

# Ensure rights of tribals in border areas: National ST panel

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BHUBANESWAR: The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has asked the Odisha chief secretary to ensure basic human rights and justice to tribals living close to the bordering states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The commission issued a notice to Pradeep Kumar Jena on March 14 after taking cognisance of the petition filed by rights activist and lawyer Radhakanta Tripathy on the matter last year. He alleged that over 10,000 tribals across 45 villages are deprived of basic human rights due to the negligence of the state government.

NCST has sought a detailed reply within 15 days. If Jena does not submit the report by that time, the commission can issue

summons for his appearance in person or by a representative before it.

In his petition filed on November 29, Tripathy alleged that Odisha has border disputes with Andhra Pradesh over the highest number of villages. The state has about 38 villages, most of which are in Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts, which share borders with West Bengal. Besides, seven villages have disputes with Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. "The state government has admitted that the boundaries of over 100 of its villages could not be determined. It has no proper records of the disputed villages. In view of this, I have requested the NCST to take this matter seriously and get the investigation done in a timely manner, so that the deprived people will get relief," the petitioner said.

He added that the tribals are struggling to get basic amenities like potable drinking water, communication facilities, benefits of social welfare schemes, education and healthcare.

