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Govt to amend Forest Act to end harassment of tribals

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NEW DELHI: To put an end to harassment of tribals by forest officials, particularly in Naxal-affected areas, government is likely to bring in amendments to the [Indian Forest Act](#) in the next session of Parliament, [environment minister Jairam Ramesh](#) said on Monday.

"In the forthcoming session of Parliament, I hope to introduce these amendments. It is Section 68 of the Indian Forest Act (IFA) 1927 and the main purpose of this amendment is to end the harassment of tribals and ordinary people by local forest officials," the minister said after receiving a report by the [National Committee on Forest Rights Act \(FRA\)](#).

Section 68 of IFA, 1927 deals with the power to compound offences.

With this step, Ramesh said, the government hopes "to end the system of foisting of cases on tribals and locals who are using forests for meeting their daily livelihood."

Speaking at the function, which was also attended by Tribal Affairs Minister Kanthilal Bhuria, Ramesh noted that the amendments were awaiting the approval of law ministry.

"We are bringing about amendments to Indian Forest Act in order to ensure that these large numbers of cases are not foisted on tribal communities people who are going into forest daily and picking up their daily requirements. That is one big complaints against the forest department.

"In Naxal-affected areas, a large number of cases are registered against the tribals... that has also been reported by the home ministry.....So we are amending the Forest Act," the minister said.

Ramesh said the UPA's flagship Forest Rights Act, 2006 in many ways, was the first systematic attempt by the Government to bring about democratic structure of the forest management in our country.

Citing that 60 per cent of India's forest area is in 180 districts of the country which have a very substantial tribal population and 250 million people depend on forests for their daily livelihood, the minister pitched for a "dramatic change" in the present model of forest management and urged the Forest Department to change its mindset on the Forest Rights Act.

"The people who get the rights are not going to de-forest. They are actually going to be partners in sustainable forestry. They are going to be partners in conservation of forest. We cannot any longer look up on people and tribals as enemies of forests. This model of forest management has to undergo a dramatic change," he said.

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