

<https://thesouthfirst.com/karnataka/in-karnatakas-nagarahole-tiger-reserve-indigenous-jenu-kurubas-fight-to-reclaim-ancestral-land/>

Home » Karnataka

In Karnataka's Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, indigenous Jenu Kurubas fight to reclaim ancestral land

The families, who have been living in Line Many in Kodagu district, working in coffee plantations for two to three generations say they weren't provided with alternate housing after eviction. And after years of unsuccessful attempts through legal channels, they decided to take matters into their own hands in early May.



Rashmi Patil

Published May 16, 2025 | 10:00 AM _ Updated May 16, 2025 | 10:00 AM

SUBSCRIBE
CLICK HERE FOR OUR NEWSLETTER



The latest flashpoint occurred on 14 May, when forest officials erected a warning sign near the temporary shelters built by the families.

Synopsis: *Fifty-two Jenu Kuruba families have returned to their ancestral land in Karnataka's Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, decades after being evicted under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Asserting their rights under the 2006 Forest Rights Act, the families began rebuilding their village on 5 May, after years of attempts to gain recognition reportedly fell on deaf ears. In response, the Forest Department launched a crackdown, deploying over 100 armed personnel, dismantling temporary shelters – including spaces for women – and erecting warning signs labelling the return as illegal trespass.*

In Karnataka's Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, 52 families from the Jenu Kuruba tribal community are attempting to return to lands that were taken from them in the early 1980s under the Wildlife

Protection Act.

Classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by the Union government, they are seeking to rebuild homes and livelihoods in their ancestral forest, invoking rights guaranteed under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) – a 2006 law designed to recognise the rights of forest-dwelling communities over their ancestral land.

However, their efforts, which began on 5 May, have been met with evictions, surveillance, and new restrictions imposed by the Forest Department.



Forest officials erected a warning sign near the temporary shelters built by the families.

The latest flashpoint occurred on 14 May, when forest officials erected a warning sign near the temporary shelters built by the families.

“It is an offence to trespass in a protected Tiger Reserve under Section 27 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972,” it reads.

But the community has rejected the forest officials’ claims of trespassing and has emphasised that they are simply exercising their rights in accordance with the Forest Rights Act, returning to ancestral lands from

which they were forcibly evicted decades ago.

The families, who have been living in Line Many in Kodagu district, working in coffee plantations for two to three generations say they weren’t provided with alternate housing after eviction. And after years of unsuccessful attempts through legal channels, they decided to take matters into their own hands in early May.

Also Read: [Taps now, water later: Come election, tribals from Nagarhole say politicians lure them with half-baked sops](#)

‘We were forced to leave’

On 4 May at the Bengaluru Press Club, Members of the Jenu Kuruba, Betta Kuruba, Paniya, and Yerava tribal communities announced that they would return to their traditional settlements inside the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve.

“We will reclaim our rights to live in our traditional villages. We will be going to our villages in the Nagarhole forest. It is a form of protest against the Forest Department and the government for failing to recognise our right under the Forest Rights Act (FRA),” they declared.

The following day, on 5 May, families from the Jenu Kuruba community entered the forest to begin rebuilding their homes Karadikallu Hattur Kollehaadi village. They built three huts out of tarpaulin near the Hatturodati temple to store food and groceries.”

But on 6 May, more than 100 personnel from the State Police, Forest Department, and the Special Tiger Protection Force arrived at the site and evicted them and removed the temporary structures.

The location lies within the Nagarhole reserve and is part of their ancestral territory.

Malathi Priya, the Conservator of Forests for Mysuru, told *Deccan Herald*:

“The people who have entered the forest are those whose FRA claims have been rejected. They are now urging us to relook into the claims.”

Shivu JA, President of the Forest Rights Committee in Nagarhole and Secretary of the *Nagarhole Adivasi Jamma Pale Hakku Sthaapana Samiti*, accused the Forest Department of deliberately ignoring their legal rights.

He said the community has waited for years for their claims to be processed.

"In 2021 and 2023, surveys were also conducted for these 52 families of the Jenu Kuruba tribe in coordination with the Panchayat, Revenue, Tribal Welfare, and Forest departments. But the government has kept our rights pending for years, violating the Forest Rights Act," Shivu said.

"That is why we decided to come back on 5 May to stay and work it out."

Shivu explained the deep cultural and spiritual connection the Jenu Kuruba community has with the land.

"We come here to bury our ancestors or family members even till today despite restrictions. There is also a temple called Hatturodati temple, which is our god of worship. We come here every year to retain the cultural, traditional celebrations and, mainly, our belief," he said.

He also pointed out that the families have not been provided any alternative housing.

