



Give tribals rights to minor forest produce, plan panel to tell govt

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New Delhi : Saying that winning the hearts of the tribal people in the 35 Naxal-affected districts is crucial to winning the battle against Left-wing extremism, the Planning Commission is likely to suggest comprehensive changes in the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for the development of these districts.

The Plan panel is preparing to tell the government that it is imperative to grant rights over the "minor forest produce" to the tribals to ensure their livelihood.

In the course of a marathon meeting of the Internal Planning Commission (IPC) chaired by its deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the panel members today stressed on mitigating the feeling of exclusion among the tribals through the sincere implementation of the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 to allow them their natural right over the minor forest produce.

They also suggested amending the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, 2006 to promote economic development in the tribal areas. "Money is not a problem for the IAP. It can be given in first and second supplementary grants. A broad plan has been worked out, and we want to take it to the cabinet after adequate discussion," Ahluwalia said after emerging from the meeting. "If we want to put some money — which I think we should in the first supplementary (demands of grants) — we will have to give a number. There will certainly be some number that will be put down in the supplementary (demands of grants). If it turns out we wanted more there is a second supplementary and a third supplementary (demands of grants)," he reasoned.

"There is an express need to ensure that the tribals have a natural right over the minor forest produce to sustain their livelihood. The monetary valuation of the minor forest produce in the tribal-dominated areas amounts to nearly Rs 50,000 crore and we precisely want that the commission factors this in while finalising the IAP," a senior official of the Plan panel said. The meeting assumes importance as it comes a day before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh meets the chief ministers of the Naxal-affected states.

The commission has proposed a Rs 13,742 crore IAP for the Left-wing extremism affected districts, though its members do not appear to be comfortable with its present contours. "The IAP was an official exercise so far and now the views of the members would be incorporated to make it a complete and a comprehensive document," the official said.

The commission has favoured inclusion of the inputs from the mid-term appraisal of the 11th Plan in the IAP and also incorporating the views of the district planning committees in formulating the plan as it would be seen by the people of the districts as reflecting their real needs and aspirations, the official said.