

Karnataka

# 52 tribal families refuse to leave Karnataka's Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, say it's their ancestral land

*Over 150 tribes from Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, Yarava and Paniya communities have occupied the forest land in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, demanding implementation of the Forest Rights*



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The tribals talking to forest officials in the Nagarahole Tiger Reserve Photo | Special Arrangement

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MADIKERI: The 52 tribal families who entered the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve claiming land rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) continue to stay put inside the forest as a way of protest. Meanwhile, the forest department is urging them to vacate, citing legal and implementation hurdles.

Over 150 tribes from Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, Yarava and Paniya communities have occupied the forest land in Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, demanding implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

However, as per the forest department, the status quo has to be maintained until July 25, following the SC order. Further, the foresters are unable to force eviction as 50% of the population of the tribes who have occupied the land consists of women and children.

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“We have not occupied the forest land, but we are occupying our ancestral land. We were evicted from the place under the Wildlife Protection Act nearly 45 years ago. After this, we stayed in line houses of the estates in the surrounding areas and we have been living in nitiable conditions since then



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been living in precarious conditions since then.

Following the FRA Act, we saw hope of reoccupying our ancestral land lawfully. It is a historical injustice that we were thrown out of the ancestral land and we have suffered enough,” shared Jenu Kurubara Shivu, one of the tribal leaders and secretary of Nagarahole Adivasi Tribe Forest Rights Implementation Committee.

He explained that they have been protesting for the implementation of the FRA from 2009-10. “After we learnt about FRA, a total of 52 tribal families put forth applications for the sanction of the forest right,” he explained.

He added that a joint verification process was ordered in 2021 and in 2024, a joint verification by the forest, revenue, tribal welfare and panchayat raj was conducted.

“While the report on the joint verification had to be submitted in four months, the same has been delayed invariably. The joint verification has not been signed by the concerned department officials, highlighting the inefficiency of the government departments,” he alleged.

He explained that numerous protests were led in the recent past and they had been shunned by the officials who he alleged extended false assurances.

“But this time, we have occupied our ancestral land and the indefinite protests will continue until we are granted our rights” he voiced. The tribes have occupied

rights, he voiced. The tribes have occupied the forest land for the past five days and have built make-shift structures for their deities inside the forest zone.

Meanwhile, the letter to the CM from retired PCCF BK Singh urged the government to temporarily stop the grant of land under the FRA. Further, Singh has also filed a petition with the SC and status quo of forests has been ordered till July 25, preventing any new activities or changes.

He has urged the state not to treat FRA as a land grant as this would escalate wildlife conflict and urged the government not to sanction land for those who occupied the forest after December 13, 2005.

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Meanwhile, the forest department is of the opinion that the applications filed by the tribes for FRA were rejected in 2011. As per the government records, Attur Kolli Forest, the land that is now in conflict under FRA, falls under the Nagarahole Range and as per the previous data, there was no signs of habitat.

While the tribes had applied for rights under FRA in 2009, the same was rejected in 2011.

Nevertheless, the SC ordered for a re-verification process of the applications in 2019 and a re-verification was carried out in 2024.

However, the report of the re-verification data has not been submitted by the Sub Divisional Level Committee and the District Level Committee till date, which is being opposed by the tribes.

“The tribes have occupied the forest land and we cannot force them out as there are women and children. Further, status quo has been ordered in natural forests following a petition by retired PCCF BK Singh. The status quo must be maintained till July 25 until further notice,” confirmed Ananya Kumar, Nagarahole Division ACF.

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Nagarahole Tiger Reserve

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