

Ramesh for revamp of Maoist policy

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NEW DELHI, 11 OCT: The Union rural development minister, Mr Jairam Ramesh, today called for a complete "revamp" of the administration and governance in tribal areas to fight the growing threats of Maoism. He said various developmental schemes and "affirmative action" by the government had made only a marginal impact.

"We must come to grips with the sad reality that affirmative action programmes like reservation have had a very marginal impact on the welfare of the central and eastern Indian tribal communities," Mr Ramesh said, delivering a lecture "From Tirupati to Pashupati: Some Reflections on the Maoist Issue" organised by Prasar Bharati here.

"My firm belief is that a complete revamp of administration and governance in tribal areas, especially in central and eastern India, is the pressing



Mr Ramesh said empowering the tribals by giving them what is theirs will be of imperative importance. He said issues related to land ownership and land alienation must receive over-riding priority

need of the hour. Andhra Pradesh has attempted to do this through its ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) model but much more needs to be done," he said.

Mr Ramesh, who has travelled extensively to some left-wing extremism affected areas of Chhattisgarh and Orissa since taking over as the rural development minister, urged a "two-track approach ~ one that deals with the leadership of the Maoists and the other, which focuses on the concerns of the people they pretend/claim to serve".

There is clearly a need to recognise tribal populations as victims, first of state apathy and discrimination and then of the Maoist agenda, he said.

Explaining the topic of the lecture, Mr Ramesh said "From Tirupati to Pashupati: Some Reflections on the Maoist Issue" basically refers to the popular image in the media that a "liberated" Red corridor is sought to be created extending from Andhra Pradesh to Nepal and "cutting across the very heart of India".

"This has been described by the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to

be India's most serious internal security challenge and by the Home Minister Mr P Chidambaram to be even graver than the problem of terrorism," he pointed out.

Mr Ramesh said though the "armed communist insurgency" has assumed greater significance now, it is not new and the issue was confronted in Telangana region when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the home minister.

"The modern-day Maoists see themselves as legatees of this uprising, which Sardar Patel dealt with firmly but sensitively," the minister said.

Sharing his diagnosis of the menace, Mr Ramesh said his findings are that, "the Maoists are exploiting the tribals and the tribals themselves want peace, not war". He argued that the Maoists are using the tribal areas and issues for their tactical purposes. "The terrain and the

forests suit them for guerrilla war-

fare. They have spread their terror and ensured that the developmental activities are obstructed. The tribal cause, which the Maoists espouse,

is only a mask to further their own agenda," the minister said, adding the Malkangiri incident is a clear message from the tribals that they want development and not Maoist terror.

Thus, he said, the real challenge before the government and the country is to transform administration in tribal areas so as to give people a sense of participation and involvement but, more fundamentally, to preserve and protect their dignity.

"How do you prevent or address their continued victimisation, first by the state and now by the Maoists?" the minister asked. He said empowering the tribals "by giving them what is theirs" will be of imperative importance. He said issues related to land ownership and land alienation must receive over-riding priority.