

# Tungareshwar and Tansa wildlife sanctuaries to get safety zones

**MoEF NOD** ESZ at Tungareshwar is spread across 67.26 sqkm, notified ESZ for Tansa is 490.29 sqkm

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**MUMBAI:** The ministry of environment forests and climate change (MoEFCC) has approved the final notification to create a protective, eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) around Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWLS) and Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary in Palghar and Thane districts of Maharashtra.

Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar tweeted on Friday: "I have approved final ESZ notification in respect of TWLS in Maharashtra." Javadekar added, "This will help scientific conservation of eco-systems and at the same time will give relief to farmers, artisans, rural people, small businesses in the areas between final ESZ and 10 km from the protected areas, which was banned earlier."

The state confirmed the same. "The minister has approved the final ESZ notifications for Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu. However, it will take a few weeks before the notifications are published in the official gazette," said an MoEFCC official.

While the total protected area (PA) of TWLS is 85.70 sq km, the ESZ is spread across 67.26 sq km with its radius ranging from 100 metres to 4 km around the boundary of the sanctuary. For Tansa, the total PA is 304.81 sq km while

ECO-SENSITIVE ZONE AROUND TWLS	
According to petitioner NGO Vanashakti	What the state finalised
<b>282 sq km</b> Proposed ESZ area (draft) in 2016	<b>67.26 sq km</b> Approved ESZ area in 2018
 <p>■ The Balayogi Shree Sadanand Maharaj Ashram inside the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. HT FILE</p>	

notified ESZ is 490.29 sq km ranging between 250m and 9km around the PA including 156 villages. Establishing an ESZ around a wildlife area helps conserve the ecosystem since only agriculture, small scale industries and minor infrastructure work are permitted in an ESZ. "The final notification enhances protection for this zone and the monitoring committee will ensure proper enforcement of allowed, regulated or prohibited activities in the ESZ," said Swapnil Deshbrathar, officer on special duty (wildlife wing), Mantralaya. In December 2018, the Supreme Court had issued a directive that the Union environment ministry should declare ESZs around 21 national park and

wildlife sanctuaries that do not have buffer zones. Maharashtra had proposed an ESZ around Tungareshwar and Tansa forests and had created a draft notification by August 2016. "A presentation was made before the technical committee (ESZ) on July 18 by me. They heard the state's stand and whatever queries the committee had were answered. Following this, the committee accepted the Tungareshwar proposal but directed some changes for Tansa," said Jitendra Ramgankar, deputy conservator of forest, Thane. "A lot of time has passed since the draft was sent to the ministry and after several deliberations; publishing the notification was just a formality."

## 'Razing of ashram to start on Aug 24'

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**MUMBAI:** After missing one court-assigned deadline, the forest department has said the demolition of the Balayogi Shree Sadanand Maharaj Ashram, constructed illegally inside the Tungareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (TWLS), will be carried out by August 24. Devotees of the ashram have planned a protest later this month.

The state chief secretary held a meeting on Wednesday with forest officials and other departments to discuss the issue. "Following the meeting, we have a clear idea of how the demolition will be carried out and the process will be followed over the next 15 days," said a senior official from the forest department. Swapnil Sapata, who works at the ashram, said, "A peaceful protest has been planned from Goregaon to Azad Maidan on August 22 and we expect at least 5,000 devotees to be part of it."

The state has already missed one deadline for the demolition.

On May 7, while hearing an interim application filed by Debi Goenka of Conservation Action Trust in January, the Supreme Court (SC) had directed the Maharashtra government to demolish the ashram before July 22. However, the state cited heavy rain as a reason for failing to comply with the deadline. The SC then allowed an extension of the deadline to August 31, which is the next date of hearing, and directed the state chief secretary to file a compliance report.

Spread across 0.69 hectare (1.7 acres), the Ashram, built in 1977, is linked by an 11-km road through the forest from Tungar phata. "If the forest department actually carries out the order and the illegal ashram is finally demolished, it will be a great boost for protection of the wildlife in this reserved forest," said Goenka.

Sunil Limaye, additional principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife), west region said, "There is no doubt the SC order will be followed and the ashram will be demolished."