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Ramesh urges Maharashtra model in Odisha to curb Maoist influence

RAKESH DIXIT | Bhubaneswar, August 17, 2012 | 18:04



As many as 19 of the Odisha's 30 districts are affected by Maoist activities.

Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh, who has been critical of the **Odisha government's policy of tackling the Maoist** menace, has urged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to follow Maharashtra by transferring power over Minor Forest Produce (MFP) to the tribal communities to bring down maoist activities in the state.

Maharashtra, which is facing the problem of **left wing insurgency** in some of its districts, has conferred the authority on the local tribal communities to harvest and sell MPF, specially bamboo, under the community forest rights.

In a letter to Patnaik, Ramesh said the Maharashtra model of transfer of power for full control of transit passbooks for bamboo from the state forest department to the gram sabhas should be followed by Odisha. He said that such a move had yielded results in Mendha in Maoist-dominated Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. The transit passbooks would give the gram sabhas the exclusive right to cut and sell bamboo.

"There have been recent newspaper reports that the Maoists in Gadchiroli are unhappy with the revolution that has taken place in Mendha," Ramesh said in his letter indicating that the move had succeeded in alienating the local tribals in the concerned district from the ultras who have been inciting them against the state.

Urging Patnaik to use the same strategy in his state, Ramesh asked him to send a team of officers to Mendha to study the model. "Hand over full control of the transit passbook for the bamboo to the gram sabha concerned where community forest rights have been recognised," said the union minister.

Ramesh, who has visited several Maoist-dominated districts of Odisha, first tried to set a benchmark for the development of such areas, by focusing on the revival and growth of Saranda forests on the Odisha-

Jharkhand border, a known Maoist bastion. The minister, who feels that the growth of Maoism hits

developmental activities of the government, has been emphasizing the needs for the empowerment of gram panchayats and gram sabhas in different areas to keep the ultras at bay and to provide a fillip to developmental projects.

As many as 19 of the Odisha's 30 districts are affected by Maoist activities and the pace of rural development has been slow in many of these areas. A few months ago, Ramesh had to cancel his trip to Gurupriya in Malkangiri, the district worst hit by Maoists in the state, because of the threat perception. The minister was keen to visit the area because a proposed bridge over river Gurupriya, which would link nearly 30,000 people in the inaccessible areas of the district with the main land, has been hanging fire for more than two decades.

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