"Our ancestors were forced to leave this place in 1985–86 under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. Since then, two to three generations of these 52 families have been living in Line Mane in Kodagu, working in coffee plantations. All we are asking the government and officials is to recognise our rights to live in this area, which are violated under the Forest Rights Act (FRA)," Shivu said.

He also said the community has been isolated and cut off from outside support.

"The media, activists, and members of organisations who work in our interest have been blocked from entering by police officials," Shivu said.

"Until yesterday, Forest Department guards were coming to our shelters and watching every movement. They even took photos of our activities, invading our privacy. And today, they've put up this new board near our shelters," he said.

"What are they trying to tell us – that we're trespassing on our own land? They should have discussed this with the Forest Rights Committee before putting up such a board."

Also Read: [Kerala turns to innovation to resolve growing human-wildlife conflict crisis](#)

Civil society condemns crackdown

In response to the evictions, a coalition of 70 social and environmental organisations submitted a letter to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Forces), calling for the immediate withdrawal of security forces from Karadikallu Hattur Kollehaadi.

They said the heavy presence of armed personnel was intimidating the Jenu Kuruba families and violating their rights.

It accused forest officials of deploying armed forces from the Special Tiger Protection Force, dismantling homes, and cutting off access to the village – actions the signatories described as a "gross infringement of constitutionally guaranteed rights."

The letter also highlighted that the Jenu Kurubas have lived in the Nagarahole forests for generations, long before the area was declared a Tiger Reserve.

According to the signatories, families in Karadikallu Hattur Kollehaadi were forcibly evicted in the early 1980s under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.

Calling the situation a "historical injustice," the groups said the Forest Rights Act was meant to correct such wrongs.

"The FRA recognises the rights of those displaced by forest conservation and mandates due process before any removal from forest land," the letter noted.

The families had filed claims under three categories in 2021: Individual Forest Rights (IFR), Community Forest Rights (CFR), and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR).

The letter says these were submitted in accordance with the law and verified jointly by officials from the Panchayat, Revenue, Tribal Welfare, and Forest departments.

Yet, the signatories said there had been no formal rejection of these claims, nor had the Forest Rights Committee or Gram Sabha been notified of any official decision.

Contrary to statements by forest officials suggesting that the families are encroachers, the letter states:

“The Forest Department’s claim that the FRA claims have been rejected is not only false but also misleading.”

It further described how, between 5 and 7 May 2025, over 120 armed personnel arrived to evict families as they built temporary shelters near sacred sites.

“Structures were torn down and sacred spaces desecrated under the pretext of ‘illegal encroachment’, with media being barred from entry,” the letter stated.

The letter also raised concerns about the gendered impact of the crackdown. It said shelters built specifically for menstruating women and girls were among those dismantled.

Meanwhile, community members who had been called for a dialogue with forest officials were reportedly made to wait all day without being heard.

New forest checkposts, the letter added, were blocking access to the area, “curtailing the right to free movement, assembly, and expression.”

The signatories called the Forest Department’s actions “illegal, arbitrary, and violative of Sections 3 and 4 of the Forest Rights Act.”

They accused officials of threatening families with criminal prosecution under the Wildlife Protection Act, even though the legal recognition process under the FRA had not been completed.

The letter ended with four specific demands:

- Immediate withdrawal of all armed forces from Karadikallu Hattur Kollehaadi
- An open dialogue with the *Nagarahole Adivasi Jammapale Hakku Sthaapana Samiti* and the local Forest Rights Committee
- Unrestricted access for the media
- Prompt approval of the pending forest rights claims

“The ongoing repression has already caused immense trauma and constitutes a serious breach of legal and ethical obligations of the Forest Department,” the letter warned.

It urged the authorities to “protect the lives, dignity and constitutional rights” of the Jenu Kuruba families.

Also Read: [Interview: Unlike Kerala, Tamil Nadu is systematically tackling human-wildlife conflict, says Dr PS Easa](#)

Concerns over tiger conservation

Joseph Hoover, a wildlife activist, has raised concerns about what he sees as contradictions in the Karnataka government’s approach to forest conservation and Indigenous rights.

“On one side, the Siddaramaiah government states the encroachments in the forests must be cleared. On the other hand, they encourage random people who were not living for many years to now come to Nagarahole to settle. This is dangerous to the wildlife, that too for a tiger reserve,” he said.

Hoover questioned whether the families currently trying to reclaim land have a legitimate claim.

“If there were settlements earlier, it would have shown on the Google Maps and the data stored by the Forest Department. The Forest Department and the state government have given place for people

who were also living in the forests under the Forest Rights Act (FRA)," he said.

He also criticised what he sees as a contradiction in the Congress government's past policies.

