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## HC paves way for 'pattas' to forest dwellers

CUTTACK: In a significant direction which will pave way for the State Government to issue 'pattas' to traditional forest dwellers, the Orissa High Court today vacated its earlier interim order in which it had asked authorities not to alienate any land or fell trees, particularly from the sanctuaries, national parks, biospheres and reserved areas by issue of record of rights.

A division bench of the court comprising acting Chief Justice IM Qudushi and Justice Sanju Panda made the order hearing a PIL filed by the Retired Forest Officers' Association of Orissa over Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. In the PIL, the association had prayed for quashing of the Act on grounds that it was opposed to the Indian Forests Act, the Forest Conservation Act and the Indian Constitution.

Advocate-General Ashok Mohanty, during the hearing process had submitted to the court that vacating the stay would be a boost to the Government in addressing the rights of the tribal dwellers.

In fact, now that the stay is vacated, the State Government will be free to distribute 'pattas' in respect of homestead dwelling to tribals over forest land.

After recent uprising of tribals in Koraput's Narayanpatna, the Government had revealed that at least 30,000 such 'pattas' are ready to be distributed to the rightful forest dwellers.

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