

No gram sabha consent needed for road, rail & power lines

The decision was taken in a meeting convened by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and attended by Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan and Tribal Affairs Minister V Kishore Chandra Deo recently.

"Recently the Ministry took a decision that, subject to Forest Rights Act, there will not be requirement of consent of each of the Gram Sabhas through which such linear projects such as roads, canals, transmission towers etc pass," Natarajan today said, adding that the Ministry would soon issue a circular regarding this.

However the tribal rights activists have criticised the government's move.

"The Gram Sabhas power under the Forest Rights Act apply to any kind of project and one cannot arbitrarily exempt some. Better solution exist to protect rights and ensure effective regulation than illegal exemptions from the law," tribal rights activist Shankar Gopalakrishnan said.

She said the step will help in streamlining the forest and environment clearance for such projects.

"This was an important issue which was debated at great length along with the Tribal Affairs Minister as well as the Prime Minister. The Tribal Affairs Minister studied the issue and he gave us his considered opinion in writing that as far as linear projects are concerned this step could be taken to streamline the projects," she said.

Natarajan also said that the UPA government is very serious over the implementation FRA, which she termed as its "flagship legislation".

The move by the Environment Ministry will help in reducing the time lag in obtaining forest and environment clearances for critical infrastructure projects.