

JAMGUDA, March 4, 2013

After a century, Odisha villagers get back bamboo rights

Tribal development must for curbing Naxal growth: Jairam

For the residents of this tiny non-descript village in Odisha's Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput region, it was a rare celebratory occasion on Sunday when they got back the rights that had been snatched away by the British rulers nearly a century ago.

The official transit passbook for cultivation and harvest of bamboo was handed over to the Jamguda Gram Sabha by Orissa forest officials. Union Rural Development and Tribal Affairs Ministers Jairam Ramesh and Kishore Chandra Deo and Odisha Revenue minister Surjya Narayan Patra attended a Tribal Rights festival organised by the Gram Sabha to mark the event.

Jamguda became the first village in Odisha to be provided community rights to harvest and sell bamboo under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Mendha Lekha in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra was the first village in the country to have been given bamboo transit passbooks in April 2011. A few more villages near Mendha Lekha obtained the rights subsequently.

Mr. Ramesh had earlier written to Orissa's Naveen Patnaik and the Chief Ministers of five other Maoist-affected States to hand over full control of transit passbooks to the Gram Sabhas where community forest rights were recognised.

Addressing Jamguda villagers, Mr. Ramesh and Mr. Deo said the Centre would extend full cooperation in providing tribals and other traditional forest dwellers the right over minor forest produce such as bamboo, kendu leaf and mahula flower.

Mr. Ramesh underlined the need for ensuring development of the tribal people in order to check the growth of Maoists in the tribal regions. "We have to understand why the tribal people were feeling alienated and were unhappy that benefits of development had not reached them so far and their land was being taken away by non-tribal people for different projects."

HOSTILE TREATMENT

Tribal people had been treated as enemies by Forest Department officials since the British enforced the Forest Act in 1927 and all land in tribal areas was declared forest land, said Mr. Deo. Under the present laws, granting tribals land rights should be the main priority, he said.