



*Site for proposed luxury hotel, Inlay Pathar
Photo by GKLHRPC*

THE UNFOLDING CRISIS IN KAZIRANGA

A REPORT ON ILLEGAL LAND ACQUISITION FOR LUXURY TOURISM

Greater Kaziranga
Land and Human
Rights Protection
Committee



Overview

This report examines the contentious land acquisition and development plans for a five-star hotel by Juniper Hotels (operating under the Hyatt global brand), and its associated partners in the immediate vicinity of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR), in the state of Assam, northeast India. The Kaziranga National Park is a globally significant UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This report will highlight the inherent conflict wherein large-scale commercial tourism initiatives are ostensibly framed as catalysts for economic development. They are often seen to prioritise corporate interests over fundamental Indigenous rights and environmental sustainability, thereby challenging the normative principles of responsible tourism in ecologically sensitive domains.

This study details the impending displacement of forty-five Adivasi families of the Hatikhuli Bagicha village near the Kohora range of Kaziranga National Park, who are in imminent danger of the loss of their ancestral lands. These are portions of land, which they have cultivated and been taxed for generations at Inlay Pathar ('pathar' meaning agricultural field), situated near their village at Kohora, Kaziranga.

These lands that are on the periphery of the Kaziranga National Park were forcibly acquired by the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) in June 2024. Subsequently, the Assam government announced that a five-star luxury hotel and cultural centre would be built on these lands. The acquisition at Inlay Pathar was forced upon by uninformed perimeter fencing, deployment of a police battalion to deter access to the affected farmers, and the commencement of building of a permanent structure in the demarcated area.

These actions signify a violation of established land rights and procedural justice, which the Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee (GKLHRPC) has been fighting for since 2022. The report highlights the systematically unlawful land acquisition process, the issues of human rights violations and displacement through case studies of the Adivasi families, and the absence of requisite clearances from the Forest Department and the State Board of Wildlife for the construction of a hotel of this magnitude on the immediate periphery of a National Park.



Site for proposed luxury hotel, Inlay Pathar
Photo by GKLHRPC

Table of Contents

Timeline of Events	04
Kaziranga: Fortress Conservation and Incursion of Luxury Tourism	06
Hyatt Enters	08
Displacement and Dispossession of Local Communities	11
Ecological Devastation of a UNESCO World Heritage Site	17
Conclusion: A Paradigm of Exploitation	21

Timeline of events

This timeline indicates the progression of events surrounding the forceful land acquisition at Inlay Pathar in Kohora.

- ➔ **Early 2022** The forceful acquisition of a total of 60 Bigha/16 Hectares of agricultural land at Inlay Pathar, Hatikhuli Bagicha Gaon, Kohora, begins. This land is earmarked for two purposes - construction of a 5-star hotel acquiring 30 Bigha/8 Hectares and an Adivasi cultural heritage museum, also acquiring 30 Bigha/8 Hectares.
- ➔ **11 November 2022** A Land Advisory Committee (LAC), the present Agriculture Minister, and other officials recommend the proposal for the allotment of 30 Bigha/8 Hectares (covered by land parcel no. 37) of Hatikhuli Bagicha Gaon to the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) for the construction of a five-star hotel. This land is where 45 Adivasi families claim ancestral cultivation rights based on their tax records, including 'Miyadi Patta, Ryoti Khatiyon, and Khazana'.
- ➔ **12 December 2022** In response to the land allotment, a petition is filed by the affected families and the Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee (GKLHRPC). The petition demands recognition of their land rights, relocation of the hotel project, and cognisance of environmental impacts on Inlay Pathar as well as the broader impact on KNPTR and animal movement.
- ➔ **June 2024** The affected families receive notices to appear before the Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) (Civil), Golaghat district. They decline an informal proposal for petty compensation from the Additional District Commissioner, Golaghat, and SDO (Civil), Bokakhat, citing the lack of formal government acknowledgment of their legal rights.
- ➔ **June 2024** The Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) Limited forcefully acquires the land at Inlay Pathar. A fence is erected to exclude farmers, and a police battalion is deployed. Construction of a permanent structure within the fenced area commences.
- ➔ **Ongoing since June 2024** Repeated physical clashes occur as farmers attempt to cultivate their lands, resulting in lathi charges and trumped up cases against them by the deployed police battalion.

Timeline of events

- ➡ **August 2024** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) takes suo moto cognisance of the matter based on media reports and registers the case with its Eastern Bench.
- ➡ **7 August 2024** Pro-hotel supporters mobilise a mob of over 150 people to physically attack members of Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee (GKLHRPC), Manohar Pegu and Ritupan Pegu, at the house of Manoj and Minali Gowala - two affected family members. During the attack, Manoj and Minali Gowala's young daughter is violently assaulted and hospitalised. Police from Kohora and Bokakhat stations collude with the mob, refusing to intervene for 4 hours despite the close proximity of a police outpost. The police subsequently wrongfully detains victims, including Geeta Gowala (from Kohora Hospital), and files false charges against Convenor of GKLHRPC, Pranab Doley, as well as Rajib Pegu, Manohar Pegu and Ritupan Pegu, members of the GKLHRPC.
- ➡ **April 2025** Nine of the affected families again receive notices from the Circle Officer (Revenue), Bokakhat, for fresh demarcation of the land for the purpose of the hotel. The district administration, however, does not appear on the designated date to conduct the demarcation exercise.



