

SC seeks details from States on claims to forest lands

The Bench said it wanted the information to be provided in four weeks.

The Supreme Court has ordered State governments to provide details of the number of claims for the grant of land under the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006.

A Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur, Kurian Joseph and Deepak Gupta, on a batch of petitions including that of Wildlife First, said it wanted updated information on claims to forest lands, encroachments and evictions.

The court said the claims for grant of land should be those made by the Scheduled Tribes and separately by other traditional forest dwellers, along with the number of claims rejected by States in respect of each category. It called for information on the extent of land over which such claims were made, number of rejections in respect of each of the two categories and the action taken against those claimants whose claims were rejected.

The court, in its March 7 order, asked for the status of eviction of those claimants whose claims were rejected and the total extent of area from which they were evicted. The States have to provide the extent of the area in respect of which eviction has not yet taken place in respect of rejected claims.

Legislative competence

The Bench said it wanted information to be provided in four weeks and listed the matter for hearing on April 18.

The court recorded that the petitioners had challenged the constitutional validity of the Act as well as legislative competence of Parliament to enact the statute.

Noting that the forests and wildlife are in a "critical state," the petitioners have indicated that they would want a performance audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India or by any other appropriate authority.

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