

'Won't force villagers out of tiger reserves'

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NEW DELHI: Environment and Forest Minister Jairam Ramesh on Thursday said there would be no forceful relocation of villagers from the 39 tiger reserves in the country even if the process takes a decade to complete.

Around 48,000 families are to be relocated from the core tiger areas for which the Centre has provided Rs 600 crore. The relocation is, however, moving slowly due to resistance from the villagers.

"... The villagers have to be relocated to protect tigers," Ramesh told forest officials and NGO representatives from tiger reserves around the country. "For that, the villagers will have to be convinced that the deal being offered is good."

Most forest officials are convinced the deal being offered is beneficial both for tigers and villagers. "Around 70 per cent of villagers in Sariska and Ranthambore have agreed to move out of core tiger areas," said R.N. Mehrotra, Chief Con-

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JAIRAM RAMESH, Minister

servator of Forest, Rajasthan.

Although Rajasthan is ahead of other states in the relocation process, finding land to resettle the villagers is still a challenge for the state government. Most of the NGOs representatives at the two-day national consultation on relocation said there was no transparency in implementation of the process. "The guidelines for relocation have not been provided in local languages. In most cases, it is in either English or Hindi," said a NGO representative.

But Sariska, which lost all its tigers in 2004, has been able to relocate most of the villagers and is ready to get a tiger couple by mid-July.

"As soon as there is soon rain, we will relocate the tigers from Ranthambore," Mehrotra said.

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