

Issue Date: Saturday , November 21 , 2009

Stability card in tribal heartland - Sonia shares dais with Marandi in Dumka

OUR BUREAU



Congress president Sonia Gandhi in Dhanbad on Friday. Picture by Gautam Dey

Dhanbad/Dumka, Nov. 20: Sonia Gandhi today gave the Congress's campaign in Jharkhand a riveting start by addressing two huge rallies where she appealed to tribal sentiments by promising the party's unstinted support to all indigenous people and assuring them that not a single tribal would be displaced without proper rehabilitation.

"If we come to power, our government will not compromise on any displacement for any industrial set-up without proper compensation for land oustees," she claimed in Dumka, touching upon a sensitive issue that has rocked the state in various forms throughout the last few years.

Addressing a crowd of over 10,000 people at a local stadium in Dumka this afternoon with new ally Babulal Marandi of Jharkhand Vikas Morcha by her side, Sonia said the Congress-led government at the centre had passed the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act to give ownership rights to tribals dwelling in forest land.

In Dhanbad, where she addressed a gathering of over 12,000 — arguably the largest the coal capital's Golf Ground has seen in recent memory — on her own, she raised similar issues, namely tribal welfare, peace and stability.

"History will tell that tribals, scheduled castes and minorities remained traditional supporters of Congress and the party is still committed to their welfare and uplift," she said. "But due to political instability and corruption during different regimes no welfare and developmental programmes could be implemented in Jharkhand."

Sonia arrived at Dhanbad around 12.25pm and spent over an hour. She then moved to Dumka, where she spoke for around 15 minutes. At both venues she stressed on stability and governance, indicating that that would be the main poll plank of the Congress that's fighting the five-phased Assembly elections on the backfoot ever since the Madhu Koda affair blew up in its face.

Jharkhand, she said, was the product of a long struggle but within nine years of its creation, the state has had to face nine chief ministers and subsequently bad governance.

"As a result, Naxalites were able to hold the state to ransom. Give the Congress a chance to serve you in Jharkhand and see the difference. I am assuring you that a Congress government will restore peace in the state," she said.

Sonia also blamed political rivals for having left the state in the lurch. "There has been no stable government here which was the main reason of such a poor state of affairs. Look, it is only the Congress which can provide a stable government which is essential for development — and to counter corruption," she claimed.

JVM chief Babulal Marandi, who shared the dais with Sonia in Dumka, said the JVM-Congress combine would get absolute majority to change the fate of Jharkhand.

In Dhanbad, Sonia mentioned the Jharia displacement issue due to the underground fire and noted the sad plight of contract labourers working at mines. She said the government would frame new laws for contract labourers, which would include pension and insurance benefits.

Not forgetting to mention the benefits of President's rule, she said that in the last few months, over 9 lakh people of the state had benefited from the recently introduced welfare schemes for BPL families.

In a move to woo women, she declared that the Centre had reserved 33 per cent seats for them in panchayats, which would be increased to 50 per cent.

Sonia, who was accompanied by Union minister Subodh Kant Sahay and state Congress president Pradip Balmuchu, also made it a point to introduce the alliance's candidates. Terming Dumka candidate Stephen Marandi as a "mature" politician, she said people should vote for experienced leaders like him. "The party has given such candidates who can take care of you in a better manner," she said.

In Dhanbad, she introduced Baghmara candidate .P. Lal, Bokaro candidate Israel Ansari, Chandankiyari JVM candidate Amar Boury and Sindri's JVM candidate Phulchand Mahto.

