

Nagar Panchayat in CNP shocks forest department

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The urban development department's decision to declare an area under Corbett National Park where kalagarh colonies are situated as a Nagar Panchayat has left the forest department shocked. While some officials have termed the move as "unprecedented", others say it is the "worst form of vote bank politics".

The urban development department has already issued a notification to receive objections from public within one week before declaring the area, where around 7,000 people are currently living, as a Nagar Panchayat.

The decision also appears to be in contravention with last year's Supreme Court directive to remove illegal encroachers from Kalagarh. The court had also asked the Uttar Pradesh government to do the needful as a major chunk of kalagarh continues to be possessed by the UP irrigation department.

In a meeting held recently between the forest officials and UP irrigation department, the latter had agreed to give around 300 hectare land in its possession in Kalagarh to the Uttarakhand forest department. The forest officials had talked of merging this land with the Corbett Tiger Reserve.

D S Garbyal, secretary, urban development department, told TOI, "The issuance of a notification of bringing kalagarh colonies under the ambit of Nagar Panchayat has been aimed at providing civic amenities which include schools, hospitals, water and electricity the people living there."

Sameer Sinha, director, Corbett Tiger Reserve, said he was discussing the issue with government officials.

According to forest official Manoj Chandran, "The UP irrigation department had agreed before making the reservoir that it will remove all the residential and construction after the dam becomes operational. Most of its staff also left the place and a lot of land was also given to the forest department. However, it is now the task of the irrigation department to

differentiate between the legal and illegal occupants after which they will be removed."

Sources said as soon as the staff left the reservoir, outsiders began occupying the vacated places. The move to shift these people from here has not been implemented for last two decades. Despite the SC verdict, no swiftness has been shown in the identification of the illegal occupants and their removal.

The Times of India 13-January-2015