Kohora, Kaziranga
Photo by GKLHRPC

Kaziranga:

Fortress Conservation and Incursion of Luxury Tourism

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) in Assam, India is globally celebrated for its thriving population of the endangered one-horned rhinoceros and exceptional biodiversity.

It stands as a critical conservation stronghold and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, Kaziranga's conservation model, often characterised as "fortress conservation,"[1] has a long and contentious history with deep colonial roots.

This approach which prioritises the strict separation of wildlife from human populations, was implemented by dispossessing Indigenous populations and has historically been underpinned by significant militarisation. This has made Kaziranga one of the most heavily guarded national parks in the country.

This has, for decades, led to the continued displacement and marginalisation of Indigenous communities, who have coexisted with the region's wildlife since long before the park's declaration.

The park's origin traces back to 1904, when the concern for dwindling rhinoceros populations spurred the establishment of the Kaziranga Proposed Reserve Forest in 1905.

Over the decades, its status evolved from a Reserve Forest (1908) and Game Sanctuary (1916) to a Wildlife Sanctuary (1950), culminating in its formal declaration as a National Park in 1974 and subsequently a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. Further expansions and its designation as a Tiger Reserve in 2007 cemented its global significance but also intensified existing pressures.

Long before these formal declarations, the Kaziranga landscape was home to diverse Indigenous and local communities, including Adivasi, Karbi, and Mising peoples. These groups settled through historical migrations or as descendants of colonial-era tea plantation labourers. They developed land-use patterns encompassing subsistence farming, fishing, livestock grazing, and resource gathering from common lands[2].

[1] 'Fortress Conservation' Is Driving Us From Our Homes <https://newint.org/features/2021/11/19/fortress-conservation-driving-us-our-homes>

[2] Wild life conservation and tribal livelihood in the Brahmaputra flood plain. The case of the Mising tribe in the fringe villages of the Kaziranga National Park (Assam, North-East India). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278761782_Wild_life_conservation_and_tribal_livelihood_in_the_Brahmaputra_flood_plain_The_case_of_the_Mising_tribe_in_the_fringe_villages_of_the_Kaziranga_National_Park_Assam_North-East_India

This deep multi-generational reliance on the land for sustenance and cultural identity frequently placed them in direct conflict with the park's expanding boundaries[3]. Increased militarisation, surveillance, and luxury tourism have heightened tensions in Kaziranga[4]. As India's third most visited wildlife destination that attracts over 443,636 visitors annually[5] and significant revenue, Kaziranga's tourism boom has led to large hotels and resorts. Borgos[6], Iora, and Royal de Casa, Taj Hotels and Mahindra Resorts, are some that have acquired vast land plots.

With the influx of big hotels, there has been rapid transformation of a small laid back tourist destination. Small scale hotels and home-stays were previously operated by locals up till just a decade ago. Indiscriminate diversion of agricultural lands and cutting of hills and forests, filling up of wetlands for hotels and resorts have resulted in both environmental and legal concerns and invited paradigmatic change in the region. The rising discontentment on ground and concerns of the locals, such as on issues of water-logging, flooding, noise pollution, and ground water depletion.

The expansion of the commercial tourism agenda, as exemplified by the latest land acquisition announced by Hyatt-branded establishment, Juniper Hotels Limited[7] and its partners, is exerting immense pressure on both the local human population and the strained ecosystem of Kaziranga. This complicates the relationship between conservation, development, and human rights in this globally recognised biodiversity hotspot. These issues have increased recently and remain underreported in the public domain.

The ongoing situation in Kaziranga vividly illustrates the concept of a "green grab"[8] – a growing global trend involving the appropriation of land and resources for environmental and commercial purposes. Often, this results in the displacement and marginalisation of local communities to facilitate conservation efforts or 'green economy' projects. This effectively prioritises development agenda goals over human rights and traditional livelihoods.

[3] A Microsite Analysis of Resource Use Around Kaziranga National Park, India.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249831238_A_Microsite_Analysis_of_Resource_Use_Around_Kaziranga_National_Park_India

[4] Kaziranga is becoming a laboratory for militarised forest conservation in India: Pranab Doley

<https://maktoobmedia.com/india/kaziranga-is-becoming-a-laboratory-for-militarised-forest-conservation-in-india-pranab-doley/>

[5] Kaziranga National Park is Now India's Third-Most Visited Wildlife Destination. <https://www.kaziranga-national-park.com/blog/most-visited-destinations/>

[6] Borgos, Kaziranga Review. <https://www.cardexpert.in/borgos-kaziranga-review/>

[7] Star Hotels by Taj Group and Hyatt In Kaziranga National Park To Boost Tourism In Assam.

