

Karnataka

Officials question NTR foresters over cricket match inside reserve

The development comes at a time when incidents of man-animal conflict are on the rise and the tribal and forest dwellers' relocation programme is being implemented.



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BENGALURU: The foresters at the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (NTR) were caught off guard on Thursday when they were questioned by conservationists and top officials at the Bengaluru head office about a cricket tournament held inside the core reserve.

The development comes at a time when incidents of man-animal conflict are on the rise and the tribal and forest dwellers' relocation programme is being implemented.

Sources in the forest department said a group of people were seen conducting a two-day cricket tournament near Nanacchi gate inside the Nagarahole range. The tournament was held on Wednesday and Thursday, for which a large portion of the vegetation was cleared. A large number of people who arrived to watch the match had parked their vehicles around the ground and were seen having meals in the open.

Conservationists termed it as a violation of not only the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 but also of the Forest Conservation Act, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) rules and Supreme Court orders.

The apex court had recently directed all state governments and forest departments that no non-forestry activities and clearing of green cover should be allowed.

“Satellite images of 2011 showed a thick green forest patch in the said location, which has now been converted into an empty patch,” a conservationist said.

Soon after the video and photographs of the game went viral, Forest, Environment and Ecology Minister Eshwar B Khandre sent a letter to Principal Chief Conservator of Forests PC Rai, asking him to take all required action and submit a report within seven days.

Nagarahole Tiger Reserve Director PA Seema said the match was organised by children from the forest tribes, staying in hamlets inside the forest. “The location was near the safari point, and they had been playing cricket there for the past 10 years. No trees have been cut in the area since 2015, and no clearance for tree felling has been given,” she said.