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Ramesh seeks ecological impact report on mega science project

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NEW DELHI: Union Minister for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh has asked the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to assess the ecological impact of the Rs 900 crore Neutrino Observatory (INO), the country's most ambitious mega science project.

"I have asked the NTCA to study the project site before my visit this month," Ramesh told *Hindustan Times*.

The minister is expected to visit the site on October 10.

The project, proposed to be set up deep under the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve at Masinagudi in Tamil Nadu, got the ministry's environment clearance earlier this year but was stuck with forest clearance due to opposition from green groups.

While environment clearance is accorded under the Environment Protection Act, the forest clearance is given under the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act.

THE PROJECT

Nobel winners lobby for India's biggest lab

UNDERGROUND LABORATORY in Tamil Nadu awaits govt clearance

SCIENTIFIC WRITER

The Neutrino Observatory will be India's largest ever facility for basic science research. The PMO files that PM calls it a "mega project" and has allocated Rs 900 crore for it.

Minister Asad has a dozen top scientists from across the world, including two Physics Nobel Prize winners, have written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asking him to clear a special underground laboratory, billed as the most ambitious project in India's science history.

To be located 7 km from the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and Tiger Reserve in the Nilgiris district, it is among the most secure sites in the world. The Tamil Nadu government's forest clearance is expected to begin by the end of the year.

■ As this HT report of October 2 said, the mega science project, proposed to be set up deep under the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, got the ministry's environment clearance earlier this year but was stuck with forest clearance due to opposition from green groups.

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

"There is opposition to the site of the project but we are exploring the alternatives," a senior environment and forest

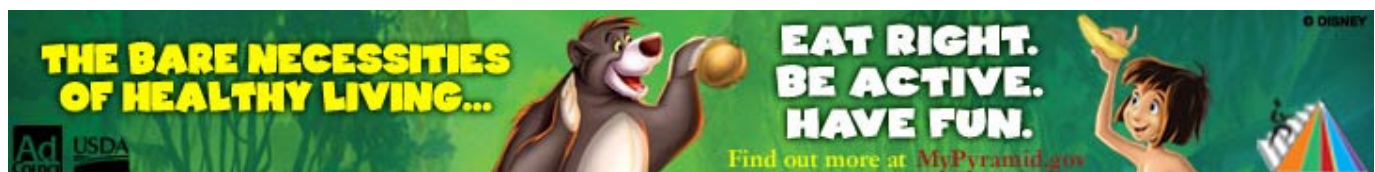
ministry official, who was not willing to be named said.

Ramesh said, "The laboratory is important for scientific leadership and we must find a way out soon". For quick action, the minister has asked NTCA secretary Rajesh Gopal to study the implications of the proposed project and submit a detailed report by end of this week.

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