

Kerala ignoring tribal rights, failed to implement PESA Act, says Vikrant Bhuria

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THE HINDU BUREAU

Kerala has failed to implement the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act in tribal regions despite the law safeguarding the constitutional rights of Scheduled Tribes, Tribal Congress national president Vikrant Bhuria said on Tuesday (February 17).

Inaugurating the tribal parliament meeting at Valayanchal in Aralam farm, he alleged that while several northern and north-eastern States acted promptly to extend the Panchayati Raj provisions to scheduled areas, southern States, including Kerala, showed negligence. He said tribal communities constituting around 1.5% of Kerala's population were among the worst affected due to the failure of the authorities to create an effective mechanism parallel to PESA at the panchayat level.

Mr. Bhuria pointed out that although forest and resource-rich areas were largely inhabited by tribal communities, there were no officially notified scheduled areas in Kerala under PESA. As a result, he said, a separate and empowered governance structure ensuring tribal self-rule had not been realised.

When tribal populations form a sizeable percentage in certain local bodies, their political relevance increases, but smaller communities require greater care and protection due to their fragile socio-economic and ecological environment, he said.

Alleging that policies favoured big business interests, Mr. Bhuria said tribal lands rich in minerals and forests were being alienated through various steps.

He asserted that a united struggle would be launched to protect the constitutional rights and livelihood security of the Scheduled Tribes.

Seminars were held on various topics. Tribal elders were honoured at the function.

P.V. Rajagopal, founder of Ekta Parishad, presided over the meeting. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president Sunny Joseph delivered the keynote address. KPCC research and policy cell chairman J.S. Adoor, former KILA director P.P. Balan, Tribal National Congress national coordinator Mohinder Kanwar, M. Geethanandan, Sreeraman Koyyon, and Aralam grama panchayat president V. Shobha were present.

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