

Jairam softens stand on mining in tiger homes

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MINISTER for environment and forests Jairam Ramesh has constituted a committee to "examine the proposals of mining, infrastructure development and industries vis-à-vis tiger conservation".

Sources said the move was aimed at shifting the onus of hard and difficult decisions on to non-political and technical persons. "Jairam has been criticised for taking technical decisions based on his own impressions. He is also facing the political consequences of these decisions. When decisions are made based on technical-committee recommenda-

By **Sowmya Aji** in New Delhi

tions, nobody can object," a source said.

About 17 mining proposals in the buffer zones of tiger reserves will be studied and approved by the committee, comprising four members of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The team will visit sites and hold consultations with the locals before submitting a report to the Centre within a month, an order issued by the ministry said.

The mining proposals to be studied are in the buffer zones of tiger reserves,

including Tadoba-Andhari and Chandoli National Park in Maharashtra, Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh and the Gundla Brameswaram wildlife sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh.

Several of these proposals are for Chindwara, the constituency of roads and highways minister Kamal Nath, whom Jairam had angered by stopping the widening of a highway that passes through the Pench tiger reserve.

Jairam also cancelled permission for coal mining in the buffer zone of Tadoba-Andhari tiger reserve in Maharashtra.

This put him in the crosshairs of civil aviation minister Praful Patel. The proposed mine was to supply coal to a power project in Patel's constituency in Gondia district.

But a Jairam who relished such confrontation appears to have disappeared, especially since he was rapped by his "only friend" in the cabinet, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, for criticising India's security measures in China. Also, with his Rajya Sabha term nearing an end, Jairam is said to be working on his conciliatory skills to ensure re-election.