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‘Forest Rights Act not being implemented in true spirit’

Staff Reporter

Centre and State taking it as just land distribution scheme, says CSD convenor

Diversion of forest land adding to the problem, he says

A vast gap between the amount of land being occupied and claimed, says CSD State leader

BHUBANESWAR: Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), a national level movement advocating implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), here on Monday alleged that the historic Act was not being implemented in its true spirit.

Addressing a press conference CSD’s national convenor Pradeep Prabhu said, “while the FRA gives to the forest dwellers rights over the forest recognising their community forest resources including grazing, collection of minor forest produces and rights over water bodies, both Union and State government are just taking it as land distribution scheme.”

The new Act totally disregarded protection and management of forests through Van Surakshya Samiti (VSS), but the State government was violating the law by not banning the VSS in which forest department played a divisive role, Mr. Prabhu alleged.

He apprehended that about 90 per cent of claimants would be deprived of their rights since the Union government wanted to wind up the implementation by December 31, 2009.

“There has been systemic failure in the implementation of the Act. State government did not come forward to take all the stakeholders right from poor tribals and representatives of panchayati raj institutions,” CSD convenor said.

“Despite the forest rights committee intimating the forest department about field verification, forest officials did not come. Illegal eviction of forest land occupants before their claims have been considered,” Mr. Prabhu alleged.

He said diversion of forestland for mining and other projects without recognition over the forest rights and consent of Gram Sabha was adding to the problem.

“Union government made huge promises of empowering village level institutions under

Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act. However, it could not be implemented to its full potential. Left wing extremists took the advantage and strengthened their base. If government fails the historic act, it will muddle a volatile situation further,” Mr. Prabhu said.

Speaking on the occasion, State convenor of the CSD Gopinath Majhi charged that there was a vast gap between the amount of land being occupied and claimed by the forest dwellers and the pattas, which had been distributed. Forest habitants from different parts of the State would take out rally protesting against improper implementation of the Act.

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