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## Centre asks states to create mechanism for compliance with Forest Rights Act

The Ministry has asked the state tribal development and forest departments for a report detailing the name and number of villages situated in tiger reserves.

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The issue came under spotlight last June when the National Tiger Conservation Authority asked state forest departments for a timeline for the relocation of 591 villages in tiger reserves.

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**Underlining that forest-dwelling communities were protected from unlawful eviction under the Forest Protection Act, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has directed the states to create an institutional mechanism to ensure compliance with the law and set up a mechanism to address grievances, it is learnt.**

The Ministry's letter dated January 10 follows complaints it received over the last few months from dozens of villages situated inside tiger reserves in at least three

As reported by *The Indian Express* earlier, the ministry received representations from 52 gram sabhas in MP's Durgavati Tiger Reserve in December, following which it wrote to the state tribal development department to resolve the issue. In October, it directed Maharashtra to look into complaints of evictions from Rantalodhi village in Tadoba Tiger Reserve.

The Ministry has asked the state tribal development and forest departments for a report detailing the name and number of villages situated in tiger reserves; the tribes and forest-dwelling communities in such villages; and all the forest rights claims received, vested, and rejected. It has also sought to know the process of seeking consent and the likely compensation.

“The provisions under FRA explicitly empower forest-dwelling communities by legally recognising their rights, protecting them from unlawful eviction, and ensuring that any resettlement is carried out with their informed consent and participation,” the Ministry is learnt to have said.

The Ministry said that Section 4(2) of the FRA provides safeguards that make it imperative to obtain free, informed consent of gram sabhas in writing for relocation. The law also provides for settlement rights in the areas where the settlement is proposed, it is learnt to have said.

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When contacted, Gobind Sagar Bharadwaj, Additional Director of Forests (Project Tiger) and Member Secretary, NTCA, said, “Whenever NTCA receives any communication on allegations of evictions, it is referred to concerned states for action... NTCA’s stand on voluntary relocation of villages is that states have been directed to act in consonance with the existing laws.”

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