<https://www.etvbharat.com/en/bharat/star-hotels-by-taj-group-and-hyatt-in-kaziranga-national-park-to-boost-tourism-in-assam-enn24071104677>

[8] Fairhead, James & Leach, Melissa & Scoones, Ian. (2012). Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature?. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 39. 237-261. 10.1080/03066150.2012.671770.

Hyatt Enters



Wildlife corridors of Kaziranga



Site proposed for the luxury hotel at Inlay Pathar, near Kohora

In July 2024, Juniper Hotels, co-owned by Saraf Hotels and Two Seas Holdings (an affiliate of Hyatt Hotels Corporation), announced its plans to develop a five-star hotel/resort in Kaziranga, Assam. This development follows Juniper Hotels' acquisition of 100% stake in Jenipro Hotels Private Limited, which had secured land on lease from the Assam Tourism Development Corporation under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. The specific terms of this lease agreement, including its duration and clauses related to environmental safeguards or community benefits, remain largely undisclosed, raising questions about the transparency of the public-private partnership.

The proposed hotel, with an estimated investment of INR 100 crore, is slated to feature 120 rooms and a swimming pool across 30 Bigha/8 Hectares at **Inlay Pathar** ('pathar' meaning agricultural field). It is situated near the central range of Kaziranga National Park known as Kohora. While the breakdown of this investment is not yet public, it reflects a significant injection of corporate capital into a region already grappling in a delicate balance. This ambition aligns with Hyatt's broader strategic goal to double its Indian hotel portfolio to 100 within five years. That indicates its long-term commercial interest in expanding its presence in ecologically rich, yet often vulnerable, areas.

The Assam government's rationale for pursuing a PPP model for the Hyatt hotel in Kaziranga, is based on the following key objectives -

Attracting investment[9]: The government aims to attract private sector investment to develop tourism infrastructure in Kaziranga, which it may not be able to finance by itself. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that Kaziranga would soon have a five-star resort to attract tourists from across the world.

Boosting tourism[10]: The government believes that these luxury hotels will attract high-end tourists to enhance Kaziranga's status as an international destination. They anticipate increased footfall due to improved infrastructure and the presence of globally recognised brands.

Job creation[11]: The construction and operation of the Hyatt hotel are expected to generate employment opportunities for the local community. The Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA) projects over 200 direct jobs from such developments.

Hyatt Hotels & partners' stated CSR & Sustainability Policies

Jenipro Hotels Private Limited is the entity that first secured the land lease from Assam Tourism Development Corporation Limited, and Juniper Hotels later acquired a 100% stake in it. As such, Jenipro's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies would effectively be subsumed under Juniper Hotels' broader framework.

Hyatt Hotels Corporation, through its 'World of Care'[12] CSR platform, publicly espouses a commitment to "prioritise the vitality of our global communities by respecting local natural resources and cultural heritage, helping to protect biodiversity and animal welfare, addressing water risks, minimising pollution, and advancing climate resilience."

While these policies of Hyatt are global, the implementation and direct responsibility often lie with its individual hotels or franchisees. Its Indian partner-affiliate, Juniper Hotels Limited (JHL), highlights an "unwavering commitment to sustainability"[13] in initiatives spanning renewable energy adoption, advanced waste management, and significant water conservation efforts across its properties.

[9] Proposed luxury hotels in and around Kaziranga threaten wildlife conservation, livelihood
<https://india.mongabay.com/2024/07/proposed-luxury-hotels-in-and-around-kaziranga-threaten-wildlife-conservation-livelihood/>

[10][11] Luxury Properties By Taj Group And Hyatt In Kaziranga National Park To Boost Tourism In Assam
<https://travelworldonline.in/luxury-properties-by-taj-group-and-hyatt-in-kaziranga-national-park-to-boost-tourism-in-assam/>

[12] Hyatt Shares Environmental and Social Impact Reporting, Eclipses Critical DE&I Goals and Sustains Momentum with Key 2023 Initiatives
<https://investors.hyatt.com/news/investor-news/news-details/2023/Hyatt-Shares-Environmental-and-Social-Impact-Reporting-Eclipses-Critical-DEI-Goals-and-Sustains-Momentum-with-Key-2023-Initiatives-08-02-2023/default.aspx>

[13] Juniper Hotels: Environmental, Social And Governance Initiatives
<https://juniperhotels.com/esg/#:~:text=With%20a%20steadfast%20commitment%20to,Juniper%20Hotels%20sets%20a%20inspiring>

Responses from ATDC towards Right to Information Act (2005) petition filed by GKLHRC:

- Details of the Memorandum of Understanding: **Not available**
- Duration of lease agreement between Jenipro Hotels, Juniper Hotels and the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC): **Not available**
- Breakdown of the 100-crore investment: **Not available**
- Land allocation process: **Direct, no tender invited**
- Detailed Project Report (DPR) submitted: **NO**
- Social Impact Assessment conducted: **NO**

It raises the critical issue - with the lack of a tourism plan and proper Social Impact Assessment, Hyatt's stated goals of "prioritising communities" and Juniper Hotels Limited's claims of "rigorous risk management practices" as well as "environmental stewardship" do not fit with what has been taking place on ground. This case exposes a gap between the corporate rhetoric and its practical implementation, particularly when profits and expansion are at stake in ecologically and socially sensitive regions.

