

Tribals, fishermen, citizens write to PM against move to bypass Forest Rights Act for mega projects

NEW DELHI, FEB 4:

Eminent citizens, tribals and fishworkers' organisations have written to the Prime Minister urging him to withhold the existing clearances for diversion of forest land for mega projects that violate the provisions of the Forests Rights Act (FRA) or the 2009 order of the Ministry of the Environment and Forests (MoEF) on compliance.

“Where projects have already come up, those affected should be rehabilitated as well as granted additional compensation for the criminal violation of their rights (along with prosecution of those responsible),” says the letter.

They also urged the Prime Minister to ensure that no forest land was taken without the consent of the Gram Sabha, and sought criminal prosecution proceedings against officials who had diverted or tried to divert forest land without respecting people's rights.

The letter is signed by author Mahashweta Devi; Ajit Banerjee, Ex-Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, West Bengal; Samar Bagchi, Ex-Director, Birla Industrial & Technological Museum, Kolkata; Kalyan Rudra, river expert; Balai Soren, Secretary, Adibasi Banabasi Adhikar Mancho; Pradip Chatterjee, Secretary, National Fishworkers' Forum; Gobinda Das, Secretary, Sundarban Matsyajibi Joutha Sangram Committee; and Tejendralal Das, President, Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum; among others.

The letter is in response to recent media reports that the Prime Minister's Office had come out with 'recommendations' aiming to legalise forest clearances by the MoEF for mega projects.

The letter said dubious reasons had been cited for delays in project clearances, “something which none other than your Environment Minister has shown to be resulting from faulty documentation, fraudulent proposals and attempts at engaging in speculation,” and added that the rights of some of the most marginalised and oppressed citizens of the country would be sacrificed if “unacceptable changes” were made in the forest clearance process.