

Tribals demand pattas for land by August 15



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Seek implementation of Forest Rights Act, liberty to collect, sell minor forest produce

Tribals in the State have given an ultimatum to the government to distribute the 2,551 titles for land in forests that are ready for distribution by August 15.

Having waited for land for cultivation under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 for years and fed up by being fined by forest officials for cultivating pulses and other crops required for their families, the tribals said they would hold protests if pattas are not distributed.

Speaking at a workshop on a status report on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in Tamil Nadu here recently, Venkatesan, a tribal leader from Tiruvannamalai district, said of the 4,000 petitions submitted by tribals in the Jawadhu Hills, only 2,000 were under the consideration of the government. Though the Act had been in force for several years now, not even one cent of land was given to tribals.

“Even last week, a youngster from my village was fined Rs. 20,000 by the forest ranger for cultivating some crops. The officer was not aware of the Act or the rights given to tribals,” he said.

Chandran, a Kurumba tribal from The Nilgiris, said at least 40 % of the applications for patta were rejected at the gram sabha itself. “No reasons are given for such rejections,” he added.

Prasanna of CIOSA, said tribals demanded that the reasons for rejecting claims under the Act should be communicated to the applicants.

They also sought the implementation of Community Forest Resource rights under which they can collect and sell minor forest produce.

The government should partner with NGOs to implement training, monitoring and implementation of the Act.

The programme was organised by the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri, Village Reconstruction and Development Project, Salem, Tamil Nadu People's Forum for Land Rights, Coimbatore, Samanvaya, Chennai and CIOSA, Chennai.