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Nagarahole tense after adivasis demand recognition of forest rights claims

In campaigns, meetings and press meetings organised across the state, they have referred to forcible eviction of tens of thousands of adivasis to create the protected area of Nagarahole in the 1980s.

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The entry of adivasis into Nagarahole tiger reserve led to a tense situation on May 6. Credit: CNAPA

Bengaluru: The delay in addressing the forest rights claims raised by adivasis threatened to escalate into a tense situation in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve on Tuesday, a day after the 52 Jenu Kuruba families entered the forest to assert their rights.

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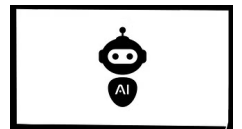
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Over the last few years, adivasis under various banners have been demanding the state government to right the historical injustice meted out to them. In campaigns, meetings and press meetings organised across the state, they have referred to forcible eviction of tens of thousands of adivasis to create the protected area of Nagarahole in the 1980s.

In a statement issued by the Community Networks Against Protected Areas, the adivasi leaders stated that the Jenu Kurubas of Karadikallu have filed their individual and community forest rights claims back in 2021. They said that the adivasis entered the forest on Monday and the forest officers tried to stop them from "performing their rituals and construction of sacred places".

"Since then, they have been submitting memorandums and bringing it to the notice of the senior authorities in the government. Even though the joint verification and GPS survey of their claims was conducted by the Panchayat Department, Tribal Welfare Department, Revenue Officials and the Forest Department personnel, the latter is now refusing to recognise the claims," the statement said.

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J K Putti, a Jenu Kuruba woman leader, stated that the social justice promised by the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was yet to be fulfilled. "This is an issue of social justice. However, it is being treated by the government as a law and order issue," she said, referring to the allegation that "over 120" police and forest personnel were brought to the forest.

Mysuru Conservator of Forests Malathi Priya, however, said that the department has not ignored the claims. "I have spoken to the Nagarahole Director on the matter. The people who have entered the forest are those whose FRA claims have been rejected. They are now urging us to relook into the claims. The officer concerned has already gone there to meet them and address their concerns," she said.

The issue dates back to 1975, when the tribal communities were allegedly forced out. The delay in the rehabilitation of families, despite a Karnataka High Court order in April 2009, has led to an increased confusion over the claims.

The Supreme Court, after ordering eviction of the over 17 lakh families whose claims under FRA were rejected, directed the government to relook into the claims.