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Act to protect rights of forest dwellers

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LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh is working towards implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, for empowering the tribals and other traditional forest dwellers for their occupation and habitation rights on forests. This Act empowers and encourages forest dwellers to protect, conserve and manage forest bio-diversity. The state has begun its efforts to put the Act in place for the benefit of forest dwellers here.

The state has identified 21 critical districts for the implementation of the Act and has constituted 707 forest rights committees, 25 sub-divisional committees and 21 district level committees. There have been total 54,708 claims submitted before forest rights committees at gram sabha level. Out of this, 13,146 claims have been submitted to sub-divisional level committees. Forest department, however, has also rejected 26 claims till date.

A state level committee under the chairmanship of chief secretary has also been set up. In order to sensitise inhabitants and departments involved in implementation, copies of the Act, pamphlets and posters have been distributed. Interactive meetings have been organised at various levels viz gram sabha, sub-division and district. Besides, the state has also set up an expert committee in order to identify critical wildlife habitat areas of national park and sanctuaries on the basis of scientific objectives and criteria.

The facts on the Act and its implementation were shared by forest minister Fateh Bahadur Singh at the ongoing two-day conference of state ministers of forest department and chief ministers. Uttar Pradesh has 14,127 sq km forest cover which is 5.86% of its geographical area and 8,203 sq km tree cover which is 3.4% of its geographical area. Natural forests in UP are confined to Bundelkhand, Vindhya and Terai region.

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