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# TN: Tribal People Hold Rally and Public Meeting After Many Hurdles

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***A rally and public meeting were held in Namakkal on Thursday to mark the conclusion of the fourth national conference of the Adivasi Adhikar Rashtriya Manch (AARM). Around 7,000 adivasi people from across Tamil Nadu participated in the rally.***

Associations of various tribal groups - such as Kattunayakanar, Irular, Konda Reddy and Kuravar, Kurumbans - from Chengalpattu, Tiruvannamalai, Kallakurichi, Krishnagiri, Erode, Coimbatore, Salem, Namakkal, Vellore, Dharmapuri, Trichy, Didugal, Chennai and Villupuram districts in Tamil Nadu- participated in the rally.

They raised slogans demanding the Union government to withdraw amendments to the Forest Conservation Act and to implement the Forest Rights Act without dilution.

Although information regarding the rally was submitted to Namakkal police authorities four weeks ago, the local officials repeatedly denied permission. The Tamil Nadu Tribal-Peoples Association (TNTA) declared the rally would take place as planned despite no permission. Only after



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the conference started did the police provide permission for an alternate route for the procession.

At the public meeting, TNTA president P Shanmugam said, "Carrying out rallies and processions and staging protests and demonstrations are rights bestowed upon the Indian people by the Constitution. It is not to be decided by police officials who come and go. The ruling class has no agency to deny us these rights."

"We have the right to express our needs and demands to fellow people and the state through rallies. Whether the state is fulfilling the demands is secondary, but the Constitution gives us the right to speech and expression," he said.

Further, the night before the procession, past 11 pm, the police removed TNTA and AARM flags with the help of municipal workers. TNTA leaders went to the spot at midnight and held a spontaneous road-block demonstration. The police accepted their mistake and helped re-erect the flags.



The rally began at 4 pm at Bodhupatti bus terminus and concluded at the public meeting spot at Poonga Salai.

### **'UNDECLARED WAR ON ADIVASI PEOPLE'**

AARM vice-chairperson Brinda Karat said, "An undeclared war is waged against the constitutional, legal and democratic rights of the adivasi people of India."

"In favour of corporates, Adani and Ambani, Narendra Modi is changing the rules of the Forest Rights Act. Therefore, this fourth national

conference of AARM has resolved to take our flag to every state and every village in India and resist the government's attempts to evict adivasi people from their land," she said.

"The Forest Conservation Act is a grossly anti-tribal legislation. In the name of sanctuaries, adivasis living in the forest for generations are being evicted. For adivasis, democracy and self-rule mean the gram sabha; for centuries, adivasis fought for these community rights. But this government has eliminated the words 'gram sabha' from the Act," she said.

The conference delegates resolved to defend their rights and not to bow down before the Modi government's bulldozer.

Jitendra Chaudhury said, "The first rebellion against the British was by the adivasis, the Santhal rebellion. Everywhere, the adivasis sacrificed their lives to achieve independence, such as in Alluri Sitaramaraju and Warli rebellions. But today, after 75 years of independence, the present dispensation is snatching away whatever we have achieved."



"Unless our democratic and secular forces are strengthened, nobody can be protected," he said, giving a call for unity.

Pulin Bihari Baske, newly elected AARM convenor and former MLA from West Bengal, spoke of victorious movements of tribals in Tamil Nadu. He particularly mentioned the struggle for ST certificates for house-site *pattas* and roadways to tribal settlements.

The Tamil Nadu government recommended that Hill Pulayan, Erode Malayali, Vettaikaran, Kuruman sub-sect and Kuruvan sub-sect communities be

recognised as tribals and given the ST certificate. The Modi government refused the recommendation.

Assuring the tribals of Tamil Nadu, Karat said, "You fight here in Tamil Nadu, and we will raise your voice in Delhi to ensure tribal certification is given to you."

Shanmugam said TNTA leaders met the chief minister of Tamil Nadu after the DMK formed the government in 2021.

"The chief minister agreed there is an indifference to implement the Forest Rights Act in the state. He promised to implement the Act properly, but there has been no improvement. At a time when the Modi government is diluting the Act, delay in implementing the Act is a dangerous trend."

"Tamil Nadu must implement the rule that non-*adivasi* people cannot buy *adivasi* lands. *Pattas* for land already bought must be made null and void," said Dilli Babu, newly elected treasurer of AARM.

TNTA has brought tribal organisations in Tamil Nadu under one umbrella and represents the 37 recognised tribes in Tamil Nadu. The public meeting called for the united struggles of all tribal groups and a merger with the national-level movement.

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