Despite extensive news coverage and protests regarding the land acquisition and community displacement, neither Hyatt Hotels Corporation nor Juniper Hotels Limited has issued specific public statements directly addressing the controversy surrounding the alleged forced acquisition of land.

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre specifically invited Hyatt Hotels to comment^[14] on the incident involving attacks on human rights defenders and displaced farmers in August 2024 (detailed in the following sections). However, they did not provide a comment.

This suggests a profound lack of genuine community engagement by the hotel developers and the acquiring authorities. Instead of a participatory process, the acquisition has been characterised by state-led forceful displacement with the affected communities resorting to protests and legal challenges to assert their rights. The silence from Hyatt and Juniper Hotels on the specific allegations of forced acquisition and human rights concerns - in contrast to their CSR rhetoric - highlights a significant disconnect between stated values and on-ground practices in this ecologically sensitive and socially complex hotel project.

[14] Proposed luxury hotels in and around Kaziranga threaten wildlife conservation, livelihood Manohar Pegu - Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Committee (GKLHRC)
<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/manohar-pegu-greater-kaziranga-land-and-human-rights-committee-gklhrc/>

Displacement

and Dispossession of Local Communities

The land acquisition process for the proposed Hyatt-branded hotel has been fraught with controversy, raising significant concerns about the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous communities. The 60 Bigha/16 Hectares total parcel of land at Inlay Pathar, now allocated for the hotel, was cultivated by 45 Adivasi families living in the vicinity[15].

- **Miyadi Patta:** In the existing system, the government allots land to Indigenous landless people who can obtain Miyadi Patta after 3 years.
- **Ryoti Khatiyani:** A contractual land agreement
- **Khazana receipts:** Records of revenue payments
- **'Khas':** Land that is reserved by the government for distribution to eligible landless groups like tenant families and landless families.

Local communities, including Adivasi, Karbi and Mising communities, have historically resided in and around Kaziranga, coexisting with wildlife and depending on the land for their sustenance[16].

Cultivation & reliance on land

The Adivasi families of Hatikhuli Bagicha Gaon, who are facing displacement due to the proposed hotel, possess deep-rooted cultural practices and land-use patterns intrinsically linked to the land. The affected Adivasi families primarily engage in subsistence farming for their livelihood, at times complemented by some cash crops, on the agricultural land at Inlay Pathar. Their cultivation practices typically involve paddy cultivation which is risk-prone due to floods in the monsoon season.

Disruption of traditional reliance

The displacement of the families, therefore, represents not merely the loss of a plot of land but the severance of profound historical, cultural, and socio-economic ties. Their Miyadi Patta, as well as Ryoti Khatiyani and Khazana records, as represented to the government in multiple petitions, are tangible evidence of generations of occupation and land management. This challenges the government's assertion of the land being 'Khas' or unowned.

[15] Adivasi farmers being evicted from Kaziranga, among Asia's most militarised protected areas, for big hotels
<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/ativasi-farmers-being-evicted-from-kaziranga-among-asias-most-militarised-protected-areas-for-big-hotels>

[16] Wild life conservation and tribal livelihood in the Brahmaputra flood plain. The case of the Mising tribe in the fringe villages of the Kaziranga National Park (Assam, North-East India).
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381740314_Wild_life_conservation_and_tribal_livelihood_in_the_Brahmaputra_flood_plain_The_case_of_the_Mising_tribe_in_the_fringe_villages_of_the_Kaziranga_National_Park_Assam_North-East_India

Case Study:

Lokhu and Bitlang Gowala

In June 2024, the Golaghat district administration used bulldozers and armed police to clear the land and hand it over to the Assam Tourism Development Corporation, displacing the families and even razing the dwelling of one farmer, Lokhu Gowala.

The dispossession of Lokhu Gowala (56) and his wife, Bitlang Gowala (53), illustrates the human cost of the land acquisition for the proposed hotel project. The family had occupied and cultivated a piece of land measuring approximately 2 Bighas/0.5 Hectare at Inlay Pathar. They had inherited and utilised the site across generations, which testifies to their long-standing historical ties to the area. Lokhu Gowala, primarily employed as a labourer in a nearby tea plantation, relied on this specific parcel of land to supplement his meagre income. He engaged in subsistence farming on the land to support his family's daily needs and reduce their vulnerability to external economic risks.



