

Clash over 'Green Gold'

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In news— Tribal residents of 50 villages in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon and Kanker districts have decided to file an FIR against an official of the state forest department after he confiscated the tendu leaves ('Green Gold') that they had collected.

Dispute over its collection and selling-

- **Tendu (*Diospyros melanocaylon*) is also called 'green gold' and is a prominent minor forest produce in India.**
- **In 1964, the trade in tendu leaves was nationalised in then-undivided Madhya Pradesh.**
- Until then, people were free to sell tendu leaves in markets across the country.
- Maharashtra adopted the same system in 1969, undivided Andhra Pradesh in 1971, Odisha in 1973, Gujarat in 1979, Rajasthan in 1974 and Chhattisgarh in 2000.
- Under this arrangement, the **state forest department collects tendu leaves, allows their transportation and sells them to traders.**
- **In Chhattisgarh, tendu leaf is collected through the state minor forest produce federation.**
- There are more than 10,300 collection centres or phads where tendu leaves are collected from collectors and the dispute is essentially about who has the right to sell the leaves.
- State governments say only they can do so due to nationalisation but **tendu leaf collectors cite 'The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006'** and the **2013 Supreme Court verdict** in the much-touted **Niyamgiri case to say private collectors can sell them on their own.**
- Tendu leaf collectors allege that the government gives them a lower price for the leaves, while it fetches a

higher price in the open market.

- **The tribals, after having obtained forest rights leases under the FRA 2006, argue** that as many types of minor forest produce like Mahua, Salbeej or the seeds of the Sal tree and Chironji or Almondette kernels (*Buchanania lanzan*) are collected and sold by tribals, there should not be a dispute over tendu leaves.

About Tendu leaf-

- The tendu tree (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) is found widely across central India.
- Leaves plucked from its shrubs are used to wrap bidi, the poor man's cigarette.
- **This tree is commonly known as "tendu," but also called "abnus" in Andhra Pradesh, "kendu" in Orissa and West Bengal, "tembru" in Gujarat, "kari" in Kerala, "tembhurni" in Maharashtra, and "bali tupra" in Tamil Nadu.**
- **It generally grows in dry mixed deciduous forests,** occurring alongside *Shorea robusta* and *Tectona grandis*.
- **Botanical name of the tree is *Diospyros melanoxylon*.**
- Off-cuts of leaves are burned and the ash is used in tooth powder.
- **Leaves of many other plants like *Butea monosperma*, *Shorea robusta* etc.** also find use as Bidi wrappers in different parts of the country but the texture, flavour and workability of tendu leaves are unmatched.