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## 10,000 tribals march into city for land rights

At least 10,000 tribals from across the state, many barefoot, marched from Shivaji Park to Azad Maidan on Tuesday morning, the second day of the state budget session.

They were protesting against the state's dismal implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, meant to empower tribals who have been living on the forest land for years.

The tribals also called on chief minister Prithviraj Chavan.

Sanu Dharma Binder, 50, walked almost 180km from a village called Ashaghar Dongripada, near Dahanu, to reach Mumbai. Binder had made a claim of 1.3-acre land as his own to the taluka committee in 2007. However, his claim was rejected in 2010.

Now, Binder cannot cultivate any crop on the land and uses part of it as a kitchen garden to feed his own family of 14. He himself works as a landless labourer. "If I lose that land, I will be homeless. I have already appealed," he said.

Shiraz Balsara, head of Kashatakari Sangathana, who has been fighting for Binder said, "Back in 1986, Binder had made an admission in the Supreme Court about his land. How can the state reject his claim 20 years later saying that he doesn't own any land there?"

The act was passed to ensure that tribals could have a right on the lands they had been staying on for centuries.

Of the 2.88-lakh claims that have reached the sub-divisional level committees in five years, 1.70 lakh claims (59%) have been rejected. Only 1.09 lakh (32%) claims have received approval.

Meanwhile, activists said the meeting with the chief minister was not very satisfactory. "He promised that all the rejected claims would be reviewed and that he would himself review the workings of the act every three months. But, all promises by him are verbal and we have nothing in writing," said Ulka Mahajan, an activist with the Sarvahara Jan Andolan and a convening committee member for the protests.

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