

# Few forest land deeds given to tribal farmers: Govt

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*GANDHINAGAR:* State Forest Minister Mangubhai Patel today admitted that his government could distribute land title deeds to only 5,778 tribal farmers across Gujarat till now under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, as against the 1.76 lakh applications received.

Responding to Congress MLA Amarsinh Vasava's query, the minister said he has written to the 26 tribal MLAs, cutting across party lines, informing them that the government was in the process of forming Van Samitis to expedite the disposal of pending applications. Patel alleged that some "vested interests" were instigating tribals to stake claim for the forest land, often leading to clashes between tribals and forest officials or police. The claims of another 5,500 beneficiaries have been sanctioned, he added.

Earlier, moving the resolution in the House, Vasava accused the state government of not implementing the Central Act in the state in letter and spirit, and thus depriving the tribals of their legitimate rights to till the forest land.

Vasava said that the performance of other states on this front is far more impressive than Gujarat, with Chhatisgarh having disposed off over 1.92 lakh land title deeds for tribals.

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