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Concern over forest policy

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Campaign for Survival and Dignity, a national platform of tribal and forest dwellers organisations, has expressed concern over the Union government's recent decision to spend huge sums of money collected in the name of "compensatory afforestation."

In a statement issued here on Thursday, the Campaign said such a policy would accelerate deforestation and result in destruction of wildlife. It would institutionalise a system that encouraged use of forests on payment. It would also displace more tribal people and forest dwellers.

When forests were cleared for changing land use, the locals were neither informed nor consulted. This would also be the case if funds were allocated for compensatory plantations, the statement said. "In both the cases — where forests are destroyed and where compensatory forests are developed — the people lose their land and livelihoods."

The Campaign said the policy would increase violations of the Forest Rights Act through illegal eviction of cultivators, as the Forest Department would rush to access the huge funds coming in from plantations. Monoculture tree plantation would also cause environmental damage and biodiversity threats.

This would also deny the State governments and local bodies their rightful share of the money, the statement said. "A crucial opportunity to make India's forest management system more environmentally sensitive, transparent, democratic, and accountable has now been lost."

"Back door deals"

The Campaign said the Ministry had acted in a blatantly unconstitutional manner, ignoring both Parliament and the State governments and proceeding through back door deals to ensure easy access and continued control over the enormous funds.

This would only fuel more deprivation, conflicts and violence in the forest areas, while accelerating the loss of some of the country's precious resources, the statement said.

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