

North Goa collector clears 60 forest rights claims

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Panaji: North Goa collector Ankit Yadav chaired a meeting of the district level committee (DLC) on Tuesday, where 108 claims under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act were taken up for screening.

The committee approved 60 cases, while 30 cases were rejected as the applicants claimed revenue land or land owned by the Goa Forest Development Corporation. Yadav also sent 17 claims back to the sub-divisional level committee (SDLC) for further clarification after discrepancies were noticed in the size of the land being claimed. The collector has been chairing one meeting every week ever since chief minister Pramod Sawant announced a fast-track schedule to clear pending claims. Goa has about 10,500 applications for forest rights, of which 870 cases were cleared, and 949 cases were rejected prior to the fast-track schedule. Of the 10,500 applications, about 8,000 remain pending — 2,000 at the gram sabha level and 3,500 with the deputy collectors.

“Claims that were sent back to the sub-divisional level committee had a contradiction in the area during spot verification, and there was no justification given for the difference in the findings,” said Yadav.

With the monsoon session of the legislative assembly set to commence on Monday, the DLC will pause the

weekly meetings and continue once the assembly session concludes. “Thirty cases were rejected as they are on revenue land or land that belongs to Goa Forest Development Corporation, and this land is being auctioned for cashew plantations, so no single person can claim ownership,” said Yadav.

Sawant has directed the two district collectors to ensure that by Dec 19, all applications have to be processed and decided upon.

Applications to recognise the rights of forest-dwelling communities have been pending since 2006. The current process requires the claims to be approved by the respective gram sabha, after which the file is sent for the SDLC’s approval. Once the SDLC clears the application, the respective DLC grants the final nod, and the collector issues the sanad certificate.