

Chennai's poor evicted as Jharkhand tribals were

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By Express News Service

CHENNAI: Amidst the Chennai Corporation's exercise of evicting people living along waterbodies and packing them off to slum clearance board tenements, Swami Agnivesh on Thursday said people should not be chased out of the city which provides them a livelihood. Around 100 people from slum clearance board tenements on the outskirts of the city, who took part in the meeting, demanded pattas for the resettlements they have been allocated.

Agnivesh drew parallels with the eviction of tribals in Jharkhand by the government to make way for big corporates. "The reason I was attacked is because I told the tribals to stand up for their rights and not hand over their mineral-rich land to the government or corporates," said Agnivesh. Agnivesh also supported in-situ resettlement of people living along waterbodies. "The government should build these tenements along the river itself. If construction companies are able to do it for their high-profile clientele, why can't the government do it for the people living there for over three generations", he argued.

Agnivesh also accused the Central government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of acting on the behest of corporate giants to ensure political funding for his party ahead of the 2019 general elections. “The Centre is basically repaying its benefactors for the previous victory,” he charged.

In addition to patta for the resettlements, the people, gathered demanded proper amenities at the tenements. They alleged elevators in the high-rise settlements often don’t work and lights aren’t replaced.

“Residents of the Perumbakkam slum clearance board tenement are forced to draw water for cooking from the bathrooms,” said Vanessa Peter, an activist with the Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived and Urban Communities, explaining there is no consideration of human wellbeing when the tenements are planned.

“This is a form of modern untouchability,” she said, claiming that the placement of tenements in places such as Gudapakkam, Kannagi Nagar and Perumbakkam, ghettoises the community and hampers inclusion. The Chennai Corporation alone has allegedly evicted almost 13,000 families identified to have encroaching waterbodies after the Chennai floods of 2015.

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