

# MP, Centre spar over tiger issue, again

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**T**he Centre and the Madhya Pradesh Government are at loggerheads once again over the issue of big cats. The bone of contention this time is the ambitious "Patrolling the Tiger Land" project of the State Government in the feline territories of the State.

The proposal is facing flak from the Centre even before its take off. The gruesome "accidental" killing of a tigress in the Bandhavgarh sanctuary, about two months ago by a vehicle, has prompted the Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh to ask the State Government to immediately scrap its new proposal.

A similar view has been shared by wildlife experts, questioning the State Government's decision to allow visitors to trek in national parks along with forest guards. They argued it poses greater threat to animals from poachers, who may take its advantage by posing as tourists.

The Bandhavgarh tigress killing controversy had kicked off much dust, especially after the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) report, on the manner in which the tigress was hit by a vehicle and she eventually succumbed to her injuries.

In a letter to State Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Ramesh pointed out that the scheme goes against the spirit as well as the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act to keep the core areas protected for tigers and wild animals. "Hence, exposing the tourists to sensitive patrolling



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routes, paths, strengths and weakness of the field staff would certainly pose a great threat to the safety of wildlife including tigers," the Minister said.

But neither Ramesh's letter nor the precedence of tigress killing had any impact on the proposed decision of the State Government. Appearing unfazed, senior forest officials from the State argued that there was nothing wrong with the idea and that it was being successfully implemented in other States like Kerala.

It seems the Centre has been misled, we will soon clarify the position. Kerala is successfully reaping tourism revenue from the scheme," claimed the sources.

However, the contentions of the MP forest officials were in turn retorted by a senior official at Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, he said, "We are taking the tourists only on the fringes of the sanctuaries and not deep inside as proposed by Madhya Pradesh."