

Date:13/08/2009 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/13/stories/2009081352600300.htm>

[Back](#)

[Other States](#) - [Orissa](#)

Forest dwellers can now get title-deed

Correspondent

High Court vacates stay, subject to certain conditions

It will go a long way in tackling naxal menace, says Advocate-General

CUTTACK: The State Government is now one step closer to tackle the naxal menace in the State by way of helping tribal people when the High Court on Wednesday allowed it to recognize and vest forest rights and occupation of forestland to traditional forest dwellers residing in jungles for generations.

Subject to certain conditions, the High Court of the State vacated an interim stay that had been imposed by it about a year ago on the implementation of Scheduled Tribes and Other traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act-2006.

“With the vacation of the stay, the State Government can now go ahead with its proposal to distribute record of rights (pattas) to the forest dwellers which would go a long way in tackling the naxal menace in the State”, said State Advocate-General Ashok Mohanty on Wednesday.

30,000 identified

Following the enactment of the Act of 2006, the State Government had identified over 30,000 forest dwellers—20,000 of whom belong to the districts of Kalahandi, Koraput and Kandhamal, to get occupational rights of the forests in which they have been staying for generations.

But the State Government’s plan was stalled in July 2008 when the High Court slapped a stay on the operation of the Act of 2006 while adjudicating over a Public Interest Litigation filed by Society of Retired Forest Officers’ of Orissa.

Challenging the Act, the retired forest officers had contested that the new Act goes against the spirit of National Forest Policy of 1998, Indian Forest Act of 1927 and Forest Conservation Act of 1980.

‘Resentment’

Due to non-issuance of title deeds to tribal people, it was often alleged that massive resentment was brewing among forest dwellers giving rise to recent upsurge in

Narayanpatna of Koraput district—where tribals are forcibly snatching away lands of non-tribals.

However, after the visit of Chief Minister Mr Naveen Patnaik to the troubled areas of Koraput in June this year, the State Government took the initiative to get the stay vacated and to facilitate distribution of land rights to the tribals dwelling in jungles.

Accordingly, the High Court was approached last month to vacate the July, 2008 stay and on Wednesday the bench of Acting Chief Justice Mr Justice I M Quddusi and Justice Kumari Sanju Panda vacated the stay.

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