

Tiger conservation pace worries PM

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March 20: The failure of accelerating the relocation of 80,000 families currently living in tiger reserves has been a source of consternation for Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, especially since 11 tigers were killed in the first two months of 2010 while 66 tigers were killed in 2009.

The Prime Minister expressed his concern during a meeting of the National Board for Wildlife on Thursday, sources present at the meeting pointed out.

"Out of 80,000 families to be relocated from tiger reserves, only 3,000 have been relocated so far. Another 77,000 families need to be relocated over the next seven years, for which a total financial package of Rs 8,000 crores would be required," Union minister of environment Jairam Ramesh said.

"For the present we have Rs 2,000-Rs 2,500 crores but we are confident the Prime Minister will help us bridge the gap," said Mr Ramesh who emphasised that "village relocation must take place not just from tiger reserves but from all protected areas."

The minister explained that so far the government had no idea about the number of people living in pro-



Manmohan Singh

ected areas but would be happy to support any "democratic and voluntary relocation for which a compensation of Rs 10 lakhs would be provided to each family."

He cited the example of 1,000 families who wanted to move out from a protected area in the state of Karnataka because of Maoist oppression. The Prime Minister is also known to have expressed dissatisfaction at the at the undue delay by the states to declare buffer zones around wildlife sanctuaries.

Mr Ramesh pointed out that "the Prime Minister has agreed to lend weight of his office for monitoring state governments. He will also take up the matter with the chief ministers of various states, especially with the Uttarakhand government, as unnatural mortality of tigers have been reported from Corbett National Park," he said.

The environment minister believed states were deliberately adopting delaying tactics in notifying buffer zones. "This delay in notification is not accidental but deliberate since once the area is notified, the state government knows they won't be able to approve the projects," he said.

Mr Ramesh cited the example of the Tadoba tiger reserve in Maharashtra where as many as 40 coal and power projects have been approved since its buffer zone is yet to be notified with only one project, the Adani Power Project, having been rejected.

Eighteen state governments had notified state level committees to initiate the notification process. "It is a great cause of worry that 60 tigers died last year against the average mortality of 30 reported in the past. These are not accidents. It is a conspiracy hatched by mining and estate mafia supported by politicians who will be benefited by eliminating tigers. They want the land for mining and construction purpose," Mr Ramesh said.

As official estimates, there are about 1,400 big cats across the 37 tiger reserves in the country, a sharp decline from 10,000 reported a decade ago. Eighteen tiger reserves are in a precarious situation.