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Karnataka farmers warn against resuming safari in Bandipur and Nagarahole, threaten agitation

Farmers say the authorities seem to be serving the cause of wealthy investors and politicians with stakes in the hospitality sector, rather than address the concern of the local villagers who face the brunt of conflict situation.

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The government suspended safaris in both the tiger reserves early this month following back-to-back tiger attacks in which three farmers died and one person is battling for life in the hospital. | Photo Credit: M.A. SRIRAM

Amid growing speculations that the authorities were toying with the idea of **resuming safari in Bandipur and Nagarahole**, farmers in the region have warned against it and threatened to lay siege to the forest department.

The government suspended safaris in both the tiger reserves early this month **following back-to-back tiger attacks** in which three farmers died and one person is battling for life in the hospital.

Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar B. Khandre announced the suspension of safaris as a measure to reduce anthropogenic pressure on wildlife habitat. In addition, staff from the safari zone were deployed for the more crucial combing operations while additional manpower was also deployed in the forest fringes bordering various villages in a bid to monitor tiger movement.

But stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector sought a resumption of safari citing loss of livelihood. There were speculations that the forest department was also keen to resume safari in due course due to fall in revenue.

Farmers warn of agitation

Peeved by the development, farmers in the region have aired their concern over talks to resume safari and warned that if the

Government goes ahead with it, they would be forced to lay siege to the forest department offices in the region.

Atahalli Devaraj, Organising Secretary of the State Sugarcane Cultivators Association, and Baradanapura Nagaraj, General Secretary, warned of an intense agitation in case safari was resumed.

“Tiger attacks have caused the death of farmers in the region as a result of which safari has been suspended for now. But there is no decline in human-wildlife conflict in the villages abutting the forest boundary and combing operations are still on. Amidst this, there are talks of resuming safari and the locals including the farmers will protest,” said Mr. Devaraj.

Political class favouring the wealthy

The farmers criticised the proposed move and said the authorities seem to be serving the cause of wealthy investors and politicians with stakes in the hospitality sector, rather than address the concern of the local villagers who face the brunt of conflict situation.

Politicians and the wealthy have built resorts in forest areas and the forest department was conducting safaris for the benefit of tourists. But the movement of tourist vehicles and other disturbances disrupt wildlife habitat, resulting

in wild animals coming out of forests and escalating conflict, said Mr. Nagendra and Mr. Devaraj.

“Farmers who feed the nation are now afraid to cultivate land along forest borders, putting their livelihoods at risk,” they added.

The farmers said the government is under the influence of the wealthy and is hesitant to act against resort and safari owners. “Resorts inside forests can be relocated elsewhere and employment can be provided to staff, but wild animals like tigers and leopards live in human settlements,” said the farmers association, which warned of a State-wide agitation if the safaris resume.

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