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Keonjhar villagers take foresters hostage

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KEONJHAR: Angry over the massive felling of trees in their village by timber smugglers, villagers of Talapada had taken four forest officials hostage. They included one forester, one woman forest guard, one female watcher and driver of the vehicle in which they had gone. Forest range officer, G C Adhikari managed to escape.

The officials belonging to Telkoi forest range were released on Wednesday, after about 24 hours following the SP's and DFO's intervention. The villagers wanted strict action against the mafia. Earlier, also they had demanded Talapada reserve forest which the timber smugglers have been regularly plundering. A fresh complaint was made in January-end after it was found that several trees had been felled again. On January 25, some forest officials reached the place to shift the logs and were gheraoed by villagers. They allowed the officials to return but kept the tractor they had got with them.

The villagers then took up the matter with the district collector. The later forwarded the complaint to the DFO. There was however no sign of any action against the timber mafia.

Tension reached its peak when the forest officials reached the village on Tuesday to take the felled timber and the vehicle. The villagers soon took them to hostage protesting against the government inaction.

Though police were informed, no team reached the spot fearing Maoist attack. Telkoi officer in-charge S K Sahu said they received the complaint around 5 pm on Tuesday. "As the area is Maoist affected, it was difficult to start operation after evening."

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