

NGT on Drilling in Assam National Park

July 23, 2020

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered for a high-level committee to look into the **recent blowout at an Oil India Ltd (OIL) well in Baghjan, Assam**. It also asked the public sector company to deposit Rs 25 crore for damages caused.

NGT on Assam Gas Leak

The committee will have the mandate to **examine the cause and damage from the blowout that occurred**. The oil-and-gas well, owned by OIL, at Upper Assam's Baghjan village subsequently caught fire, after leaking for about a fortnight. Two OIL employees were killed in the fire that occurred a day after the company flew in well control experts from Alert Disaster Control Inc. Around 11,000 locals were evacuated and continue to live in relief camps. The **Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Maguri-Motapung wetland**, less than a kilometre away from the site, are both under threat due to the accident, according to conservationists and experts.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has now directed the **Environment Ministry, Oil India Limited (OIL)** and two other entities to explain how the proposed drilling of seven oil wells in an eastern Assam national park was permitted. The other two respondents are the **Assam State Pollution Control Board and the Assam State Biodiversity Board**.

The NGT directive was based on a petition by Assam-based conservationists against the environmental clearance to OIL for drilling in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in violation of a Supreme Court order of September 2017. The NGT's Eastern Zone Bench also took note of the petitioners' contention that **OIL did not carry out a biodiversity assessment study for the seven-well exploratory drilling project besides not conducting**

a public hearing as mandated by the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006.

The NGT has also ordered the formation of a committee to probe allegations of **large-scale illegal coal mining by North Eastern Coalfields inside Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve** in Assam's Tinsukia district.