

State to protect rights of foresters

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Lucknow, June 19 The state government is implementing the Forest Rights Act to settle forest land disputes across the state and ensure rights to forest-dwellers, a majority of whom are tribals and Dalits.

Principal Secretary to the chief minister, Net Ram, has been assigned the job, as the government is keen to expedite the formation of state and district-level committees to spread awareness about the Act among beneficiaries. The government's move came after a few voluntary organisations had submitted their survey report to the chief minister last month.

The detailed survey of forest land from 1950 to 2005 highlighted the irregularities committed by the Department of Forest and Revenue, as they converted huge tracts of land into forest.

"The government gazettes show that thousands of hectares of land belonging to gram sabha, nistaar and zamindari forests have been transferred to the forest department under Sections 4 and 20 of the Indian Forest Act (1927)," said one of the surveyors.

A delegation comprising representatives of National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers, Tarai Kshetra Mahila Majdoor Kisan Morcha and Bhumi Adhikar Sangarh Manch recently met Net Ram and apprised him of the issue.

The principal secretary told the organisations that the state and district-level committees would be constituted soon. The Social Welfare department has already issued a circular to spread awareness about the law.

The Act was passed last year to protect the rights of those residing in the forests for generations. The law was notified on December 31 and its rules were notified on January 1.

"All state governments were briefed about the Act," said Bachchitar Singh, Joint Secretary, Union ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Singh said he would visit the state soon resolve the impediments in the implementation of the Act.

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