



Nationwide protest against proposed changes to forest act on Nov 12

12 October 2021

The Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan, a union of farmers' bodies, has called for a nationwide protest on November 12 against the proposed amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, (FCA) 1980.

At a core group meeting of the organisation on October 11, which was chaired by Ashok Choudhary, general secretary, All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP), the participants condemned the "unilateral" decision of the government and announced the protest.

After environmental activists criticised the government for releasing the consultation paper during an extended weekend (October 2-3), which reduced the number of days in the 15-day period set for public comments/suggestions by two, the ministry extended the deadline till November 1 on Tuesday.

"People have been agitating and struggling for their rights since the 1980s, which resulted in the FCA. These amendments once again turn the tide against the aspirations and rights of these people," Choudhary said.

The ministry of environment, forest and climate change had released a 'consultative paper' to exempt a range of infrastructure activities within the purview of the Act on October 2. The amendments exempt several non-forestry activities, including defence and security-related projects along the country's international border, zoos, forest training infrastructure, and surveys and investigations on forest land from the Act.

Hannan Mollah, CPI(M) member and general secretary, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), said that the attempt to amend the Act is another "backdoor ploy by surpassing the Constitution as well as the Parliamentary procedures". "The intention of these amendments is fundamentally handing over the natural resources to the hands of corporate entities and denying the rights of the natural resources-dependent communities on the forests," Mollah said.

This amendment has "bypassed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, (FRA) which acknowledged the historical injustice rendered to the forest-dwelling communities," Mollah added.

Roma Malik, member, executive council, AIUFWP, said that "without settling the claims under the FRA, these amendments are snatching the rights of the Gram Sabhas and centralising the federal structure of India", adding, "this definitely needs to be challenged as it also is against the spirit of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002".

Vijoo Krishnan, joint secretary, AIKS, said that there is a "hidden agenda to allow corporate entities to start cultivation of oil palm and plantations by giving them access to forest land. The amendments will only harm nature further and displace people".

Source: <https://www.newsclick.in/Nationwide-Protest-Against-Proposed-Changes-Forest-Act-Nov-12>