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Stir to kick off in tribal belt

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VADODARA: With little progress on the front of giving titles of forest lands to tribal residents cultivating land in forest reserve areas, various NGOs working for tribal rights will start an agitation from Monday. The activists claim the Forest Rights Act is not being implemented properly by the state government and was even violating it.

They said at a recent meeting of state-level monitoring committee for the act, it was claimed that only 10 percent of the claims for titles filed by tribals were genuine and the rest were bogus and without any supporting documents. "For us this was the first indication that the state government was back-tracking from proper implementation of the act," said Ambrish Mehta of Adivasi Mahasabha, Gujarat.

Mehta said as many as 20,000 claim files had been deposited by the gram sabhas. "Of these only 2,000 were found to be genuine. This is far from the truth. The fact is that the 2,000 claims that were approved before the Lok Sabha polls were of persons cultivating the land before 1980. These were already approved vide a government resolution in 1992, but were not given titles. The remaining 18,000 claims were not even looked at," he added. Another activist father Xavier Manjooan from Narmada district said it seemed the government only intended to give user rights to the tribals. "This is against the act that clearly states that ownership of the land must be given to tribals," he said.

Manjooan pointed out that while the Forest Department was a respondent to the land claims that were made to the gram sabhas, it was not willing to accept that status. "The village-level committees are like quasi-judicial bodies. It seems that the Forest Department is finding it difficult to accept this," he said.

Protest marches, demonstrations and other activities will be held at various locations throughout the state. On Monday, programmes will be held at Rajpipla, Dharampur and Ahwa.

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