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# 10,000 forest staff threaten to boycott tiger census

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BHUBANESWAR: Around 10,000 forest field staff in Orissa have threatened to boycott the tiger census starting May 9 to press their demand for more security in view of threats from Maoists and forest mafia.

J B Patnaik, general secretary of Orissa Non-gazetted Forest Service Association, said they will join the operation only after the government fulfils their demands.

The operation to count the number of big cats in Orissa will be conducted for three days in the tiger reserves and is expected to continue till May 13 in other forest areas.

Patnaik said their demands include introduction of group patrolling in forests in place of the age-old system in which only one or two forest officials are given charge of a particular area.



They are also asking the government to equip them with firearms and weapons and have sought parity with police in terms of compensation and incentives for working in Maoist-affected districts.

"All these demands are genuine. We need to save our life first," Patnaik said.

Maoists gunned down a forest guard last month and attacked a forest check gate inside

the Sunabeda Sanctuary in Nuapada district. Harishankar Upadhyay, field director of Simlipal Tiger Reserve said, "Without the involvement of forest field staff, the enumeration operation is not possible."

According to the census of 2009, the Simlipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district - one of the first project tiger reserves in India - was home to at least 60 tigers. IANS