

Karnataka: Tribals oppose big cat alliance event in Nagarahole

The Nagarahole Adivasi Jamma Pale Hakku Sthapana Samithi, a collective of the Adivasis, said the denial of their ancestral lands and rights, the consequent violation of their human rights, cannot be justified in the name of conservation.

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Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Subhash Malkhade speaks during the International Big Cat Alliance summit at Bandipur in Gundlupet taluk, Chamarajanagar district, on Monday. Credit: DH Photo

Bengaluru: The Adivasis (tribals) of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve Forest have questioned the government's move to conduct a four-day technical course on conservation of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) in Bandipur and Nagarahole landscapes.

The Nagarahole Adivasi Jamma Pale Hakku Sthapana Samithi, a collective of the Adivasis, said the denial of their ancestral lands and rights, the consequent violation of their human rights, cannot be justified in the name of conservation.

"By showcasing such large-scale violation as a model of conservation to other countries, IBCA will only put additional pressure on our government to drive us out of our ancestral lands," Shivu J, a leader of the Samithi, said

Inaugurated in 2023, IBCA seeks to channel more funds for conservation of big cats, including tigers, leopards and cheetahs.

Asked whether the Samithi opposes IBCA or just the event, Shivu said they were opposing the move to perpetuate a model of conservation with 'colonial injustice'.

In a statement, the Samithi demanded that the government recognise their legal rights under the Forest Rights Act 2006.

"We, the Jenu Kuruba, Beta Kuruba, Paniya, and Yerava communities of Nagarahole, have been asserting for decades that these forests are our traditional homelands. For generations, we have protected and conserved forests and wildlife through our ancestral knowledge, customary practices and ways of life," it said, urging the government to restore their rights.