Funds crunch hits relocation of tribal families

By Anil S | Express News Service | Published: 16th December 2016 02:11 AM | Last Updated: 16th December 2016 02:11 AM | A+ A A- | 

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: At a time when forest-dwellers in the state face a host of issues including Maoist presence along the border and man-animal conflict at its peak, an ambitious move to relocate around 800 tribal families from inside Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is in no man’s land due to shortage of funds.

The voluntary relocation of settlements as part of the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, proposed to be implemented with Central support, has been moving at a snail’s pace.

So far 185 families in 6 settlements - Vellakkode, Goloor, Ammavayal, Arakkunchi, Kurichiyil and Kottankara - have been moved while 615 families in 8 settlements are waiting for a long time. In September, the APCCF (Eco Development and Tribal Welfare) approached the government pointing out that relocation of 800 tribal families in 14 priority settlements from the sanctuary has been pending. Funds to the tune of Rs 59.50 crore to complete first phase of the scheme.

Considering the shortage of funds, the Forest Department proposed to avail of the funds as grant from the Scheduled Tribes Development Department so as to complete the process on time. The STDD has funds to the tune of around Rs 800 crore which can be utilised for the purpose, they pointed out. The relocation started, but later on got affected following hike in stamp duty, said Wayanad wildlife warden P Dhanesh Kumar. “We couldn’t give the full instalment to the families. We thought tribals may get an exemption and utilised the funds,” he said.

Meanwhile, Forest Minister K Raju said the State Government has taken up the issue with the Centre and a petition has been given to Forest Minister Anil Madhav Dave. “Though it’s a Central Government scheme, the Centre has so far released only around Rs 20 crore. Last time when we went to Delhi, I met the Union Environment Minister and requested to release funds. Also the matter has been taken up at the high-level meeting chaired by the CM,” K Raju said.