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Red fear factor in land claims

KUMUD JENAMANI

Jamshedpur, Oct. 14: Tribals of six villages of Saranda forest are hesitant to turn up to claim their rights over forest land where they have been residing and farming due to fear of Naxalites.

According to a senior forest official, the Naxalites have reportedly warned the villagers not to stake their claim under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, as it was "similar to accepting alms".

The villagers apprehended that if they went against the rebel diktat, they might lose their lives, a forest officer said.

About 200 families were living in the six villages, including Bitkelsoya, Thalkobad, Tirilposhi and Nuagoan, and none among them has turned up for the drive so far, which was initiated in June 2008.

Failure in registering their claims over the land may lead to their eviction by the forest department.

S.R. Natesh, the divisional forest officer of Saranda, confirmed that they had not received any petition from the six villages. He said under Saranda and Kolhan divisions there were 42 revenue villages and 14 forest villages.

"Those who were living in the revenue villages do have necessary documents and ownership rights for the land while those residing in the forest villages are considered illegal inhabitants," said the DFO.

Under the Forest Rights Act, people who were residing on forest land till December 13, 2005 were entitled to ownership rights for land measuring four hectares per family.

"We also conducted an awareness campaign but the end result is zero," he said.