Although his house was not situated directly within the perimeter initially demarcated by the Assam Tourism Development Corporation, Lokhu Gowala received a notification in May 2024 from the revenue department for demolition of his house. Subsequently, without due process and in a forceful manner, authorities proceeded to demolish his dwelling. When Lokhu Gowala, his family, and other villagers attempted to resist this dispossession, they faced harassment and threats from the deployed authorities.

This incident underscores the coercive methods employed in the land acquisition process. It is indicative of a direct violation of the right to adequate housing and the right to peaceful assembly. As a consequence, Lokhu Gowala and his family have been compelled to reside in a small dwelling within the tea plantation area - a clear testament to the heightened vulnerability inflicted upon them.



Case Study:

Minali Gowala and Geeta Gowala

The experiences of Minali Gowala and Geeta Gowala, sisters-in-law of the same Adivasi family, underscore the deep-seated reliance of local communities on their ancestral lands and their courageous resistance to forced displacement. Minali Gowala, who also serves as a Panchayat Ward representative, and Geeta Gowala, a daily wage worker at a nearby hotel in Kohora, both depend significantly on their 4 Bigha/1.1 Hectares of land. This parcel, cultivated for generations, essentially supports their families' subsistence, supplementing the wage labor of their husbands in the nearby TATA tea plantation.

Upon learning of the government's intention to hand over their agricultural land for the five-star hotel, Minali and Geeta have been on the forefront of the ground resistance. They have immediately organised with the Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee (GKLRHPC). They proactively submitted memorandums to the local administration to seek justice for their 'Ryoti' land and that of others, thereby asserting their legal rights over the contested territory.

Both women have emerged as central figures, regularly confronting the brute physical force of the police and authorities. Their prominent roles in the struggle have made them prime targets.

On 7 August 2024, Minali Gowala's house was attacked by a mob of over 150 pro-hotel supporters[17]. During this violent assault, Minali's young daughter suffered severe injuries and was hospitalised while Geeta Gowala was forcefully detained by police directly from the hospital where the injured girl was receiving treatment. This incident, marked by police collusion and inaction, highlights the extreme measures employed to suppress dissent and dismantle community resistance against the project. They continue to organise and mobilise others in keeping up the fight against the takeover of their lands.



Geeta Gowala & Minali Gowala
Photo by GKLRHPC

[17] Two Activists Opposed to Kaziranga Hotel Project Attacked by Mob and Detained by Police.

<https://m.thewire.in/article/rights/two-activists-opposed-to-kaziranga-hotel-project-attacked-by-mob-and-detained-by-police>

The forceful acquisition of agricultural land at Inlay Pathar violates:

- The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013
- The Assam (Temporary Settled Areas) Tenancy Act, 1971
- The Assam Agricultural Land (Regulation of Reclassification and Transfer for Non-Agricultural Purpose) Act, 2015

The situation exemplifies a broader trend in India where land acquisition for “public purpose”, often encompassing tourism projects, has been criticised for its colonial origins and its failure to adequately protect the rights of project-affected communities.

Despite the families possessing historical land records like Miyadi Patta and Khazana records, their claims were disregarded, leading to their involuntary removal from their homes and land.



Human Rights Violations and Social Justice Framework

The land acquisition for the Hyatt-branded hotel in Inlay Pathar has brought to the forefront a series of grave human rights violations. This exemplifies a pattern where corporate and state interest can override fundamental human rights and legal due process.

Violations of international human rights law:

The actions undertaken by the Golaghat district administration in June 2024, involving bulldozers and armed police to clear land cultivated by 45 Adivasi families at Inlay Pathar, constitute clear instances of forced eviction.

Forced evictions are recognised under international human rights law[18] as gross violations of fundamental rights, including the human rights to adequate housing, food, water, and security of the person (UN-OHCHR).

Violation of global agreements ratified by the Indian government:

- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 2022
- Agreements on UNESCO - IUCN Natural World Heritage Site
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

[18] OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). Forced evictions <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/forced-evictions>

State apparatus used for forceful acquisition

The documented involvement of the police and state apparatus in the land acquisition process reveals a significant power imbalance and raises serious concerns about state complicity in human rights violations. A police battalion was deployed to enforce the land takeover, and physical clashes ensued repeatedly when farmers attempted to access their lands, resulting in lathi charge and trumped-up cases against the people.

More critically, on 7 August 2024, when human rights defenders and affected families were attacked by a mob of pro-hotel supporters[19], the Kohora and Bokakhat Police colluded with the mob by refusing to intervene for several hours and subsequently wrongfully detained the victims. This inaction and subsequent targeting of activists, instead of providing protection, suggests that state-sanctioned force is being deployed not to uphold justice, but to facilitate the dispossession of marginalised communities for commercial interests[20].

GKLHRPC pursues legal action

Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee, led by political activist Pranab Doley, has been at the forefront of the affected peoples' resistance. They have been demanding the recognition of people's land rights, calling for the cancellation of the hotel project, and highlighting the environmental and social impact.

