

Doubts cast shadow over KTR relocation project

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THE HINDU BUREAU



Kali Tiger Reserve. | Photo Credit: File photo

Questions and doubts have been raised over the legalities of the relocation of 339 families from Kali Tiger Reserve (KTR) in the State, based on documentary evidence and official replies in the Assembly.

Though the relocation has been described as voluntary and touted as a model, activists find it intriguing that applications of 99 families who had filed for claims under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) had been rejected.

The fact that the Forest Department had rejected their applications for restoration of traditional rights under FRA indicates that they could not prove their bona fides and hence were encroachers, argue the activists.

It was pointed out that in the reply to a question raised by Abhay Patil, MLA, in the Legislative Assembly on December 18, Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwar B. Khandre stated that 339 families had been relocated from villages and hamlets within the limits of 10 gram panchayats between 2022 and 2025. He also revealed that claims of 99 families under the FRA had either been rejected or were still pending. The government had paid a compensation to the tune of ₹12.17 crore.

This has perturbed activists, who claimed that such a casual approach in identifying the genuineness of claims undermines the rights of tribal persons. Besides, payment of compensation without prior recognition and settlement of forest rights is a violation of the FRA, said the activists, who pointed out that even relocation without prior recognition of forest rights and informed consent of the gram sabha is explicitly prohibited by law.

“Though the government has been asked to furnish gram sabha resolutions for the period of relocation, the Forest Minister allegedly produced only a single resolution dating back to 2014 from Ulavi Gram Panchayat — an 11-year-old document unrelated to the relocation period in question,” said the activists.

Stating that such glaring violations are not isolated, activists pointed out that between 2020 and 2025, 498 families had been relocated from various gram panchayats, including Anshi, Ulavi, Kateli, Gangoda, Bajarkunang, Nandigadde, Badakan-Shirada, Kadra, and Pradhani, spread across Dandeli, Joida, and Karwar taluks of Uttara Kannada district. But information obtained under the Right to Information Act, 2005, from multiple gram panchayats has revealed that no gram sabha meetings were held during the relocation period.

Furnishing documents from specific gram sabhas to buttress their point, the activists have alleged that there was a systemic disregard for the law and have sought scrutiny of the project.

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