

Will seek review of tiger order: Govt

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The ministry of tribal affairs has decided to ask the Supreme Court to review its interim order on declaring core and buffer areas across 41 tiger reserves, following reports of forest dwellers being harassed on the pretext of implementing it.

Seven states have notified core and buffer areas in tiger reserves ever since the Supreme Court, in July, asked them to create a distinction and report the action within three weeks. In the same order, the court had also imposed a ban on tourism in core areas.

However, before complying with the court order, the state governments failed to take people living in forests into confidence - as required under the watershed Forest Rights Act (FRA). "Restrictions have been imposed on the movement of forest dwellers," said Tushar Dash, a forest rights activist. "Boundaries are being erected in violation of the FRA."

Tribal affairs minister Kishore Chandre Deo said that the ministry had decided to seek a review of the order on Tuesday. "We will bring to the Supreme Court's notice that certain processes are to be followed as mandated under various laws to declare critical wildlife habitats. People can't be moved out without settling their rights," he said.

The Forest Rights Act clearly states that critical wildlife habitats cannot be notified without scientific process and settling the rights of the people living in the forests. According to the tribal affairs ministry, none of the listed processes were followed in any of the seven states.

Forest department officials had apparently acted in haste after the Supreme Court cautioned of a Rs.50,000 fine on state forest secretaries if they failed to comply within three weeks.

Deo's ministry has recently notified simplified guidelines for FRA implementation to ensure forest dwellers, including tribals, are not harassed by officials.