

# Elephant route block sparks fear of conflict

## Odisha Erects Fences, Herds Pushed To Bengal

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**Kharagpur:** Bengal and Odisha are in a tussle over the Dalma elephants again.

With the locals in Odisha digging trenches along its border with West Midnapore to thwart the jumbos from crossing over to their side, the Bengal foresters fear the elephants will be redirected to the state triggering conflict here. Two herds have already damaged crop fields in Bankura and West Midnapore.

Incidentally, forest officials from Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh had met in Jamshedpur in August and pledged to work together to ensure free passage for the elephants.

State forest minister Benoy Krishna Burman said, "It is unfortunate that the locals in Odisha are digging trenches along the border to block the traditional migratory routes of Dalma elephants. Talks are on between both the governments on the issue." The minister was in Kharagpur recently to inspect progress work for the modern training centre for forest workers.

Declaring that an elephant census in the state will begin next April, Burman said, "Heavy mining



activities in Jharkhand have forced the Dalma elephants to move into the adjoining states in search of food and habitat. Considering this, we are trying to increase the vegetation at Mayurjharna elephant shelter."

The elephants venture out of Jharkhand's Dalma sanctuary every year and move towards Chhattisgarh, Bengal and Odisha using their age-old corridors.

Only a week back, 80 Dalma elephants, divided in two herds of 50 and 30 respectively, entered Bankura and then West Midnapore via Bishnupur. After traversing through Goaltore and Garbeta, the herd of 50 reached Nayagram's Chandabila forest crossing Lalgah, Midnapore and Kolaikunda. The herd of 30 headed for the Sankarmoni forest through Sankrail and will reach

Once the herds encounter the trenches or fences on the border, they will head back to Danton and Keshiary which are non-forest areas. Foresters fear that the herds will destroy human habitat here

Nayagram in about two days.

"The elephants have destroyed crops on 22 bighas in Kharagpur forest division alone," said divisional forest officer (DFO) of Kharagpur Anjan Guha. Crops on another 30 bighas were damaged in Goaltore. No casualty has been reported so far. According to him, the locals in Odisha have also erected metallic fences along the border to block the jumbos' movement.

Guha said they feared that once the herds encounter the trenches or fences on the border near Nayagram, they will head back using a different route. "They will cross the Subarnarekha river and head for West Midnapore's Danton via Keshiary. Both Danton and Keshiary are non-forest areas. We fear the herds will destroy human habitat," Guha said.