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79 per cent land oustees tribals

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OVER A million people have been ousted from their homes in the last decade, mostly from Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand, a survey done by NGOs has shown.

Of the 14 million displaced, 79 per cent were found to be Scheduled Tribes from the four states, which are hotbeds of Naxalite activity.

Though such a high percentage of the displaced are Scheduled Tribes, the community makes up only 8.2 per cent of India's population.

The NGOs, ActionAid and Laya, as well as the Indian Social Institute conducted the survey that questioned the government's model of development, which is alienating an already vulnerable section of society.

The total area acquired for setting up industries in the four states was found to be 10.2 million acres - roughly the area 28 times the size of Delhi.

Projects for which land has been acquired include mines, industrial plants and dams.

The study pointed to a correlation between attempts to exploit minerals, forests and rivers on an industrial scale and the increasing impoverishment and growing number of human rights violation cases among those displaced.

The report also noted that all these states have seen a rise in both peaceful and violent protests, which are countered increasingly by an aggressive state hand. "Largescale displacement induced by India's dogged pursuit of economic growth is ousting adivasis from land, livelihood, ancestral homes and places of worship," said Bratindi Jena, who works for tribal rights with ActionAid. She added that tribal communities are increasingly under attack in the name of development.

The NGOs also spoke to a number of tribals in these states.

Gobindha Marin, who was displaced because of a refinery project in Orissa said his land was taken. "They took our farming land. They left some houses. They took the cremation ground, temple, well and pond. How will we survive."

Kumthadi Vadaka, another tribal from Orissa, said: "We won't leave. We are mountain people, if we go somewhere else we will die. We will live here and die here."

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said earlier this year that Maoist insurgency was the single most important threat to the country's internal security.

And the four states worst affected by displacement of tribals seem to be providing the most fertile ground for Naxalite insurgency.



File picture of a rally of displaced villagers in Delhi

DISPLACEMENT ALERT

OUSTED 1.4 million

STATES Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand

SCHEDULED TRIBES 79 per cent of the displaced

AREA ACQUIRED 10.2 million acres