

## **VAN GUJJARS PLAY KEY ROLE IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION: CM**

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**The State Government will advocate making Rajaji National Park into a tiger reserve, said Chief Minister Vijay Bahuguna while attending a meet at Corbett national park on the 40th anniversary of Project Tiger. Later addressing a gathering of Van Gujjars at Pakhro forest rest house, he said that 181 Van Gujjar families living in Sonanadi wildlife sanctuary will be rehabilitated in Chidiyapur range of Haridwar forest division where 160 hectares land has been provided. Bahuguna also announced that education and scholarships will be facilitated for the children of this community while Van Gujjars aged more than 60 years will receive State government pension.**

He said the Van Gujjars had played an important role in conservation of forests and wildlife in the State and looking after their welfare and development was a priority of the government. The CM said that UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi also believed that this community should be given all possible facilities and support, adding that the State aimed at rehabilitating 5,000 Van Gujjar families. Stating that Uttarakhand will establish eco-sensitive zones around protected forest areas, he said that efforts will be made to minimise the resulting obstruction to development works.

Speaking at the meet in Corbett, Bahuguna stressed on the need for linking villagers around Corbett to work on developing the national park for the benefit of the people and wildlife. Stressing that both development and environmental conservation are important, he called for collective efforts towards achieving the desired balance. Stating that the State will strongly advocate making Rajaji a tiger reserve, Bahuguna announced that the uninhabited areas of Kotri and Dugadda in Lansdowne forest division will be merged in the buffer zone of Corbett national park.

The CM also presented letters of appreciation along with Rs11,000 each to 20 staff members for appreciable work while also announcing Rs1,000 increase in the salary of fodder cutters in Corbett. He said that the State Government will also take proactive measures for the betterment of nature guides.

“Uttarakhand is known for its temples, rivers and Corbett national park. There is need for increasing night patrol for strengthening wildlife security and for increasing the number of nature guides to boost eco tourism. There is also need for action to redress human-wildlife conflict,” said Bahuguna. Appreciating the increase in tiger population in Corbett, he said that this was due to tiger protection and expansion of the park’s area.

National Tiger Conservation Authority member secretary Rajesh Gopal spoke on the history and achievements of Project Tiger. He said that the number of tiger reserves in India has increased from nine in 1973 to 42 at present. Referring to the high tiger density in Corbett, he said that a tiger conservation plan will be made for Corbett and help will also be taken from the Union Government to tackle wildlife poaching. Principal Chief Conservator of forests RBS Rawat and others were also present on the occasion.