

# Amid save-nomads cry, J&K moves to implement forest rights act

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Srinagar: A day after PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti railed about nomads in J&K being allegedly "harassed and displaced" in the name of reclaiming encroached forest land, the Union Territory administration on Wednesday fixed January 15 next year as the deadline to complete its first survey of claimants to forest land under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

As a state enjoying special status, J&K didn't need to implement the central act that safeguards the land rights of forest dwellers until it became a UT.

"Chief secretary B V R Subrahmanyam has reviewed the implementation of the forest rights law in line with the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, and work on surveying claims has already begun," a government spokesperson said.

Under the act, tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers are to be vested with rights to forest land for habitation, cultivation or livelihood through collection and disposal of minor forest produce.

Ex-CM Mehbooba, CPM's Yousuf Tarigami and former National Conference minister Mian Altaf Ahmad, who represents the nomadic Gujjar community, had recently accused the UT administration of evicting "lawful nomads from their hearths and kothas (temporary sheds)".

Taking up cudgels for nomads, Mehbooba tweeted on Tuesday, "They've been the rightful inhabitants & are now being evicted on discriminatory grounds. Kindly intervene @manojsinha & ensure that this stops."

Anantnag DC Kuldip Krishan Sidha contested allegations that people of the Gujjar Bakerwal community had been illegally evicted from the forested areas of Lidroo Pahalgam and their dwellings demolished. "The people residing on forest land have not been unnecessarily harassed, as is being alleged. Just as it is the right of people to stay there, it is also our duty to conserve and preserve the beautiful forest land," he said.