

# Relocation project for settlers soon

Chief Minister to take up issue with Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests

A Correspondent

**KALPETTA:** Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said here on Friday that issues related to the relocation of settlers in the 110 settlements in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary was under the consideration of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Chief Minister said he would take up the issue with Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests. However, if there was delay in getting clearance, the State government would implement the project utilising the tribal fund and general fund. He said a final decision would be taken at the next Cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

The initial phase of the project would be launched in Kottamkara settlement soon, the Chief Minister said during a visit to the settlement on Friday.

Hundreds of settlers had assembled at the settlement to represent their woes to the Chief Minister. Many farmers had left the settlement and taken refuge in their relatives' houses fearing attack by wild animals. K.V. Mariyamma, a woman who settled in the Kottamkara settlement 45 years ago, told the Chief



**REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE:** Chief Minister Oommen Chandy going to the Kottamkara settlement in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary on Friday.

Minister. Close to 35 families of the 68 families in the settlement had left the place leaving their paddy fields fallow owing to wildlife threat

and dearth of basic amenities. The condition of other settlements was no different, she added.

Though the State govern-

ment had submitted a proposal estimated to cost Rs.80 crore to the Union government two years ago to relocate 1,388 people residing in

880 families in 14 settlements inside the sanctuary in the first phase, the project was yet to be implemented, the settlers complained.

The families were identified in a study conducted under the supervision of S. Sankar, scientist, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi.

## 110 settlements

According to the study, as many as 10,604 people residing in 2,613 families in 110 settlements inside the wildlife had to be relocated. Moreover, the settlers complained that they could not claim the compensation for crop raid by wild animals as the wildlife sanctuary authorities had not renewed the lease of their land for the past 10 years. Hence, the authorities were yet to renew the house number or ration card too, they added.

The Chief Minister directed the District Collector to take necessary measures to provide house numbers after a discussion with the authorities are concerned.

He disbursed ex gratia of Rs.3 lakh to V. Gouri, widow of A. Vasu a forest watcher who was trampled to death by a wild elephant two months ago. Minister for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes P.K. Jayalakshmi, M.I. Shanavas, MP; and I.C. Balakrishnan, MLA; accompanied him.