

# THE HINDU

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## Move us out of Mudumalai, demand villagers

D. RADHAKRISHNAN

*About 450 families have been residing inside the MTR for long*



Seek re-settlement: Members of the Moundadan Chetty and Wynaadan Chetty communities at the Collectorate in Ooty on Wednesday. — Photo: D. Radhakrishnan

The delay in implementing a re-settlement plan for the residents of villages located inside the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) has raised the level of anxiety among many of them. Funded by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the plan has been hanging fire for many years. Consequently, both government officials and the villagers are hoping that things will start moving soon.

Speaking to *The Hindu* here on Wednesday, 73-year-old M. Balakrishnan, President, Mudumalai Relocation Committee, lamented that though officials are convening meetings in this regard periodically, “we are in the dark as to which direction the plan is heading”.

Pointing out that about 450 families have been residing inside the MTR for long, he said: “we have been trying to move out permanently for the past several years.”

About 20 years ago the re-settlement plan had been set in motion. It had gathered pace about a decade ago.

The forest department had identified about 1,000 acres at Ayyankolli in Pandhalur Taluk.

While some families had opted to move out under cash based relocation program which offered Rs. ten lakh for each family all the others have opted to be part of a land based relocation plan, which offers alternative farm land and other civic facilities.

After a slowdown, the scheme has again moved up in the list of priorities of the authorities concerned.

At a meeting held here on Wednesday, the Nilgiris Collector, Archana Patnaik, had assured them that no efforts would be spared in implementing the plan.

Expressing the hope that the momentum will be maintained, Mr. Balakrishnan said that due to a marked increase in the population of wild animals particularly elephants and restrictions on provision of basic amenities like power supply and roads the villagers have been subjected to a great deal of hardship.

Among those badly affected were school children.

Since their future has become a question mark they have represented many times to the government to rehabilitate them in a suitable place.

In 2007, the Madras High Court had ordered the authorities concerned to resettle them within a year. Work on surveying the lands by Forest, Agriculture and Revenue departments had also been completed.

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