

Indigenous federation protests Big Cat Alliance meet in Karnataka forests



By A Representative

A federation of Adivasi gram sabhas from Nagarahole has strongly opposed the holding of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) summit in Nagarahole and Bandipur tiger reserves from February 9 to 12, 2026, accusing the Centre and the Karnataka government of ignoring long-standing human rights violations faced by Indigenous communities in the name of wildlife conservation. The objections were raised by the Nagarahole Adivasi Jammapale Hakku Sthapana Samiti (NAJHSS), which represents gram sabhas within the Nagarahole forests, following the Union Finance Minister's recent announcement that the IBCA summit would be hosted at the two protected areas.

In a detailed statement issued from Nagarahole, the NAJHSS described the summit as an "extravagant" international event being organised at a time of global concern over climate change and biodiversity loss, while Indigenous peoples living within protected areas continue to face displacement, coercion and denial of basic rights. The federation alleged that IBCA, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April 2023, is being used as a global platform to legitimise further occupation and exploitation of

Indigenous lands through conservation-driven projects backed by corporate and international funding.

The Adivasi organisation recalled that Indigenous communities in Nagarahole had protested the inauguration of IBCA in Mysuru in 2023, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger, to draw attention to decades of forced evictions and human rights violations carried out in the name of tiger conservation. According to the NAJHSS, these concerns have been consistently ignored by successive governments. The statement criticised both the BJP-led Union government and the Congress-led Siddaramaiah government in Karnataka, alleging that despite differences in political claims, both have continued policies that result in the forcible eviction and marginalisation of forest-dwelling communities.

The NAJHSS reiterated its demand for legal recognition of community forest rights and habitat rights of the Jenu Kuruba community under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, stating that these rights have been unlawfully denied in Nagarahole. It also condemned what it termed “greenwashing” initiatives such as

nature-based solutions, biodiversity offsetting, wildlife tourism and green credits, alleging that these approaches enable large-scale extraction and profit-making at the cost of Indigenous lands and livelihoods. The organisation accused the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation Authority and several national and international conservation groups of playing a role in advancing these agendas.

Referring to the history of conservation in India, the statement noted that all officially declared tiger reserves are located on Indigenous ancestral lands and were notified without the free, prior and informed consent of the communities concerned. It alleged that since the creation of the National Tiger Conservation Authority in 2005, forced evictions from tiger reserves have often been portrayed as voluntary relocations, causing irreversible damage to Indigenous cultures and livelihoods. The NAJHSS also referred to a directive issued in June 2023, which it said intensified threats of displacement, and claimed that no adequate response or clarification has been provided despite widespread protests by Indigenous peoples across the country.

The federation emphasised that communities such as the Jenu Kuruba, Beta Kuruba, Paniya and Yerava have lived in Nagarahole for generations and have traditionally conserved forests and wildlife through customary practices and belief systems that treat humans, animals and forests as equals. It stated that many animal species and natural features in the region are worshipped as deities and protected through traditional governance systems recognised under the Constitution, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and the Forest Rights Act. Despite this, the statement alleged that forest officials have filed cases and issued threats against community members even for conducting sacred rituals, and that dispossession has continued since the area was first declared a reserved forest in the nineteenth century and later converted into a national park and tiger reserve.

The NAJHSS also referred to a recent development at the international level, stating that following a foot march through villages in Mysuru and Kodagu districts in January 2026, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination formally wrote to the Government of India acknowledging decades

of human rights violations faced by Indigenous peoples in Nagarahole and elsewhere. According to the organisation, there has been no response so far from the Union or state governments or concerned authorities.

As international delegates from more than 20 countries arrive for the IBCA summit, the NAJHSS said it wants participants to recognise that Nagarahole is Indigenous ancestral territory and to reflect on the unresolved injustices linked to conservation policies. The federation urged visitors to respect the rights, dignity and traditional governance of Indigenous communities, asserting that conservation cannot be pursued by excluding or displacing the people who have historically protected these forests.

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