

CG EOW files chargesheet in tendupatta case

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Raipur: Chhattisgarh Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has filed a chargesheet in a high-profile corruption case involving the embezzlement of crores meant for tendupatta (forest produce) collectors in Sukma district of Bastar.

The case includes a district forest officer (DFO), four forest officials, and nine managers of primary forest produce cooperatives in one of the state's most sensitive and Maoist-affected tribal regions. The chargesheet, spanning over 4,500 pages,

was filed on Tuesday before the Special Anti-Corruption Court in Dantewada, under various sections of the IPC, including criminal conspiracy, forgery, and misuse of official position, along with provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018).

According to the EOW chief Amresh Mishra, former DFO Ashok Kumar Patel, while serving in Sukma Forest Division, abused his official position and colluded with subordinate forest officials and mana-

gers of tendupatta societies to divert a significant portion of the Rs 7 crore tendupatta bonus fund meant for collectors during the 2021 and 2022 collection seasons.

Fake documents were allegedly prepared and used to siphon off the money without distributing it to the actual beneficiaries.

So far, the investigation has covered eight out of 17 targeted forest cooperatives, revealing embezzlement of Rs 3.92 crore, officials said. The affected areas include so-

me of the most remote and Naxal-affected regions such as Madaiguda, Golapalli, Kistaram, Jagargunda, Chintalnar, Chintagufa, Bhejji, Konta, and Polampalli, where the bonus scheme was allegedly manipulated.

Inhabitants of these tribal villages, who rely heavily on tendupatta collection for livelihood—were found to be unaware of the bonus scheme during the course of the investigation. Their testimonies formed a critical part of the evidence presented in the chargesheet, officials said. Those named as accused in-

clude Ashok Kumar Patel, former DFO, other forest officials Chaituram Baghel, Devnath Bhardwaj, Manish Kumar Barse, and Podiyami Idima, cooperative managers Payam Satyanarayan alias Shatru, Mohd Sharif, C H Ramna (Chitturi), Sunil Nuppo, Ravi Kumar Gupta, Ayatu Korsa, Manoj Kawasi, Rajshekhhar Puranik alias Raju, and B Sanjay Reddy.

Officials said that investigation is still ongoing for the remaining nine societies, suggesting the scope of the 'scam' could be widened in the future.

