

Villagers all over Palamau division, waiting for completion of the process of recognition of their rights over lands they occupy, had similar tales to narrate: "Forest officials tell us we will be given "20 decimal - 50 decimal" (0.20 acres - 0.50 acres) at the most. Those who have five acres will get a maximum of 0.5 acres."

When Palamau deputy commissioner (DC) Amitabh Shukla announced the settlement of claims of around 170 villagers on April 14, many of them were those processed by 'thekedars' (contractors), according to Awadh Singh. The sizes of plots allotted, "averaging one



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acre" according to the DC, was between 0.4-1 acre, said Singh. The actual sizes were three to four times this size but the villagers, in awe of 'sahib log', government servants, were browbeaten into agreeing to this.

Forest officials are seen as the most serious hindrances to full implementation of the law. According to activists, forest officials not only do not extend



## Prospects in JHARKHAND

ACCORDING TO a report prepared by the Xavier Institute of Social Service in Ranchi, half of Jharkhand would go to various industries and mining activities. Over 32,088 sq km land of the total of 79,740 sq km available in Jharkhand, has already been utilised for setting up industries, dams and other projects. Another 242 sq km would go in to accommodate the 60-odd industrial houses which had already signed MoUs with the state government in recent months. The report said fresh coal blocks had been identified in areas covering 464 sq km. This indicated that almost 50 per cent of Jharkhand would be needed for industries, dams, roads and other projects.

any help to those wanting to exercise their rights over forest land as stipulated in the law, they resort to various devices to deny them those rights. The forest official, who is a mandatory member of the joint verification team often does not turn up for meetings to settle claims. A

forest department functionary in chief conservator's office said the claims were not being processed fast enough as no claims were being received. "We can clear the applications only when we get them," he said.

Corruption, too, has muddled the process. According to Awadh Singh, involved in helping villagers in the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, the 'amin' who measures the piece of land claimed by a family, often demands Rs 1500-Rs 2500 from every villager for doing his job. Hence, so far, according to latest data, Jharkhand has settled claims of slightly over 9,000 tribal families.

Compare – or contrast – this with the eagerness with which the government has rushed through MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with corporate entities, awarding them nearly two lakh acres of land, much of it forest, with utter disregard to environmental and social concerns. In Keradari Block in Hazaribagh district, 1,300 acres of the total about 1,400 acres that have been given to a corporate house is forest land, says leading activist Dayamani Barla. Not a single villager in the area has yet been given any 'patta' or piece of land under the Forest Rights Act.

It is the government and the corporate houses that are aware of the land and resources available; the people who

| State        | No. of claims received at Gram Sabha | No. of titles distributed | No. of claims rejected | No. of claims disposed of by 30.04.2010 |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Chhattisgarh | 491374                               | 214918                    | 271468                 | 486386                                  |
| Jharkhand    | 29551                                | 6079                      | 3036                   | 9115                                    |