

PRESS RELEASE

09 February 2026: Nagarahole, Karnataka

“Hello, uninvited guests of IBCA ... who are you in Nagarahole?”

The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget a few days back, announced that the summit of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) would be held in Nagarahole and Bandipur, Karnataka, from 9th to 12th February 2026. Preparations for this summit are currently underway under the watch of senior officials from the Government of Karnataka and its Forest Department.

The Nagarahole Adivasi Jammapale Hakku Sthapana Samiti (NAJHSS), a federation of Gram Sabhas in Nagarahole forests, is appalled at this extravagant meet of the International Tiger Summit of IBCA at a time when there is global outrage over climate change and biodiversity loss, and in particular when Indigenous peoples on whose territories protected areas have been imposed are facing severe human rights violations. Ignoring the intense injustices faced by Indigenous communities in conservation areas, governments and international conservation groups, backed by corporate funding, are using IBCA as a facade to further occupy Indigenous lands, intensify their exploitation, and generate humongous profits. The IBCA launched by PM Modi has become yet another neoliberal tool to legitimise this process on a global scale.

“₹150 Crore sanctioned for IBCA to continue historic injustice?”

Two years back, on 9 April 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the International Big Cat Alliance in Mysuru, marking 50 years of tiger conservation in India. On that very day, the Indigenous peoples of Nagarahole had protested this grand celebration, opposed not just the project but highlighted the cycles of forced evictions, displacement, and violations of human rights carried out in the name of tiger conservation — facts that have been persistently and conveniently ignored over the years.

Despite claims of social justice, the Congress-led Siddaramaiah government in Karnataka is no different from the BJP-led Modi government at the Centre. Both governments are equally responsible for the continued injustices and forcible evictions of Indigenous peoples from their forests.

“Burying Indigenous people alive in the name of greenwashing!”

Under the leadership of NAJHSS, the people of Nagarahole are demanding legal and moral recognition of their community forest rights, as well as habitat rights of Jenu Kurubas under the Forest Rights Act 2006, that have been unlawfully denied and unjustly stamped out in the name of tiger conservation.

NAJHSS unequivocally condemns the IBCA and all its members for aggressively pushing false and extractive agendas like nature-based solutions, biodiversity offsetting, wildlife tourism, and green credits, which are nothing but large-scale greenwashing schemes. We also strongly

condemn and resist the covert strategies of IBCA allies like MoEF&CC, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and international conservation organisations like WWF, WCS, CWS and Coorg Wildlife Society, which seek to profit from Indigenous lands and lives in the name of tiger conservation.

Since the launch of Project Tiger in 1973, with support from international agencies, Indigenous communities across India have faced forced displacement, erosion of basic rights, and violent alienation from their traditional ways of life and livelihoods. After the creation of NTCA in 2005, forced evictions from tiger reserves have been falsely portrayed as “voluntary relocation,” causing irreversible damage to lives, livelihoods, and cultures. The NTCA directive of 19 June 2023 was an attempt to further intensify threats to Indigenous existence. Despite widespread protests by Indigenous peoples across India, NTCA has failed to provide any clarity or redressal on its 19 June 2023 directive.

Today, all 58 officially declared tiger reserves in India have been notified on Indigenous ancestral lands — without ever obtaining free, prior, and informed consent of the communities who have lived there for centuries. Indigenous peoples, forests, and wildlife have coexisted through a carefully evolved way of life, which the State and conservation lobbies, driven by a predator–protector mindset, continue to violently invade region after region.

“Whose forests are these, and whose consent was taken?”

We, the Jenu Kuruba, Beta Kuruba, Paniya, and Yerava communities of Nagarahole, have been asserting for decades that these forests are our traditional homelands. We are Indigenous peoples who, for generations, have protected and conserved these forests and wildlife through our ancestral knowledge, customary practices, and ways of life. That our belief system recognises humans, forests, and animals as equals and respectful coexistence is the foundational principle of our ways of life.

The tiger, elephant, leopard, bear, peacock, several tree species, and water sources of Nagarahole are worshipped as deities. For generations, protecting forests and animal spirits has been considered a sacred duty and is deeply embedded in our traditional governance systems. Our Indigenous customs and traditions are recognised under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), and the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Our forests, traditional governance systems, customary rights, land, and livelihoods have suffered grave injustice due to coordinated and historic oppression. The unilateral rejection of our forest rights, coercion to accept NTCA relocation packages, and forcible use of our community lands for tourism and wildlife projects are all part of this injustice.

Forest officials in Nagarahole have threatened our people and filed false cases even for conducting sacred rituals to worship our clan deities. Since being declared a Reserved Forest in the 1870s, then a Game Reserve in 1955, later Rajiv Gandhi National Park in the mid-1980s, and finally a Tiger Reserve in 2007, our people have been continuously dispossessed and displaced from our ancestral forests for the last 160 years.

“Nagarahole – where people, animals and forests are equals!”

Following the historic foot march through villages in Nagarahole region of Mysuru and Kodagu districts, on 19 January 2026, the CERD Committee of the United Nations formally wrote to the Government of India, recognizing decades-long human rights violations faced by Indigenous peoples in Nagarahole and across India. Yet, to this day, there has been no response from the MoEF&CC, NTCA, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Karnataka Government under Siddaramaiah, or any other responsible authority.

As our ancestral lands and forests — taken from us over generations — continue to be sacrificed in the name of conservation, tourism, and green credits. We ask : will the international delegates arriving from more than 20 countries for this summit reflect on these truths?

We urge all the uninvited guests and participants visiting Nagarahole during the IBCA summit to take note of the signboard at the illegally constructed Nanachi forest check gate and safari point:

Nagarahole Forests – Indigenous Ancestral Territory

You are now entering Indigenous ancestral lands. This forest is the home of Indigenous Adivasi communities. Here, forests, animals, and people are equals. Nagarahole, declared as Rajiv Gandhi National Park and Tiger Reserve, was notified without following due process of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and without the consent of Gram Sabhas. This declaration is rejected by the Nagarahole Adivasi Jammapale Hakku Sthapana Samiti, Indigenous traditional governance bodies and Gram Sabhas. Please conduct yourself with dignity and respect in this area.

**NAGARAHOLE ADIVASI JAMMA PAALE HAKKU STHAPANA SAMITI
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