They have been consistently filing petitions and memorandums with authorities, and demonstrating a commitment to democratic means of redressal. The mob attack[21] on Pranab Doley and members of the Committee as well as affected families, underscores the risks faced by human rights defenders challenging powerful interests[22].

Convenor of the GKLHRPC, Pranab Doley, describes the situation as a "clear land grab", which highlights how the pursuit of tourism development is dispossessing long-term residents. The lack of due process, including proper impact assessments and compensation, further exacerbates the vulnerability of these marginalised communities, as their legal battle continues.

[19] Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. Manohar Pegu - Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Committee (GKLHRPC). <https://www.business-humanrights.org/it/latest-news/manohar-pegu-greater-kaziranga-land-and-human-rights-committee-gklhrc/>

[20] Amnesty International. (2007, May). India: Police shootings and forced evictions target adivasi indigenous communities in Madhya Pradesh. <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/asa200102007en.pdf>

Amnesty International. (2008, August). India: Indigenous communities at risk of forced eviction in Orissa.

<https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/asa200172008en.pdf>

[21] Two Activists Opposed to Kaziranga Hotel Project Attacked by Mob and Detained by Police.

<https://m.thewire.in/article/rights/two-activists-opposed-to-kaziranga-hotel-project-attacked-by-mob-and-detained-by-police>

[22] HRDA (Human Rights Defenders Alert - India). (2024, August). Controversy Erupts Over Hyatt Hotel Project in Kaziranga: Human Rights Defenders Attacked and Detained. <https://hrdaindia.org/controversy-erupts-over-hyatt-hotel-project-in-kaziranga-human-rights-defenders-attacked-and-detained>



Lokhu Gowala amidst the rubble
Photo by GKLHRPC



Geeta & Minali confront the police at Inlay Pathar
Photo by GKLHRPC



Affected families with Pranab Doley
Photo by GKLHRPC

Present status of legal cases:

A writ petition civil suit has been filed by fourteen families in the Guwahati High Court to challenge the legality of the land acquisition. The last significant order from the court in this ongoing civil litigation has been to summon the land authorities to clarify the matter. This indicates that the court is seeking further information and justification from the government regarding the acquisition process. It reflects a continuing judicial oversight of the executive actions.

Ecological Devastation

of a UNESCO World Heritage Site

- Environmental Impact Assessment conducted: NO
- Cognisance of criteria of No-Development Zone of the nearby oil refinery 'Numaligarh Refinery Limited': NO
- Cognisance of 10 km default Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) in absence of notified ESZ: NO[23]
- Clearance obtained from State Forest Department: NO
- Clearance obtained from State Board of Wildlife, Assam: NO
- Clearance obtained from National Board of Wildlife: NO
- Clearance obtained from Ministry of Environment Forest & Climate Change: NO

The proposed Hyatt hotel in Kaziranga directly challenges several international legal and conservation frameworks. This includes those set by the UNESCO for World Heritage Sites, guidelines from the IUCN and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). UNESCO's Operational Guidelines[24] require notification for new constructions that may affect a site's "Outstanding Universal Value", a principle seemingly disregarded by the hotel project's lack of proper assessments and consultations.

IUCN guidelines[25] advocate for tourism that actively benefits local communities and preserves natural

heritage, which stands in stark contrast to the forced displacement of the families.

The UNDRIP prohibits forced removal of Indigenous communities from their lands, affirms rights to their traditional lands and resources, and mandates legal recognition of Indigenous land tenure systems and land holding. It also requires States to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous communities before approving any projects or measures affecting them or their lands and guarantees restitution or compensation for lands taken without their consent.

[23] Environmental Clearances in Eco Sensitive Zones & Protected Areas
<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2003994>

