

Alienation of tribals taking a dangerous turn: PM

New Delhi, Nov 4 (IANS) Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Wednesday admitted there had been a “systemic failure” in giving tribals a stake in modern economic processes and emphasised that “equitable growth” was not possible without guaranteeing legitimate rights of these marginalised and isolated sections of society.

In a hard-hitting speech, the prime minister warned that the alienation of tribals was taking a “dangerous turn” and said the “social and economic abuse of our tribal communities can no longer be tolerated”.

“There has been a systemic failure in giving the tribals a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude into their living spaces. The alienation built over decades is now taking a dangerous turn in some parts of our country,” Manmohan Singh said while addressing a conference of chief ministers and state ministers of tribal affairs.

“The systematic exploitation and social and economic abuse of our tribal communities can no longer be tolerated.”

“But the fact is that no sustained activity is possible under the shadow of the gun. Nor have those who claim to speak for the tribals offered an alternate economic or social path that is viable. The cult of violence will only bring greater misery to the common people,” he said.

“We have to counter this threat with determination. While violence cannot be tolerated, the tribals must be the primary beneficiaries of the development process. We have to win the battle for their hearts and their mouths.”

Manmohan Singh’s comments came as forest dwellers of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat gathered in the capital to protest the non-implementation of the Forest Rights Act and the repression unleashed by authorities in their states.

“We cannot have equitable growth without guaranteeing the legitimate rights of these eventually marginalised and isolated sections of our society,” the prime minister said.

He lamented that several states were lagging in the distribution of title deeds under the Forest Rights Act 2009 and urged them to speed up the process so that it could be completed in time.

“While some states have achieved remarkable progress in the distribution of titles, others are lagging behind. In a few states, even the process of receiving claims is yet to commence. This cannot be considered as an acceptable situation,” he said.

The distribution of titles, he said, was an important and necessary first step that recognises the symbiotic relationship between the forest and the forest dweller.

“It attempts to deal holistically with the issue in terms not only of the recognition of rights but of livelihood opportunities and environmental protection and conservation. If implemented in its true spirit this act will provide significant multipliers in the processes of economic development in some of our critical habitats.”

Delving on the losses suffered by tribals displaced as a result of acquisition of land, the prime minister called on improving laws and mechanisms.

“It is not just the displacement and disorientation caused by separation from the land that is at issue. One can only imagine the psychological impact of seeing the cutting down of the vast very forests that have nurtured the existence of these communities for centuries.”

“But resettlement and rehabilitation raise serious issues not just of monetary compensation. We have to address issues relating to creating sustainable livelihoods, preserving the traditional sense of community and helping the tribals cope with the trauma of dislocation and alienation.”

He also pointed out that over the years a large number of cases had been registered against the tribals, leading to harassment.

“The heavy hand of the criminal justice system has become a source of harassment and exploitation. Therefore, we need to take a more enlightened approach in line with current thinking on how to deal with such issues.”

Read more: http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/politics/alienation-of-tribals-taking-a-dangerous-turn-pm-lead_100269761.html#ixzz0VxJsGbTk