No Welfare, No State

In an inversion of the system, people in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are fighting the government to get the law enforced, writes RAJESH SINHA

The CRPF camp in a village school off Bundu, barely 30 km from Ranchi, the Jharkhand capital, is the only visible sign of government for miles. But its writ doesn’t run. The CRPF men stopped going to the villages about a month ago.

A Maoist living in a hut within striking distance of the school feels this is a result of the State suffering reverses in Lalgarh (West Bengal), Orissa and Dantewada (Chhattisgarh). “We have never seen the government take interest in this area or its people,” says the rebel. “We only have unpleasant experiences with the government officials who come to harass us or make money in the name of non-existent development work,” he says.

“The government wants to clear these forests of the original inhabitants and hand over all the riches of our resources to big industrial houses and multinationals,” he adds, “We will not allow this. We shall fight them tooth and nail.”

There can be no acceptance accorded to Maoists who take law in their own hands, challenge the authority of the State, levy ‘taxes’ and generally break the law in several other ways. But neither can acceptance be accorded to a government that also frequently breaks the law and conspires with the rich and powerful against the poor. These strong words find credence in Chhattisgarh. Land claims filed by the villagers in many parts of the State under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) are nowhere near any settlement. With no proper resettlement and rehabilitation policy in place, tribals get a pittance as compensation, losing land and livelihood for ‘development’ that benefits others.

Until February 2010, Chhattisgarh had given land rights to 2,14,633 families out of the 4,86,101 claims filed. A larger number of claims — 2,71,468 — were rejected. In areas like Dantewada, where villages lie abandoned as people have been forced to move to Salwa Judum camps, the FRA has become infructuous. Those who refuse to move are branded Naxalites. Caught between the Naxalites and the police, several hundred Adivasis have walked to Orissa or Andhra Pradesh. There are other shortcomings as well in the government claims. As in Jharkhand, the land rights given in Chhattisgarh for 1-2.5 acres are far smaller than traditional land holdings. Community rights granted over forest land, for an entire village in Chhattisgarh, averages seven hectares, which is far more than the 1 acre that is granted in Jharkhand.

There are other ways in which rules have been brazenly flouted. According to the FRA, the claims of families are to be decided by the Gram Sabha’s Van Adhikar Samiti (Forest Rights Commit-