

FRA implementation tardy in state

By Express News Service - BHUBANESWAR

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Even as Odisha Government is way ahead of other States in the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry has asked all the States, including Odisha, to effectively implement FRA.

In his recent letter to the State Government, Union Tribal Affairs Minister V Kishore Chandra Deo has expressed concern over the slow pace of implementation of various provisions of FRA.

The Union Minister has asked the State Government to effectively implement the FRA to safeguard the rights of the Scheduled Tribes and the traditional forest-dwellers.

Deo said the community rights over forests will be meaningless if people are unable to stop destruction of forest.

On distorted interpretation of Joint Forest Management guidelines by some States, he said committees which are constituted by the Forest department by no stretch of imagination can be equated with the committees that are elected by the Gram Sabhas under the Forest Rights Act.

"There is still a vacuum on the ground and so far no State Government has fully modified its transit permit (for forest products) regime to match the amended rules," Deo said on ownership and control of the minor forest produces such as kendu leaves and bamboo.

The Centre issued the revised Forest Rights rules and guidelines for FRA in 2012 and had held a series of consultations with various stake holders for its effective implementation.

Deo expressed concern over the illegal rejection of forest rights and said that there is still gross violation of the rights recognition process.

Taking serious note of Forest department systematically building high stone walls around Government forests, Deo said people are forced to walk for kilometres to access their lands and forest produce.

This is illegal, yet no action has been taken to stop it, he added.

He also said that the criminal offence provisions of the FRA has been completely ignored during implementation of the FRA.