

Karnataka Rejects Kasturirangan Report, We go by the people's needs and rights—Khandre

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HIGHLIGHTS

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Dharmasthala: The Karnataka government has officially rejected the contentious Kasturirangan report on environmental conservation, asserting that the decision reflects the demands of the state's people and representatives.

During a visit to Dharmasthala, Minister Khandre received a memorandum from the

Karnataka Adivasi Rights Coordination Committee, where tribal leaders raised several concerns about the challenges faced by forest dwellers. They called for decisive action to resolve disputes over forest and revenue land boundaries, expedite applications under the Forest Rights Act for agricultural land regularization, and issue title deeds to provide basic amenities for tribal families, particularly in the Kudremukh National Park area. They emphasized the need to ensure exclusive rights for tribals to collect forest products and urged the government to avoid making decisions under projects like eco-sensitive zones, elephant corridors, and tiger reserves that could negatively impact forest dwellers. Additionally, they requested that tribals be prioritized in recruitment for vacancies in state government departments.

Speaking at Kukke Subrahmanya, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre emphasized that communities residing on forest fringes have played a pivotal role in protecting and preserving these ecosystems for centuries. "We have conveyed to the Centre that the Kasturirangan report does not align with the realities of these regions. Conservation efforts will continue, but not at the cost of people's livelihoods," he stated. The minister also outlined ongoing efforts to address confusion surrounding forest and revenue land boundaries. A joint committee, comprising revenue and forest department officials, has been established to conduct a comprehensive survey across 31 districts. The findings, expected within six months, aim to resolve disputes and provide clarity to affected communities.

In response to the concerns raised by tribal representatives, Khandre assured that their grievances would be addressed in accordance with legal provisions. "The government is committed to protecting the rights of forest dwellers while upholding our conservation goals," he affirmed.

Khandre also highlighted the government's focus on infrastructure development in forest-fringe areas. Plans to improve the Kadamakallu-Kodagu Galeebeedu road near Kollamogru village and enhance facilities for trekkers at Kumaraparvatha were discussed. These initiatives, he noted, are part of a broader effort to balance development and conservation.

The minister expressed optimism about the state's greening efforts, noting that Karnataka is poised to significantly increase its forest cover by 2025. "Our strategies ensure that conservation aligns with the aspirations of the people," he added. The Adivasi delegation was led by Jayanand Pilikala, General Secretary of the Karnataka Adivasi Rights Coordination Committee, along with Vice President Lakshman Alangai Neriya and convener Shekhar Laila.

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