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Peeved forest-dwellers to stage rally

BHUBANESWAR: Tribals and other forest-dwellers of the State will organise a rally here on Tuesday against violation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, by the State Government.

The tribals will protest against the police offensive in their areas and non-recognition of the powers of the gram sabha to protect and manage their community forest resources.

Criticising the State Government for ignoring the spirit of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and concentrating only on distribution of pattas, Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) State convenor Gopinath Majhi demanded banning of the joint forest management (JFM) and Vana Sangrakshan Samitis (VSSs).

JFMs and VSSs are dividing the tribals and working for their impoverishment, he said, adding that the CSD has launched a countrywide campaign for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, in its totality.

The Centre has called a three-day meeting of the chief ministers, forest ministers and tribal welfare ministers of all states from November 4 to review the implementation of the Act. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had also reviewed the implementation of the Act at a high-level meeting here on Friday.

Out of the 3,04,509 individual claims filed at the Gram Sabha level, 55,000 individual forest land pattas have been distributed. The pattas have been distributed to only Scheduled Tribes and claims of other forest-dwellers have not been considered, he said.

There is also widespread resentment over the fact that there is a large gap in the amount of land claimed by the tribals and pattas distributed to them.

While the Act gives rights to the forest-dwellers over the forest recognising their claims for collecting minor forest produce, over water bodies and grazing, the State Government has ignored these issues, he said.

Besides, the Act totally disregards the present forest protection and management system through JFM (VSS) and empowered the village committee/gram sabha to protect forest, the State Government has taken no step on this.

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