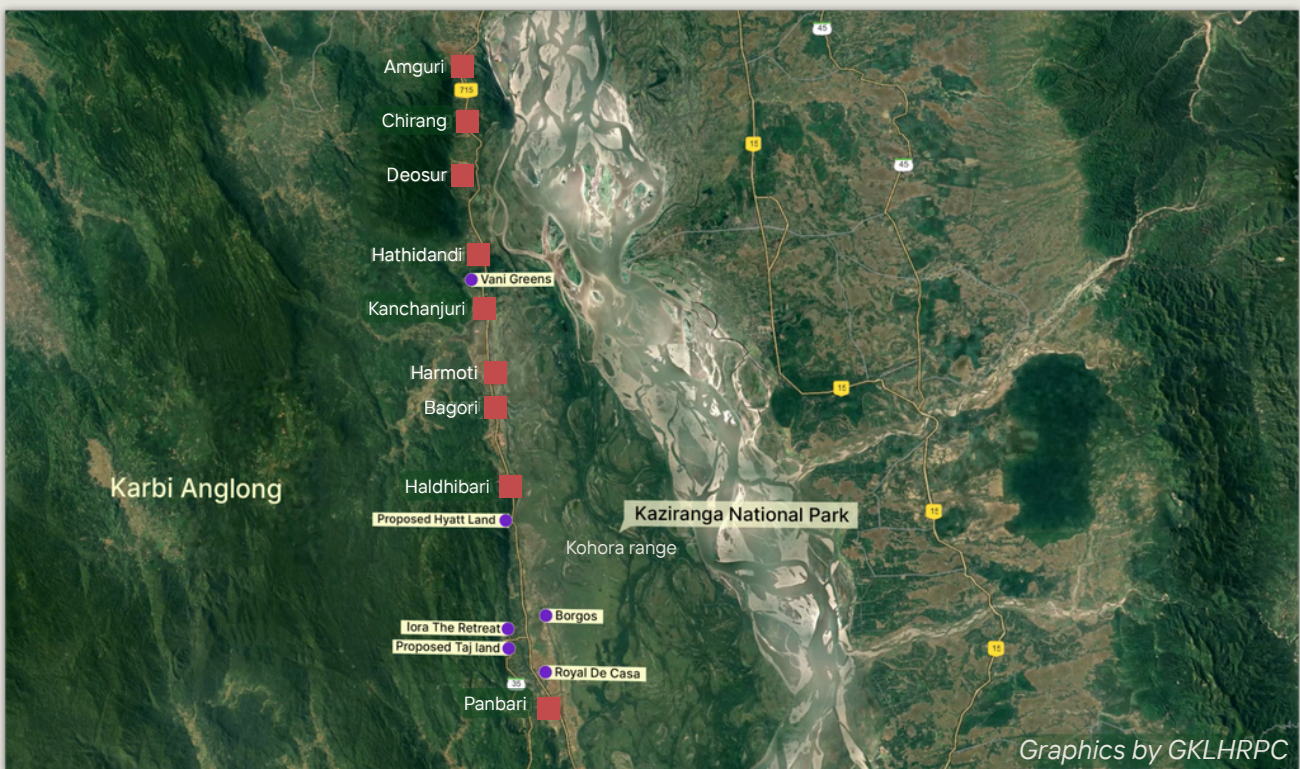
[24] Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

[25] Sustainable tourism in protected areas: guidelines for planning and management.
<https://iucn.org/resources/publication/sustainable-tourism-protected-areas-guidelines-planning-and-management>

Further complicating matters, the Supreme Court's stringent orders (April 2019), explicitly ban mining and new construction[26] within Kaziranga's vital animal corridors and catchment areas. Recent reports from the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) indicate ongoing violations of these orders[27], highlighting a systemic failure in upholding judicial directives and environmental laws.

This situation exposes the hypocrisy of conservation in Kaziranga. Communities from areas like Hatikhuli, Borbil, Sildubi and others[28] have previously been evicted ostensibly for conservation measures. The evictions paradoxically pave the way for lucrative tourism developments and unchecked illegal activities that benefit vested interests rather than truly serve the park's ecological integrity or the local population.

Concrete Barriers



- Wildlife corridors of Kaziranga
- Large scale resorts in the vicinity of Kaziranga

[26] Kaziranga mining scandal: Congress seeks CBI probe, accuses CM and KAAC Chief of collusion and environmental betrayal. <https://www.syllad.com/kaziranga-mining-scandal-congress-seeks-cbi-probe-accuses-cm-and-kaac-chief-of-collusion-and-environmental-betrayal/>

[27] CEC Flags Illegal Mining in Assam's Kaziranga, Urges Supreme Court to Intervene.

<https://guwahatiplus.com/assam/cec-flags-illegal-mining-in-assams-kaziranga-urges-supreme-court-to-intervene>

[28] Eviction notice served on settlements in animal corridors of Kaziranga National Park in Assam; residents protest. <https://www.landconflictwatch.org/conflicts/eviction-notice-served-on-settlements-in-animal-corridors-of-kaziranga-national-park-in-assam-residents-protest>

A particular concern is the location of the proposed hotel at Inlay Pathar, which is identified as a traditional haven and migratory route for elephants, tigers, deer, rhinos and other animals during the flood season and is a critical wildlife corridor. The expansion of the hospitality industry into sensitive areas like Inlay Pathar can disrupt these crucial corridors, and impede the natural movement of animals, particularly during seasonal migrations.

The construction of a large-scale hotel, even on the periphery of Kaziranga National Park, inherently contributes to habitat fragmentation[29]. This process involves the division of large, continuous natural habitats into smaller, isolated patches, primarily due to human activities like urbanisation and infrastructure development.

This isolation can also lead to reduced genetic diversity within animal populations, which makes them more vulnerable to diseases and less adaptable to environmental changes[30]. The cumulative effect of these impacts undermines the long-term viability of the park's biodiversity and challenges its role as a critical conservation stronghold.

Such fragmentation can have devastating consequences for biodiversity. It will likely impact the long-term viability of species, worsen or increase human-wildlife conflict for existing communities.



