

DELHI

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Tribals threaten nation-wide stir over Bill on forest rights

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BHOPAL: The leaders spearheading the Adivasi Van Adhikar Abhiyan (tribals' forest rights campaign) served ultimatum on Friday that they would be forced to launch a country-wide agitation if the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill is not introduced in Parliament immediately.

The convener of the Abhiyan, Vijay Bhai, issued the ultimatum and demanded the immediate clearance of the Tribal Bill at a Press conference jointly addressed by the founder chairman of Gondwana Gantantra Party, Hira Singh Markam and repre-

sentatives of Samajwadi Party, Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, and Adivasi Svashasan Sangh. He said that a country-wide campaign would be launched to build public opinion in support of the Bill from August 15.

The Abhiyan convener said: "It is unfortunate that even more than half a century after Independence, we are being governed by laws made by the British." He particularly cited the Indian Forest Act 1927, Land Acquisition Act 1894, and the Revenue and Police acts of 1860 to drive home his point. He expressed resentment over the prevailing scenario saying that the tribals were being denied the right to till

their own land and protect their common resources.

The paradox is that the forest dwellers cannot collect minor forest produce from the forest areas even though they had traditionally subsisted on forest produce. Mr. Vijay Bhai criticized the move to hand over forest land to multinational companies to set up forest-based ventures. He said that tribals would never allow the systematic plundering of their land by the vested interests. He said that over 4 crore tribals had been uprooted across the country to make way for big dams and for the sake of mining and other projects.