

State government killing spirit of Forest Rights Act: Kalahandi MP

By Express News Service - BHUBANESWAR

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Criticising the State Government for not implementing the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in true spirit, Congress MP from Kalahandi Bhakta Charan Das on Saturday demanded recognition to individual and community rights in reserve forests, protected areas and national parks.

Though the State Government has issued 3,04,660 title certificates, rights of a majority of families, using forest land in reserve forest, protected area and national park for agriculture and allied purposes have not been recognised, Das told mediapersons here.

He said rights of all the eligible families under the Act should be recognised. Das said for families to whom titles had been issued in smaller areas but used by them for agriculture, a process should be started to recognise the whole area and new title should be issued.

Only 545 villages in the State have been recognised and titles issued though 29,302 forest villages are eligible, Das, a former Union minister, said. He alleged that there is no initiative by the State Government in supporting the gram sabha in the management of the community forest resources.

Dubbing the State Government as anti-tribal, the Congress MP alleged that it is harvesting bamboo through the Odisha Forest Development Corporation (OFDC) from the community resource areas in various parts of the State by violating the Act.

Das alleged that the Jamguda gram sabha in Kalahandi district harvested bamboo from the community forest resource in June 2012, but it could not sell as the Forest Department refused to issue transit pass.

The State Government did not make any arrangement in this regard despite a letter from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Das said and added that bamboo worth crores of rupees rotted because of this. He demanded amendment to the existing rules for issue of transit pass to stop sale of bamboo to paper mills from the community resource areas.

Stating that the State Government should stop its monopoly over kendu leaf trade, Bhakta demanded free trade of kendu leaf. He said the royalty from kendu leaf which was Rs 140 crore in 2010 should be distributed among 7.5 lakh pluckers.

Das demanded support to the cooperatives of the minor forest produce (MFP) collectors/gram sabha for infrastructure development of MFP procurement, value addition, processing, storage and marketing.