Tripura: Ex-militants build bamboo dwellings in forest; fresh tension in troubled Kanchanpur

Officials said those who had been encroaching the local forests were identified to be members of different surrendered militants groups

by Mrinal Banik
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Agartala: Tension is brewing in the entire Kanchanpur sub-division under North Tripura district after locals noticed that some unknown persons have been building bamboo dwellings in reserve forest areas for the last couple of days.
Officials said those who had been encroaching the local forests were identified to be members of different surrendered militants groups. So far, no one from the administration or police could clearly ascertain as to which militant groups are responsible for the act.

Some of the photos and videos available with EastMojo showcase that some people had been installing bamboo structures in the forest areas and constructing house-like infrastructure.

Sub-divisional Magistrate, Kanchanpur had already promulgated section 144 in the areas to avoid any conflict situation between the newcomers and the local inhabitants.

Speaking on the issue, OC Kanchanpur police station Udhyam Debbarma said, “The group, which is constructing houses in the forest land, are in negotiating terms with the administration. According to preliminary reports, they belong to the deprived section of surrendered militants who previously served in proscribed organizations like NLFT (National Liberation Front of Tripura) and ATTF (All Tripura Tiger Force). So far, no one from this group has come to light as a leader. We are keeping a close watch on the situation.”

On being contacted, Nagesh Kumar B, District Magistrate of North Tripura, said that a meeting had been scheduled on April 10 next.

“A meeting has been convened on next Monday at the office of District Magistrate North Tripura to discuss the situation there. A delegation of the surrendered militant group has also been invited for talks. After we heard the news, we tried to initiate talks. Once they join the table talks then only we can say anything on their demands. Otherwise, we don’t have any idea regarding their demands,” he added.
Meanwhile, local sources have said that the encroachment on forest land is being done in two specific areas and both of them have strategic importance for that particular sub-division.

The first part falls in Manu-Mangpui by-pass road that connects Kanchanpur sub-division with Manu. The second part lies adjacent to Kanchanpur-Machmara road which is another link road for the subdivision.

Locals said if both the roads are blocked, the whole Kanchanpur sub-division will be cut off from the rest of the state.

An FIR was also lodged against these illegal structures being built in the forest areas.

Speaking on the issue, newly elected MLA from Kanchanpur and Tipra Motha Party leader Philip Kumar Reang said, “I am totally unaware of what is going on there. The state government is the right authority to speak on the issue.”

Sources said some ex-militants, who were earlier associated with BNLF (Bru National Liberation Front), who laid down arms in Assam’s Cachar district, are also part of this group.
Kanchanpur subdivision in North Tripura district is one of the volatile areas of the state where anti-Bru protests turned violent in 2020 that even caused loss of lives.

Even though the majority of the displaced Bru migrants had been shifted from North Tripura district, Kanchanpur is the subdivision where anti-Bru sentiments among the non-tribes and Minzo settlements are still palpable.

EastMojo also contacted two of the active organisations of ex-militants fighting for the rights of surrendered rebels. Amrit Reang, who is heading DMRC (Deprived Returnees Movement Committee) an umbrella body of ex-rebels, said that his organisation has no links with what is happening at Kanchanpur.

“Some other group seeking rehabilitation may be responsible for that,” he said.

Leader of TUIRPC (Tripura United Indigenous Returnees People’s Council) Daniel Borok Debbarma also distanced himself from the bamboo constructions in Kanchanpur.

Notably, both these organisations had been actively taking part in agitation seeking a proper rehabilitation package for the families of surrendered militants.

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