

Forest dwellers hold demonstration for land patta

Staff Reporter

The agitators allege improper implementation of the Forest Rights Act

— Photo: Ashoke Chakrabarty



BHUBANESWAR: Hundreds of forest dwellers staged a demonstration along the Mahatma Gandhi Marg here on Tuesday protesting 'improper' implementation of the Forest Rights Act, which would have enabled them to secure rights over land and resources inside forests.

A majority of the protestors had a common grievance that they were not yet given land pattas though verification of their existence had long been completed. Another group alleged that the Forest Department was playing spoilsport in the implementation of the law.

"My family has been staying inside the Bhender reserved forest in Bolangir district since time immemorial. Collection of minor forest produces is our only livelihood source. We came to know that implementation of the Act will come to an end by December 31. We don't know what our future would be," said Budu Majhi who came to the capital city for the protest rally.

Similarly, Rabi Majhi of Talbhta village under same reserved forest had similar grouse. "Although we are in occupation of bigger land for several decades, our land area has been squeezed during verification," Mr. Majhi said.

They were protesting under the banner of Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), which had played a major role in passage of the Forest Rights Act.

"Government must expedite the community forest claims submission process and special direction should be made in this regard.

Action sought

Thereafter, the verification of community rights and the individual claims should be verified at time," said Gopinath Majhi, convenor of CSD, Orissa.

"The claims duly verified and recommended by the Pallisabha cannot be rejected by the technical team. Any claims rejected at the sub-divisional level committee should be duly intimated to the claimants and the respective pallisabha specifying the reasons," Mr. Majhi demanded.

Demonstrators also demanded immediate direction to the forest department to stop eviction in any areas. Moreover, they put forward demand that the government should withdraw all forest cases filed against people as per the provision of the preamble of Forest Rights Act, which admitted historical injustice was done to forest dwellers over the periods.

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