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Title: Regarding damage caused to forest reserves due to deforestation and construction of National Highways in the country.

SHRI TATHAGATA SATPATHY (DHENKANAL): Madam, I thank you for giving me this opportunity. In the overdrive mode that this Government is moving to facilitate the creation of infrastructure and industrial growth, it is completely forgetting that the future belongs not to us but to our descendants, our heirs. In that process, I would like to bring to your notice the irrevocable damage caused to national forest reserves due to deforestation and construction of national highways.

Deforestation has been a big menace in India for the past few decades. But, efforts have been made to protect and maintain national wildlife reserves. Under the garb of development, the present Government is destroying our natural heritage and getting away with it. Odisha's pride, Simlipal has seen construction in and around its periphery as well as increasing habitation even within its core area. Similarly, in the recent past, major source of Pench and Kanha Forest Reserves – Madam, it is from your State – is being raised to the ground by none other than the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) to make way for the expansion of National Highways 6 and 7. The Highway cuts through two of the most beautiful Tiger Sanctuaries in India, namely, Kanha and Pench. This project will end up destroying a vital animal corridor between the two reserve forests. These reserves are for tigers, which are precious animals at the top of the food chain. It has become an endangered species. Mere increase in statistical data showing growth in its population does not correspond to ground realities. The deforestation also leads to drying up of ground water and acceleration of soil erosion. We are already facing water crisis in Central India and moves like these will only worsen the situation. It is time that the Government cannot and must not continue executing such projects. Immediate withdrawal of sanctioned funds will alone save not only the forests but the whole country.

HON. SPEAKER: Shri Bhairon Prasad Mishra, Shri Rabindra Kumar Jena, Shri Sudheer Gupta and Shri Rodmal Nagar are permitted to associate with the issue raised by Shri Tathagata Satpathy.