

Review implementation of Forest Rights Act, Centre tells States

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The Environment Ministry and Ministry of Tribal Affairs jointly issued a communique on Tuesday to Chief Secretaries of States to review the implementation of the Forest Rights Act that came into force in 2006 and ensure better coordination among forest departments and forest communities. “You are requested to undertake a review of the implementation of the Act and intimate the Government of India about any clarifications that are needed to smoothen the process,” says the letter that was publicised by the Environment Ministry. There was also a ceremony attended by Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar and Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda here to mark this communique. There was a meeting last August, Mr Munda said, to “resolve issues” around community participation in forest management. The joint letter on Tuesday was a “culmination” of several deliberations following the August meeting. Though the Act, formally known as the Scheduled Tribes and the Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 has been in force for over a decade and a half, several forest communities have not had their traditional rights registered or acknowledged, an issue that has sparked conflict over the years. Tuesday's communication says that the frontline staff of State forest departments should extend assistance to institutions and committees for preparing conservation and management plan to sustainably manage forest community resources. State forest departments should undertake projects for “value chain” addition, meaning that they must find ways to derive greater economic value from forest produce, particularly non-timber products, devise better storage and transportation methods in ways that benefit both tribal and forest communities as well “increase forest productivity.” State Tribal Welfare departments should be initiating tribal welfare and skill development programmes for sustainable use of forest resources.

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