

Gehlot for tiger recovery plan

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JAIPUR: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Friday assured the State Assembly that his government would extend all support to the tiger recovery plan for the Sariska Tiger Reserve even as the Opposition demanded a CBI probe into the death of two young tigers outside the Ranthambhor National Park this past weekend. More tigers would be shifted soon to Sariska from Ranthambhor, Mr. Gehlot informed.

The tigers issue came up for the second time in the Assembly in the past four days as BJP member Gajendra Singh Kheevsar, who had put up a question on the number of tigers in Sariska, blamed the State Government for not tak-

ing steps to complete the first phase of the recovery plan by re-locating more tigers from Ranthambhor. One of the reasons for the deaths at Ranthambhor was overcrowding in the 392 sq km park while Sariska, with an area of 868 sq km, was almost empty, he noted.

The atmosphere became tense when BJP members alleged that big names were involved in holding up the shifting of tigers. Mr. Kheevsar also mentioned regular visits of Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Vadra to "internationally acclaimed Ranthambhor". Getting apprehensive whether Mr. Kheevsar's reference was an attempt to drag Mr. Gandhi and Ms. Vadra into the controversy, the ruling party MLAs rose in

protest. Mr. Gehlot, who intervened at this juncture, said the references to the Gandhi family were unwarranted in this context. Mr. Kheevsar was quick to point out that he did not mean to blame them. Terming the recent deaths of tigers a "bloat" on Rajasthan, he said the last tiger was re-located from Ranthambhor more than a year back. "Who is responsible for the delay in the programme which has the blessings of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who is also the chairman of the National Tiger Conservation Authority?" he wondered.

Mr. Kheevsar alleged "vested interests", including tourism lobby and some conservationists, trying to thwart attempts at shifting of more tigers from Ranthambhor.