

Jairam gives in on NREGS wages

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RURAL Development Minister Jairam Ramesh is learnt to have reluctantly agreed to file an appeal against a Karnataka High Court verdict in September that NREGS wages cannot be fixed lower than what is prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act.

For over a month, Ramesh was opposed to the idea of appealing against the ruling. Government sources

told *The Indian Express* that the Rural Development Minister "agreed with protest" to appeal against the high court order in the Supreme Court. The deadline for appeal is set to expire on December 23.

The high court verdict went against government's position on this issue as late last year the Prime Minister had approved a decision to 'de-link' NREGS wages from the wages under the Minimum Wages Act. However, Ramesh appeared to be on a

different page once the issue came to spotlight in the wake of the high court verdict.

Ramesh, in fact, wanted to comply with the order and was not in favour of appealing in the Supreme Court. At best, he was learnt to be contemplating approaching the high court to seek clarifications in an apparent bid to buy time to tie up the necessary funds required to comply with the decision.

Complying with the verdict would have meant about

Rs 4,000 crore expenditure for arrears while additional over Rs 1,000 crore of annual expenditure in future.

He, in fact, had written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and suggested that it was "inadvisable" to appeal against the verdict. He suggested amending the MGNREG Act and also the Minimum Wages Act to bring them in consonance with each other. However, his idea did not find favour from the government quarters.