Rutland Island in Andaman and Nicobar Islands for setting up a Missile Testing Range. The other one selected for missile test range facilities is at Nagayalanka in Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh. There was no proposal to set up a Missile Launcher Project in the newly formed state of Telangana. But the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) had identified Rutland Island in Andaman and Nagayalanka in Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh for setting up missile test range facilities, the Minister then told the Parliament.

<http://echoofindia.com/port-blair-rutland-become-missile-testing-and-surveillance-base-141872>

## **DRDO gets nod for strategic surveillance system at vantage Rustland Island**

*Defence officials say the project is crucial as Rustland Island is located at a vantage location of about 200 km from the Strait of Malacca that connects Indian Ocean with South China Sea*

Chennai: After a delay of six years, Union Environment Ministry has given its approval to Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to establish infrastructure facilities for strategic surveillance system, including land-based long-range missile facility at South Andaman's Rustland Island.

At a meeting on September 27, Regional Empowered Committee of Regional Office (South Eastern Zone) of the ministry has recommended for clearance to divert 49.978 acres of forest for the project, which is being conceived at a cost of `1,000 crore.

In 2013, the then Defence Minister AK Antony told the Rajya Sabha that DRDO had proposed to set up a missile test range each at Rutland Island in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Nagayalanka in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.

Defence officials say the project is crucial as Rustland Island is located at a vantage location of about 200 km from the Strait of Malacca that connects Indian Ocean with South China Sea. The standing committee of National Board of Wildlife had already given approval in May last year with conditions, including preparation of marine and terrestrial wildlife conservation plan, placing essential deflectors and anti-radiation screens around satellite antennas, as the proposed area is close to ecologically-sensitive Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park.

Now with the major hurdle of land acquisition cleared, DRDO will have to obtain environment and coastal regulation zone (CRZ) clearances before commencing the project. The proposal has been cleared at all levels of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration.

DRDO has submitted the Environment Impact Assessment study report and joint inspection carried out by DRDO and District Forest Officer of Port Blair. The DFO South Andaman Forest Division has reported that the requirement of forest land for diversion was unavoidable and barest minimum for the project. "To compensate the forest loss, an extent of 100 acres of degraded forest area at Burmachad, Paschimsagar range, Diglipur has been identified for compensatory afforestation" MRG Reddy, Additional PCCF (Central) and Chairperson of REC said.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2018/oct/27/drdo-gets-nod-for-strategic-surveillance-system-at-vantage-rustland-island-1890507.html>