

Tens of Thousands Protest for Democracy in the Forests

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa witness chakka jams, rasta rokos, dharnas, morchas and other protests.

Today in State capitals and district headquarters across the country, many tens of thousands of people joined morchas, dharnas and rasta rokos with the following demands:

- Halt Forest Department interference, exclusion of rights holders, and violation of people's rights under the Forest Rights Act;
- Recognise our right and power to protect and control our forests and resources;
- Stop illegally destroying forests and robbing us of our resources through diversion for private companies and large projects.

In a tragedy, four protesters were killed and two seriously injured in Devala, Udaipur District, when a lorry hit the protesters as their rasta roko was ending. The organisation is pursuing the case to ensure that the driver and other concerned persons are arrested and brought to justice. Those who lost their lives in the struggle will be honoured as martyrs.

Protests took place in the following States:

Rajasthan: Chakka jams took place in Banswada, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Pratapgarh Districts, in total in 12 locations. More than 6,000 people participated. The rasta rokos included a blockade on the National Highway at Chindwara More.

Orissa: More than 5,000 people participated in a chakka jam in Bhubaneswar, shutting down the main crossroads in the city for more than two hours. People joined the demonstration from across the state. Protests also took place in major district headquarters.

Maharashtra: Rasta rokos took place throughout the State, in several locations in Thane District (on the Ahmedabad – Mumbai national highway), in two places in Raigad district, in 4 places in Nandurbar district (rasta rokos will continue over the next three days in other locations in the district).

Madhya Pradesh: Approximately 4,000 people from 20 districts joined a chakka jam in Bhopal for several hours. More than 3,000 people courted arrest and were arrested.

Gujarat: Mass rallies took place in Rajpipla (10,000 people), Dharampur (4,000 people), Sabarkantha District (dharnas at three locations). Protests will take place in Chota

Udaipur, Vyara and Bhilwada are expected in the coming days, in which several thousand people are expected to participate.

Chhattisgarh: A mass dharna took place in Raipur in which approximately 1,000 people participated.

Jharkhand: People from Kunti, Hazaribagh and Ranchi district joined a mass demonstration in Ranchi. Rallies took place at the sub-divisional level in East Singhbhum and at the block level in Latehar, Palamau, West Singhbhum Districts.

The passage of the Forest Rights Act in December 2006 was a historic step forward for the struggle against the autocratic, brutal and repressive rule of colonial laws and the Forest Department in India's forests. But the mere passage of a law is not enough to overturn a century of oppression. Today, the fight continues for a new order in the forests – one built around democracy instead of bureaucracy, around the people rather than the officials, and around the forests and their citizens rather than the corporates and capital.

<http://forestrightsact.com/index.php/Forest-Rights-Act-2006/Scheduled-Tribes-and-Other-Traditional-Forest/Tens-of-Thousands-Protest-for-Democracy-in-the-Forest.html>