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ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-165



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Amid regional parties' protests over the eviction of forest dwellers, the Jammu and Kashmir administration on Wednesday said it was in the process of implementing the

Forest Rights Act of 2006 “to grant the rights to forest dwellers”.

“The Forest Rights Act of 2006 provides for granting of rights to forest dwellers across the country. It was not applicable or implemented in J&K till 31st October, 2019. It has been decided that the survey of claimants by the forest rights committees for assessing the nature and extent of rights being claimed at village- level be completed by January 15, 2021”, an official spokesman said.

The sub-divisional committees shall complete the process of scrutiny of claims and prepare the record of forest rights by or before January 31, 2021 and the district level committees shall consider and approve the record and grant forest rights by March 1, 2021, the official said.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Chief Secretary B.V.R Subrahmanyam on Wednesday to review the implementation of

the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, and Rules in Jammu and Kashmir.

The administration has decided that the tribes and traditional forest dwellers will be provided with the rights over forest land for the purpose of habitation or self-cultivation or livelihood, ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce, and entitlement to seasonal resources among others

“However, the rights conferred under this Act shall be heritable but not alienable or transferable. However, under the Act, on the recommendation of a gram sabha, forest land up to one hectare can be diverted for the purpose of developing government facilities, including schools, hospitals, minor water bodies, rainwater harvesting structures, minor irrigation canals, vocational training

centres, non-conventional sources of energy and roads”, the official noted.

Mehbooba’s protest

The decision came just a day after Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti met the Gujjars and Bakerwals, who were allegedly evicted from their habitats in south Kashmir by the authorities, and registered her protest against the move.

National Conference’s Mian Altaf, who had represented the nomadic community in the Assembly, said the recent demolition of hutments of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Lidroo Pahalgam in south Kashmir gave an insight into the discrimination and apathy that the BJP nurtured against them.

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