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No.11-70/2002-FC (Pt)

Dated: 3.2.2004

To

1. The Chief Secretary,
All the States/UTs
2. The Principal Secretary
All the States/UTs
3. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
All the States/UTs

Subject: Stepping up of process for conversion of forest villages into revenue villages.

Sir,

As you are aware that the National Forest Policy of 1988 envisages that development of forest villages should be on par with the revenue villages. In order to ensure this, the Ministry had issued guideline on 18th September, 1990 vide this office No.30-1/90-FP (5) for conversion of these forest villages into revenue villages. But so far, very few proposals have been received from the State Governments, and even of the proposals received, many are either incomplete and/or also include the encroachments in adjoining forests, as also the balance forest land in the compartment. So far only 384 forest villages have been converted into revenue villages (311 in Madhya Pradesh and 73 in Maharashtra) during the last one year. From rest of the states, proposals are yet to be received.

The matter was reviewed last year in September, 2003 by the Ministry on the basis of information furnished by 13 states (Assam, Chhatisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Orissa, Tripura, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), a total of 2690 forest villages have been enumerated as existing in the country. It has been decided that the state governments may be requested to immediately expedite the process of conversion of these forest villages into revenue villages.

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The following procedure may be followed while preparing the proposal so that the complete proposals are sent within a fixed time limit for taking a decision under the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

- i) This is to reiterate that the Central Government is committed to the conversion of forest villages into revenue villages in accordance with the guidelines approved by the Union Cabinet in 1990.
- ii) Central Government would consider all land on which pattas have been issued prior to 25.10.1980 by the concerned Divisional Forest Officers or the authorised officers and patta holders and the land is in their or legal successors' continuous possession. These lands will include land under habitation, existing buildings, gochar lands, health centre, community centre, cremation ground, road etc. for diversion. Isolated patches of settlement should be brought to the periphery of forests by the State Government and proposals sent for the areas in which the resettlement will take place.

For purposes of conversion of forest villages into revenue villages, the State Government shall submit a map delineating the external boundaries of the areas where pattas have been issued pre-1980. It should not be necessary for them to submit details of individual pattas.

- iii) The balance forest areas in the forest compartment shall be demarcated and retained as reserve forests and managed by the state forest department. These areas shall also be demarcated in the field by the state forest department.
- iv) Forest lands which have been encroached shall be dealt with in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry for regularisation of the encroachment and the State Governments shall ensure that all ineligible pre-1980 and post-1980 encroachments are evicted in tune with the Hon'ble Supreme Court orders. Only eligible category of pre-1980 encroachment shall be considered for regularisation if and when the ban on regularisation of the encroachment is lifted by the Supreme Court. The State Governments may also simultaneously approach the Supreme Court in this regard.
- v) If any of the forest village falls in a National Park and Sanctuary, the State Government shall submit the proposal for conversion to the revenue villages only after obtaining the approval of the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife and Hon'ble Supreme Court.
- vi) Regarding traditional rights of inhabitants of forest villages on forest lands outside the village boundaries, the State Governments may document such rights and notify them under the provisions of relevant Acts or Rules as applicable, furnishing the details of specific rights so granted, the villages where individuals are entitled and the specific forest-lands on which such rights may be exercised.

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It is therefore, requested that a time bound programme maybe draw up by the State Government for expeditiously converting forest villages into revenue villages in the next six months so that the people living in these villages can enjoy the fruits of development and also their dependency on forest is reduced.

Yours faithfully,

(Dr.V.K. Bahuguna)
Inspector General of Forests

Copy for information and necessary action to:

1. Chief Conservator of Forests (Central) of all Regional Offices located at Bhubaneshwar, Bangalore, Bhopal, Shillong, Lucknow, Chandigarh.
2. The Secretary Ministry of Tribal Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi.
3. The Advisor (Environment and Forests), Planning Commission, Yojana Bhawan, New Delhi.

(Dr.V.K. Bahuguna)
Inspector General of Forests