

Protect forest dwellers from eviction, states told

The letter, seen by this newspaper underscores that the implementation of the FRA remains slow across several states and UTs despite nearly two decades since its enactment.



Jitendra Choubey

Updated on:
28 Oct 2025, 7:50 am

NEW DELHI: Days after defending the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 in the Supreme Court, the Union government has directed all states and Union territories to ensure that no tribal or forest-dwelling community is forcibly evicted from wildlife sanctuaries or national parks until their rights are fully recognised and settled.

In a letter dated October 22, Vibhu Nayar, Secretary of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), instructed Chief Secretaries to strictly follow the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The letter, seen by this newspaper underscores that the implementation of the FRA remains slow across several states and UTs despite nearly two decades since its enactment.

The communication lays out 12 key priorities for accelerating the process of recognising forest rights, including Individual Forest Rights (IFRs), Habitat Rights for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), Community Forest Rights (CFRs), and Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRRs). Citing Section 42 of the FRA, the Centre reminded states that “no member of the Scheduled Tribes or other traditional forest dwellers shall be evicted or removed from forest land under his occupation till the recognition and verification procedure is complete.”

The letter urges the states to explicitly prohibit any form of forced displacement before the settlement of rights and resettlement plans are firmly in place. The Centre has also asked states to correct discrepancies in forest land records so that rightful beneficiaries can access government schemes. It warned that unless official land records are updated, FRA-recognized lands could become subjects of dispute between

forest and revenue departments. However, it clarified that such corrections are administrative in nature and must not be used as grounds to reject any pending or fresh claims.

The Tribal Affairs ministry secretary's letter stresses that claim under the FRA should be assessed primarily on ground-level evidence rather than technological data. "Technological inputs such as satellite imagery or GIS mapping should only serve as supplementary tools," it states, emphasising that Section 12 of the Act mandates decisions to be based on physical verification. The letter also called for regular meetings of State Level Monitoring Committees to resolve disputes and integrate forest rights into welfare and livelihood schemes.

Highlighting best practices from Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, the ministry urged other states to replicate their approach. They include the preparation of FRA Atlas documents and district-level action plans to identify potential CFR areas. In addition, the letter yet again reiterated the importance of recognising and protecting the habitat rights of PVTGs.