



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ASTROPHYSICS
BENGALURU 560 034

Dr P. Sreekumar
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To
The Secretary,
Ministry of Environment,
Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC),
Indira Paryavaran Bhavan,
Jorbagh Road, New Delhi - 110 003
INDIA

Dear Sir,

1. I am writing this letter to your office in furtherance of the Order dated 05.10.2015 passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India on an application (I.A. Nos.3894-3896/2015 in WP (C) No.202/1995) filed on behalf of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (hereinafter, 'the IIA') inter alia praying for exemption from payment of NPV of Rs.327.60 lakhs for use of the forest land at Javadhu Hills, Kavalur, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu, which is being demanded by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department.
2. By way of the said order dated 05.10.2015, Hon'ble Supreme Court disposed of the application filed by the IIA (alongwith other such applications filed by others) by directing the Registry of the Supreme Court to transfer the same to the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) within 45 days, whereafter the MoEFCC will consider the applications.
3. Therefore I am writing to your office with a request to kindly consider the application of the IIA at the earliest. You would be kindly to give us an opportunity of being heard before passing any orders on the application.
4. For your convenience and ready reference, I am furnishing the brief facts: -
 - (a) Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) is an autonomous body fully funded by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, and has its headquarter in Bangalore. The IIA is dedicated for research studies in Astrophysics and Astronomy. It is the oldest scientific institution in the country, tracing its origin to Nungambakkam Observatory set up in 1786. One of its observatories / campus is at Javadhu Hills, Kavalur, Vellore District, Tamil Nadu.

- (b) In 1965, the Government of Tamil Nadu allotted 40 acres of forest land in Javadhu Hills in Kavalur Village, Vellore District, to the IIA for setting up an astronomical observatory for research and training purposes. For expansion activities which included setting up of the National Facility of 234 cm optical telescope, which was the largest of its kind in Asia, the IIA acquired additional 60 acres of land in the year 1976. The IIA has installed telescopes of various sizes and requisite support infrastructure facilities (eg., a small office, roads connecting different observatories) for operating these instruments. It may be clarified that apart from the said infrastructure, there is no other infrastructure and the IIA is not even desirous of expanding the said infrastructure in the foreseeable future.
- (c) Facilities at the campus utilize only a small part of the land (7%) while the rest of the area (93%) is maintained as forest in order to provide conducive environment for astronomical research and to avoid any kind of disturbance to the observatory. The IIA also keeps planting additional trees from time to time to compensate for the area used for infrastructure. The observatory attracts animals and birds of various species which move freely within the campus for its food and water requirements. In any event the observatory does not cause any hindrance to the animals / birds and does not pollute the environment in any way.
- (d) It must be mentioned that astronomical observatories are usually set up in forest lands since light and other pollution in cities render them unsuitable for research activities. The forest area of 100 acres allotted to the IIA is being well maintained for its scientific research with good vegetation. This in turn has helped in retaining the forest area in a better way. Further, to facilitate good observing, the area is being maintained to its original darkness in the night and there is no light and no noise pollution in the campus. The environment is, thus, friendly to the wildlife living there.
- (e) Further, scientific usage of the telescope facilities is during the darkness hours. Often, there are instrument configuration changes and/or emergency maintenance in the telescope facility building during the darkness hours, requiring use of lights. The larger telescope buildings are therefore placed 200 to 300 metres away from each other so that emergency usage of lights do not affect the usage of the others. It is due to considerations like this that an area of 100 acres has been allotted to the IIA, while the actual use is limited to only about 7% of the same. As stated earlier, the remaining 93% of the area is being maintained as forest and original darkness is being maintained in the area.

- On Pages 36-37 of the Order, Hon'ble Court passed the order disposing of our application (alongwith other such applications) by directing the Registry of the Supreme Court to transfer the same to the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) within 45 days, whereafter the MoEFCC will consider the applications.
 - Further, on Page 37, the court refers to Annexure-III to the note prepared by Mr. Salve, Sr. Adv. The said Annexure-III is at Page 70, which mentions the details of applications filed by IIA.
5. I assume that by now the Registry of the Hon'ble Supreme Court would have transferred the said I.A. Nos.3894-3896/2015 in WP (C) No.202/1995 to your goodself.
6. By this communication I request you to kindly decide the same at the earliest. You would be kindly to give us an opportunity of being heard before passing any orders on the application.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. P. Sree Kumar)

Director

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