THE HINDU

News » National

Ministry to consider forestland conversion

Aarti Dhar

Union Environment and Forests Ministry will consider applications for diversion of forestland for non-forest purposes under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 only after complete compliance under The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is ensured.

Speaking at the Chief Minister's Conference on Implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 here on Wednesday, Minister of State (Independent charge) Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh said orders have already been issued to the State governments that Gram Sabhas with minimum 50 per cent quorum have to give consent to such diversion.

Required documents

A letter from the State government certifying that the complete process for identification and settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 has been carried out for the entire forest areas proposed for diversion, with a record of all consultations and meetings; an official certification that the proposal for such diversion have been placed before each Gram Sabha concerned of forest dwellers, and a letter from the Gram Sabha indicating that all formalities have been carried out and that they have given their consent to the proposed diversion are some of the documents now required for any diversion of land.

Process yet to begin

Importantly, the State governments where the process of settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act is yet to begin are required to enclose evidences that settlement would be carried out before the final approval for the proposal, the Minister said.

Mr. Ramesh also said that following guidelines issued to State governments on October 25, 2007 for identifying critical wildlife habitats, only two proposals had been received from the Orissa government. Also, following suggestions at the National Conference of Environment and Forests Ministers in August, the scope for further simplifying these guidelines were being examined and revised guidelines would be issued by the end of this year, he added.

Union Tribal Affairs Minister Kanti Lal Bhuria said "innocent" tribals were now taking route to naxalism as hundreds of them were facing harassment for being accused under the Forest Act for collecting minor forest produce. He asked the Prime Minister to strengthen his ministry, saying financial resources and powers given to it were "inadequate" to achieve its goals.

Speaking at the conference, Kedar Kashyap, Primitive Tribes Welfare Minister of Chhattisgarh, said while 85 per cent of the claims had been settled in the State and forest rights granted to over 2 lakh people, Gram Sabhas were not convened in the naxal-affected areas that had hampered implementation of the Act. He also drew the attention towards the Abhujmad area where no land survey had been carried out so far and hence granting such rights to the people was a challenge.

Stating that Orissa has embarked on a "mission mode" to adopt the Forest Rights Act, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said two lakh land titles have already been approved in the state and certificate distributed to over 55,000 beneficiaries.

Keywords: Union Environment and Forests Ministry, Forest Conservation Act 1980, Naveen Patnaik, Forest Rights Act, Jairam Ramesh

Printable version | Nov 5, 2009 9:50:29 AM | http://beta.thehindu.com/news/national/article43375.ece
© The Hindu

.