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Thu, 17 Mar 2011

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## Lure of land pattas strips forest

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**Vivek Deshpande**
**Tags :** [Forest Rights Act](#), [Yaval Sanctuary](#), [Environment activists](#)
**Posted:** Fri Mar 11 2011, 23:42 hrs

**Yaval, Maharashtra:**

About 450 km from Nagpur, in a range of hills, a board says, "Welcome to Yaval Sanctuary. Give us the tree that would be planted by both, the feller and the nurturer."

The 175-sq-km sanctuary needs that prayer. It has been living literally on the edge of an axe, with virtually no forest left end to end.

Environment activists blame new settlers for the denudation. Much of it, they say, happened after the Forest Rights Act (FRA) came into effect, giving residential rights to encroachers beyond a cutoff. Satellite images too show that the destruction has been starkest since 2008, the FRA period.

There are 2,000 residents, the Pawras and the Barelas in three villages besides those in illegal settlements. Forest activists say many arrived in the hope of getting land rights, even though they wouldn't legally qualify, and are chopping trees to make room for agriculture.

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“Activists who campaigned for pattas for the settlers either encouraged the tree-felling or ignore it,” says Rajendra Nannaware, convener of Satpuda Bachav Sangharsha Samiti, a joint forum of NGOs.

Forest officials say the entire belt comprising Jalgaon, Nashik, Nandurbar and Dhule has been affected. “Yes, we have reports from these parts, but it is the duty of the Forest Department and the police to stop it,” says state Tribal Development Commissioner D S Rajurkar.

Head of the Forest Force Alok Joshi, too, acknowledges the damage done. “Satellite images show huge felling, particularly in Yaval and Nandurbar. Our staff get attacked and abused when they try to stop encroachers. We have brought this to Home Minister R R Patil’s notice.”

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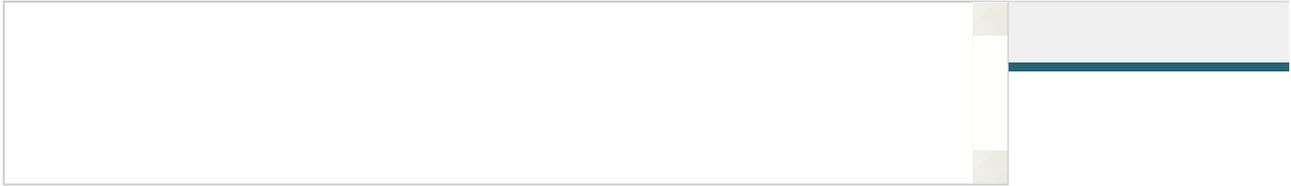
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