

Ministers lock horns over NH

Kamal Nath writes to Manmohan, seeks PM's intervention

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NEW DELHI: Which is more important – saving wildlife or laying roads in forest areas? The question is haunting the Centre even as two Union ministers are engaged in a tussle over the issue.

While Road Transport and Highways Minister Kamal Nath wants his colleague Environment and Forest Minister Jairam Ramesh to expedite the process of giving forest clearance for highway projects, which pass through forests, the latter seems to favour protection of forests compared to road laying.

Upset over not getting forest clearance for several long pend-

Bone of contention

- Kamal Nath wants Jairam Ramesh to expedite process of giving forest clearance for highway projects
- Ramesh keen on protecting forests through which proposed projects pass over road laying
- Four projects proposed in Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath's home state
- Environment ministry not

ing highway projects in the country, Kamal Nath has written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seeking his interven-



tion. It is learnt that Kamal Nath has listed 11 proposed highways projects, including four pending projects in his home state Mad-

hya Pradesh. Of the four projects proposed by the Transport and Highways Ministry, one was to expand the National Highway 7 from Nagpur to Jabalpur.

It is learnt that the Environment and Forest Ministry was against all the four projects as they pass through the Pench National Park and required cutting of lots of trees.

The National Park, which spreads across MP and Maharashtra, falls partly in Chhindwara district. As this forest was declared a tiger reserve in 1992, officials in the Environment Ministry claim that building of highways would be a threat to the big cat. Moreover the NH-7 has already harmed the forest

as it formed the eastern boundary of the tiger reserve for an extent of around 10 km.

"A case pertaining to a highway in Pench is pending in the Supreme Court and till that issue settles, the Environment and Forests Ministry cannot take any decision on other projects in MP," a senior official in the Ministry told *Deccan Herald*.

On the instructions of the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary K M Chandrashekar held two rounds of meetings which were attended by officials of the two ministries last week to resolve the issue. It was learnt that the Cabinet Secretary will hold a few more meetings to find solutions to other projects.

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