

NGO seeks vigilance inquiry over rehab project in Wayanad sanctuary

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Kochi: Ernakulam-based NGO ANEC Trust has filed a petition with the chief minister, state forest department officials and district collector seeking a vigilance inquiry into the voluntary rehabilitation of a group of ineligible people in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

The NGO said that allegations of fraud and corruption to the tune of lakhs of rupees have surfaced in connection with the rehabilitation project, allegedly led by Sulthan Bathery MLA I C Balakrishnan and with support of officials from the Wayanad collectorate.

ANEC requested an urgent investigation into the issue.

Procedures to allocate Rs 1 crore to individuals in the Kottankara settlement, who are deemed ineligible, are nearing completion, the petition said.

"The voluntary rehabilitation in the Kottankara settlement began in 2012. At that time, all families residing in Kottankara were legally compensated and relocated outside the forest. However, during the implementation of the project, families who did not reside there or recently vacated requested inclusion in the project. After discussions, it was decided to provide a total of Rs 10 lakh to such families and Rs 5 lakh those with tribal forest rights documents. This was accepted by them," ANEC stated.

After receiving the project funds, the children of these families approached the forest department claiming eligibility and demanded inclusion in the project. Despite the forest department and the district implementation committee not accepting these claims, these individuals continued to exert various pressures. Despite pressure from the MLA and politicians, multiple committees formed at different times by various collectors rejected their claims, the NGO said.

ANEC also questioned the composition of the current district implementation committee in connection with the project and said that it violated NTCA guidelines.

If their claims are accepted, approximately 50 other claimants from Kottankara and around 200 individuals from 10 other settlements where rehabilitation is complete will come forward. The ongoing smooth rehabilitation process will be disrupted, the petition warned.