Broader ecological impact

The development of large-scale tourism infrastructure, such as the proposed 120-room Hyatt hotel with a swimming pool at Inlay Pathar, introduces significant broader environmental challenges that threaten long-term ecological integrity.

Pollution and waste management:

A luxury hotel of this scale will inevitably lead to an increased generation of solid waste, including non-biodegradable materials.

Impact on local water resources:

Luxury hotels are known for their high consumption of water, which is driven by amenities like swimming pools, extensive laundry services, and guest demands.

Increased vehicular traffic:

This pervasive disturbance can disrupt natural movement patterns and reduce overall biodiversity in the region surrounding the park.

[29] Habitat fragmentation - Practical considerations <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/practical-considerations-and-challenges-to-greenspace/habitat-fragmentation-practical-considerations/>

[30] Wildlife Habitat Fragmentation <http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Wildlife-Habitat-Fragmentation.pdf>

NGT dismissal

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) of India had initially taken **suo moto** cognisance of concerns surrounding proposed tourism developments near Kaziranga, prompted by journalistic reports highlighting environmental and social issues.

However, the NGT's Eastern Bench later dismissed a petition[31] related to the construction of two five-star hotels, including the one linked to Hyatt, based on an affidavit from the Assam government.

This decision has been met with dismay by local stakeholders and environmental organisations that argue that the Tribunal failed to conduct a thorough verification of facts and did not engage with affected communities.

An affidavit filed by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority before the National Green Tribunal on 14 November 2024 explicitly stated that Kaziranga National Park lacks a mandated tourism plan, which is a prerequisite under India's wildlife laws, particularly for tiger reserves.

The development of tourism infrastructure within or adjacent to protected areas necessitates rigorous environmental compliance and comprehensive Environment Impact Assessment, as mandated by the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

The observed disregard for these protocols in this case raises serious questions about the commitment to sustainable development and adherence to conservation laws.

ESZ notification withdrawn

The Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) mandates the establishment of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries to act as "shock absorbers" and regulate activities in their vicinity. However, as of April 2025, the Assam government has controversially withdrawn a proposal for an integrated Eco Sensitive Zone covering Kaziranga National Park, citing concerns about potential socio-economic hardships for nearly 5 lakh residents and unresolved community rights.

Instead, the state government now intends to submit separate Eco Sensitive Zone proposals[32] for the individual protected areas and additions that constitute the total area of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. This decision has been widely criticised by activists and conservationists, who fear it reflects a prioritisation of development and real estate interests over critical environmental protection and could lead to a severe ecological crisis.

Conclusion:

A Paradigm of Exploitation

The case of the proposed Hyatt hotel at Inlay Pathar, Kaziranga serves as a poignant illustration of how unchecked luxury tourism (far from being a benign economic catalyst) can become a significant driver of displacement and social injustice. While the Assam government articulates a rationale centred on job creation and boosting tourism, the realities on the ground starkly contradict these stated objectives and reveal a deeper problematic narrative.

As shown in this report, the forceful acquisition of land cultivated by 45 Adivasi families at Inlay Pathar, marked by bulldozer operations and police presence, have directly resulted in the threat of dispossession of their ancestral livelihoods. This process, executed without transparent public hearings as mandated by legislation, such as the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, underscores a profound disregard for the fundamental rights of indigenous communities.

The reported attacks on human rights defenders supporting the marginalised groups highlight the extremely coercive mechanisms employed while securing land for such high-end projects.

This pattern of displacement, driven by the expansion of tourism infrastructure, mirrors and exacerbates the historical dispossession that communities around Kaziranga have faced. The park's "fortress conservation" model exposes the critical dissonance between the stated sustainability commitments of global hospitality brands like Hyatt and the tangible social and environmental impacts of their developments.

In its essence, the Kaziranga luxury hotel project encapsulates a broader conflict of corporate expansion, under the guise of economic development. It undermines local livelihoods, compromises environmental safeguards, and challenges the very principles of human rights and the notion of responsible tourism.

[31] NGT does a U-turn on luxury hotels in Kaziranga <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/ngt-does-a-u-turn-on-luxury-hotels-in-kaziranga>

[32] Govt takes U-turn on Kaziranga eco-sensitive zone proposal, draws flak from conservationists <https://assamtribune.com/assam/govt-takes-u-turn-on-kaziranga-eco-sensitive-zone-proposal-draws-flak-from-conservationists-1575150>

Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee



This briefing was produced by the Greater Kaziranga Land and Human Rights Protection Committee (GKLHRPC) with financial and technical assistance from the Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE).

This report has been reviewed, edited and proofread by the GKLHRPC Convenor, Pranab Doley and the AIPNEE Convenor, Prabindra Shakya.

Citation: Sept 2025. “The Unfolding Crisis in Kaziranga: A Report on Illegal Land Acquisition for Luxury Tourism”. Available at: www.aipnee.org

Published on: 29 September 2025