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Ramesh calls for eco-impact report on mega lab

Union Minister for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh has asked top tiger conservation body to study the ecological impact of what has been billed as the country's biggest science project that awaits forest clearance.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has been asked to assess the ecological impact of the proposed Rs 900 crore neutrino observatory (INO).

Neutrinos are elementary particles key to understanding how the universe evolved.

"I have asked the NCTA to study the project site before my visit later this month," Ramesh told *HT*. He is expected to visit the site — 1.3 km into the ground under the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve at Masinagudi in Tamil Nadu — on October 10.

On October 2, HT had written that the world's scientific community was eagerly awaiting for the project to take off.

The project has got the environment clearance, but opposition by environment groups has stalled forest clearance.

Bombay Natural History Society Director Asad Rahmani and some other conservationists have written to Ramesh, objecting to the location.

"There is opposition to the site but we're exploring alternatives," said a senior ministry official, who didn't wish to be identified.

"The laboratory is important... and we must find a way out soon," said Ramesh.

He has asked NCTA member secretary Rajesh Gopal to submit report by this weekend. Gopal has also been asked to suggest alternative sites, if needed, the official said.

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