

Pipeline projects now need not take tribal nod

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NEW DELHI: The environment ministry has agreed to grant a major concession to pipeline and transmission projects across forest belts by exempting them from getting consent of tribal people affected by the project, government sources said.

The environment ministry, under pressure from the Prime Minister's Office, is expected to shortly amend the August 2009 order that made it mandatory for the state government to provide written consent from the project affected gram sabhas that all claims under the [Forest Rights Act](#) had been settled, and that they approved of the diversion of forest land before it could permit the diversion of forest land.

Tribal affairs ministry, the nodal agency for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, has also given its consent to the change. Tribal affairs minister V [Kishore Chandra Deo](#) had earlier sought strict enforcement of the August 2009 order. He has, however, stressed that constitutional provisions that safeguard tribal areas should be honoured.

The PMO has been pushing for a more relaxed implementation of the Forest Rights Act for projects in forest areas. To this end, a three-member committee headed by Pulkot Chatterjee, principal secretary to the prime minister, has been set up.

On December 12, the committee, which included secretaries of environment and tribal affairs, submitted a report outlining an agreement to dilute the consent requirement from tribals in the forest affected areas. The committee agreed to allow the forest clearance process to bypass the gram sabhas or village assemblies, which are the basic units for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

Despite this agreement by the officials, both environment minister [Jayanthi Natarajan](#) and Deo had expressed some reservations, calling for further consultations. On January 24, Deo wrote to the environment minister saying that "recommendations of the committee take care of the concerns of the Forest Rights Act" and that he was in "broad agreement with the recommendations".