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State plans to 'counter' Naxal threat with land

Rajaram Satapathy, TNN 12 October 2009, 11:12pm IST

BHUBANESWAR: Close on the heels of the mounting unrest on land issues in tribal areas and the emerging situation looking like giving handles to Maoists to wreak havoc, Orissa government has asked officials to expedite implementation of the Central Forest Rights Act.

The government is of the view that distribution of land rights to tribals could muffle the escalating extremism to some extent.

The ceaseless violence in Narayanpatna, Bandhugaon in Koraput district and similar such agitations in other areas are cited as a pointer to the degree of disaffection entrenched deeply in public psyche on the land issue.

Tribals and non-tribals for whom forest is the source of livelihood are both entitled to getting the deeds subject to a maximum area of four hectares. Orissa so far has been able to distribute such deeds to around 28,400 families.

Functions attended by ministers and ruling BJD MLAs are being organized for the purpose ostensibly to garner political mileage from the Central legislation.

Official processing for finally recognizing the rights of people on forest lands is a multi-layer affair starting from the gram sabha to the collector. Applications are to be first made to the gram sabhas, which after examining would forward them to the sub-collector, where they are to be scrutinized again before being sent to the district collector concerned.

The deeds will carry the signature of collector, divisional forest officer (DFO) and another forest official, sources said. Inquiries revealed close to 3.45 lakh applications were received by gram sabhas, of which a little over 46,000 had been processed at the collector-level.

At a meeting convened to review the progress of the implementation of the Act, chief minister Naveen Patnaik asked the officials to ensure that the law is implemented without much procedural delay.

"We are also planning to document the distributed lands with tahsildar so that the beneficiaries do not face much problem. Presently, only revenue lands are recorded in the revenue department.

There was no survey done earlier for the forest lands," revenue minister S.N.Patro said. The Act, known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, was passed in the Parliament on December 18, 2006.

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