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Centre seeks report from PCCF

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has asked the State Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) to look into the charge that forest land was being misappropriated under the guise of the Forest Rights Act with the active collusion of Forest Minister Binoy Viswom.

The PCCF has been asked to submit his action-taken report at the earliest. The complaint was lodged by Tony Thomas who heads the environment NGO 'One Earth One Life'.

Tony had stated that the Forest Minister, in the presence of Tribal Welfare Minister A K alan, on September 23, 2009, asked officials to scale up the claims of tribals who had asked for less than one acre of land under the Forest Rights Act.

The State Government has received nearly 13,000 applications seeking land rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act.

All applications staking claim to less than one acre were returned last September after the ministers asked the tribals to up their claims. The LDF Government has even appointed special officers to help tribals to improve their claim to at least one acre.

'Express' had earlier reported that the LDF's 'an acre a tribal family' policy has given tribals improper assumptions and could also give rise to a situation where spurious claims crowd out the genuine ones.

'Express', for instance, had reported that the Muduga tribals of the Vettilachola Colony in Palakkad have cleared nearly 100 acres of evergreen forest in the catchment area of the Kanjirapuzha dam. The clearing operation has acquired a sudden urgency in the last few months with the implementation of the Forest Rights Act reaching full steam. Of the 82 acres of virgin evergreen forests, reportedly ravaged by the tribals, nearly 50 acres were cleared on a single day.

The Act but clearly states that tribals can stake claim to only those forest lands held and cultivated by them before December 13, 2005. The land cannot be alienated either, it can only be inherited.

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