"The Congress government in 2006 declared the tiger habitats like this one are inviolate areas and are critical wildlife areas and nobody can enter these places. The same government, after six months of declaring this in 2006, brought the Forest Rights Act and allowed people to stay inside the forests."

Hoover argued that the present situation does not fit into historical claims of displacement.

"They did not live here earlier. They came up all of a sudden on 5 May and various organisations are involved to push for the same," he said.

"Instead of protecting the forest, the forest officials are busy removing the encroachments. These settlements are documented every year under KML files with proper pictures, maps and sketches."

While Hoover expressed support for tribal rights, he made it clear that he believes those rights should not apply within protected areas.

"I am very much for giving them place to stay in a different place. Tribals must be given their rights and treated well by the government. But one cannot barge inside the forest," he said.

Also Read: [Cauvery Aarti at Sankey Tank: A celebration that comes at an environmental cost](#)

Role of indigenous communities in conservation

Akshay Hebalikar, Director at Eco Watch, stressed that tribal communities have a deeper understanding of forests than outsiders.

"The tribals who live in the forest will know about the forest and its ecosystem better than people like us living in the city," he said.

"After Project Tiger was initiated in 1973 for the conservation of tigers, many tribal families were evicted from their original place of stay in the forest. Did they not co-exist with the tigers before Project Tiger was initiated?"

He pushed back against the idea that forest-dwelling communities harm the environment.

"They do not destroy forests, but they harvest the forest produce. And whatever they grow on a small piece of land, they make sure to divide it among different families," he said.

"The tribals never exploit the resources of the forest. They never harm animals, but they just scare them off."

Akshay called for a more thoughtful policy that allows Indigenous families to return and stay in their ancestral forests.

"The government must understand that these families were part of the forest, and they must work it out," he said.

"These tribals are also informers to the officials and people like us – not just in terms of illegal activities, but they observe the activities of animals and birds. Back then, when their ancestors were evicted, there might not have been any leader to question the government." That is why they spread to different places, working in coffee plantations or doing menial jobs. Since their lives were disturbed so far, they were left jobless and homeless. Now, they have desperately come to claim the rights over their land."

Yellappa Reddy, environmentalist and former Divisional Forest Officer at Nagarahole, echoed the view that Adivasi families are essential to forest protection.

"I was a Divisional Forest Officer in Nagarahole from 1971 to 1977, and without these families of Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba, the forest officials cannot work to save the forest. It is their right to live in

the forest because they are Indigenous to that land. There will be no harm if they stay in the forest. During my service, we never evicted any families. Tribal families never lie, and they are not greedy. They want to continue living in their ancestral land. According to me, these 52 families are also not lying about the rights to their forest land.”

He also highlighted their practical role in forest conservation.

“The Forest Department needs these tribal families to control forest fires, poaching, and to sustain the ecosystem. They must be employed and given some sort of job in the forest so that they feel the ecosystem belongs to them, and it is their duty to protect it.”

Also Read: [Politics over Bandipur’s wildlife: Priyanka Gandhi, two states and a traffic ban](#)

‘The State must take responsibility’

Clifton D Rozario, a Central Committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Liberation, has appealed to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre to intervene.

“We had been to Karadikallu Hattur Kollahaadi village to speak to families of Jenu Kurubas. They are living in bad condition. but their ancestral reminiscences. temple and deities are still there. They

HOME | STATES | POLITICS | MOVIES | HEALTH | DAKSHIN DIALOGUES | MORE |

“There are other hamlets. In the name of Project Tiger, they were thrown out. It is a colonial practice. This practice was discarded, and the Forest Rights Act 2006 came into being.”

He called on the state government to take responsibility.

“The state government must definitely intervene and act with responsibility. It must ensure that these families get justice. They must be allowed to live on their land. Their rights are recognised under the FRA, and as per our information, only paperwork is pending in this regard,” he said.

Meanwhile, Karnataka’s Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre has requested a detailed report on the ongoing conflict involving the Jenu Kuruba families and the Forest Department.

In a letter to the Deputy Chief Secretary, Khandre called for a “comprehensive and factual report regarding the action taken so far and the implementation of court judgments regarding the rights of the Jenu Kuruba Adivasi families.”

(Edited by Dese Gowda)

Are you an independent journalist?
Send in your ideas to pitch@thesouthfirst.com
News features, interviews, analysis, opinion 

Follow us



‘Fight for land is fight for identity’, say Devanahalli farmers as CM Siddaramaiah agrees to meet them

The farmers have been protesting for the past 1,178 days against the acquisition of 1,300 acres at Channarayanaapatna Hobli, and the KIADB’s plan to take over an additional 1,777 acres of farmland spread over 13 villages in Devanahalli.



The protesters took a vow to protect the land at any cost.

