

Encroachments eat up 600 acres of Kadugodi reserve forest

Forest Department has given report to joint legislature committee

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BANGALORE: The Joint Select Committee of the Legislature headed by A.T. Ramaswamy, set up to look into encroachment of government land in Bangalore Urban district, has been informed by the Forest Department that 616 acres of the 711-acre Kadugodi Plantation Reserve Forest (close to the International Technology Park in Whitefield) has been encroached upon. The committee held a meeting here on December 5.

The prominent encroachers are government agencies such as the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB), Indian Rail-

ways, Container Corporation of India, the Police Department (a police station and housing quarters have been built) and the Animal Husbandry Department, which has established a veterinary hospital.

Manufacturing units

A number of manufacturing units, including an export promotion park and dwellings, have also been established on what the Forest Department says is reserve forest land. The Forest Department's accusation is based on the land's original notification.

Sources in the committee told *The Hindu* that the For-

• The accusation is based on the land's original notification

• Encroachers include various government agencies

est Department had submitted a report on the encroachments last September.

"The report was discussed threadbare during our December 5 meeting," the sources said.

Wrong impression

The 711 acres was declared a reserve forest in May 1896 under the Mysore Forest Regulation. During the 1960s it was given to individuals by the Government for cultiva-

tion as part of the 'Grow More Food' campaign. Over a period of time, the cultivators, who had only got 'cultivation rights,' got the impression that the land had been given to them.

With the KIADB also holding such a view, it notified and acquired 589 acres of this land from the persons who were occupying it and compensated them. It allotted the land between 1981 and 1985 for development as an industrial area.

Occupiers filed cases

But the 'occupiers,' dissatisfied with the compensation that they had been paid, filed 201 cases with the Special Deputy Commissioner and various courts, including the Supreme Court.

In September this year the

Special Deputy Commissioner ruled that the individuals had no title over the land and that it was government land.

The Forest Department's stand is that the land may have been given for a purpose (cultivation), but the title/tenure of the land is still that of a reserve forest.

'No legal sanction'

According to sources, the KIADB had allotted land over which it had no legal sanction.

They could have taken the records from the Revenue Department, which is bound to keep the records or checked the mutation of the land, the sources said.

According to KIADB executive director D.N. Naik, the land was acquired under the provisions of the KIADB Act,

1961 and developed as an industrial area. "It was a transparent acquisition process and done by way of a notification. Why did the Forest Department not object? If the Forest Department is claiming that it is forest land, they will have to move a court of law. You can't wish away the existence of what has come up on the land."

95 acres left

Today, the Forest Department is in possession of only 95 acres of the Kadugodi Plantation Reserve Forest, where it has a Forest Training Centre.

According to officials, the Kadugodi forest is "a wonderful area for sandalwood regeneration, with almost every square metre sprouting a sandalwood tree."