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# As monsoon sets in, adivasis of Nagarahole plan to start constructing houses

The tribal leaders are also planning to file a case against the forest department and panchayat officials under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for withholding the rights of the people

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THE HINDU BUREAU



A file photo of Adivasis who were relocated from Nagarahole to Nagapura. | Photo Credit: SRIRAM MA

With the monsoons setting in, Jenukuruba tribal, who re-entered the forests of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve almost a month ago “to reclaim their ancestral land”, said they will begin

construction of houses.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, J.A. Shivu, leader of the Nagarahole Adivasi Jammappale Hakku Sthapana Samiti, said, “We held a gram sabha on May 20, where it was decided that we would start constructing houses. Individual forest rights surveys have already been done for the 52 families who re-entered the forest, and therefore, we know the plots that have been surveyed. So, we will start constructing the houses there, since the rains have arrived.”

## **Case to be filed**

The tribal leaders also said that they are planning to file a case against the Forest Department and panchayat officials under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for withholding the rights of the people and dragging their feet on the forest rights claims raised by adivasis under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006.

It was a month ago that 150 tribal people entered the Nagarahole forests as a mark of protest against the delay in granting rights. Officials of the Karnataka Forest Department and the Karnataka State Tiger Protection Force (STPF) attempted to prevent this move, and tensions have been brewing in the regions since.

“The Forest Department and tiger protection

force have been continuously trying to evict us out of our ancestral lands. They attempted to bring down the sacred structures we built. There were many instances where in the middle of the night they tried to bring down the three structures in which we are collectively living now,” Mr. Shivu alleged.

## **A long wait**

According to Community Networks Against Protected Areas, the forest dwelling communities of Nagarahole were evicted in 1985 after it was declared a wildlife sanctuary. The indigenous population were subsequently forced to work as bonded labourers in coffee plantations. After the FRA came into effect in 2006, the tribals applied for their forest rights in 2009, and have been waiting for 16 years for the officials to act upon it.

“What has happened since 2006 has been a complete denial of those rights and a return from the promise that was made under the Forest Rights Act,” said Lara Jeswani, lawyer at Bombay High Court. She said that out of the more than three lakh claims, only 15,000 claims of individual rights had been decided.

Political ecologist Nitin D. Rai alleged that adivasis were bearing the brunt of what the State needs to do to meet its financial and developmental obligations.

“Denial of forest rights comes directly from the

(government's) need to increase the tiger numbers so that they can show they are doing very well on the conservation front and therefore cannot be questioned of diversion of forests and infrastructural development," he said.

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