Synopsis: *Farmers in and around Devanahalli have been protesting against the KIADB's move to acquire their fertile farmlands to develop an aerospace park. Losing land, the protesters said, is akin to erasing their identity.*

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has called for a meeting with farmers from Devanahalli, who have been protesting against a Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) move to acquire their lands for an aerospace park.

A protester said Siddaramaiah called for the meeting even as the farmers, on Wednesday, 25 June, vowed to protect their properties at the cost of their lives. The meeting will be held at the chief minister's official residence, Kaveri, at 11 am on 4 July.

On Wednesday, hundreds of farmers converged near the taluk office at Devanahalli, a Bengaluru suburb, and issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the government to de-notify the land and drop the acquisition plan. The protesters said they would intensify their stir if the government failed to heed their demand.

The farmers have been protesting for the past 1,178 days against the acquisition of 1,300 acres at Channarayana Patna Hobli, and the KIADB's plan to take over an additional 1,777 acres of farmland spread over 13 villages in Devanahalli. The protest began after the farmers were issued notices in January 2022.

Related: [Devanahalli farmers resist forcible land acquisition](#)

Erasing identity

"It's been four years since this *horata* (struggle) began. They gave us the notice for a few areas like Mattibaru and Tellohalli. We have been protesting against the acquisition," Munegowda, a protesting farmer, told **South First**.

The protest by the KIADB Land Acquisition Resistance Struggle Committee has the backing of various state and national-level organisations, including those of farmers, workers, Dalits, and women's outfits.

Another farmer said taking away their land was akin to erasing their identity. “We will not give the land under any circumstances. No compensation is equivalent to this land. Nothing will make us give this land away. It’s like taking our identity away. It doesn’t matter if we have to go to jail for days; we will not stop this protest until we get what we are demanding,” she asserted.

Several organisations are backing the farmers.

The woman further said their land was equally developed and has been producing food. “The KIADB wants our fertile land—the land that has been producing food,” she lashed out.

Concurring, environmentalist and farmers’ rights activist Chukki Nanjundaswamy at the protest site said Devanahalli has been fulfilling 30 percent of Bengaluru’s agricultural needs. “Most of Bengaluru’s milk, vegetables, fruits, and flowers go from here,” he said.

Also Read: [Boost for infrastructure, transport, and housing](#)

A pledge

Actor Prakash Raj, who addressed the protesters, reminded Siddaramaiah of the Congress’s election promise to de-notify the land earmarked for acquisition. He also drew the chief minister’s attention to his advocacy AHINDA, representing the minorities, backward classes, and Dalits.

Later, people from 13 villages in Channarayapatna Hobli of Devanahalli Taluk took a pledge. “Today, there is an attempt to break our unity. An effort to lure us with false promises. An attempt to intimidate us. In front of the representatives of all people’s movements and communities of Karnataka, we take this pledge once again today: Even if we lose our lives, we will never sell this soil,” they vowed.

The police later arrested the protesters. Incidentally, the date coincided with the 50th anniversary of the internal Emergency, promulgated in 1975.

“We insisted on continuing the protest, but the police said the permission was only until 5 pm and decided to arrest us. They just took us away. We were only let out around 12:30 am,” Nanjundaswamy said.

“We didn’t want to come out. We were willing to be under detention. In the meantime, the chief minister called five of us, requesting that we call off the protest. After our discussion, we felt it was important to give the chief minister a last chance, as he has been asking for more time,” she said about the upcoming meeting.

Also Read: [Treated water to be filled in drying lakes](#)

Minister’s version

Meanwhile, Industries Minister MB Patil said several parcels of land have been excluded from acquisition.

“Farmers from this region had already lost their land twice earlier for industrial projects. Taking this into account, along with the fact that the land includes irrigated farmland and human habitation, the government has decided to exclude 231.23 acres in Channarayapatna, 185.18 acres in Mattibaru, and 78.21 acres in Shrotriya, Tellohalli from the acquisition process,” he said at a meeting with Devanahalli MLA and Bengaluru Rural District Minister KH Muniyappa.

The acquisition of the remaining 1,282.38 acres would continue as planned. This will cover 10 villages: Palya, Haraluru, Polanahalli, Gokare, Bachchenahalli, Nalluru, Mallepura, Nallappanahalli, Cheemachanahalli, Muddenahalli, and Hadayala.

Patil added that those losing their land would have an option to receive 10,771 square feet of

developed land per acre, which could be used for commercial purposes.

(Edited by Majnu Babu).

Follow us



Follow Us On :



Categories States | Opinion & Analysis | Movies | Community & Culture | Health & Wellness | Andhra Pradesh | Karnataka | Kerala | Tamil Nadu |
Telangana |

South First About Us | Privacy Policy | Contact Us | Work With Us |