

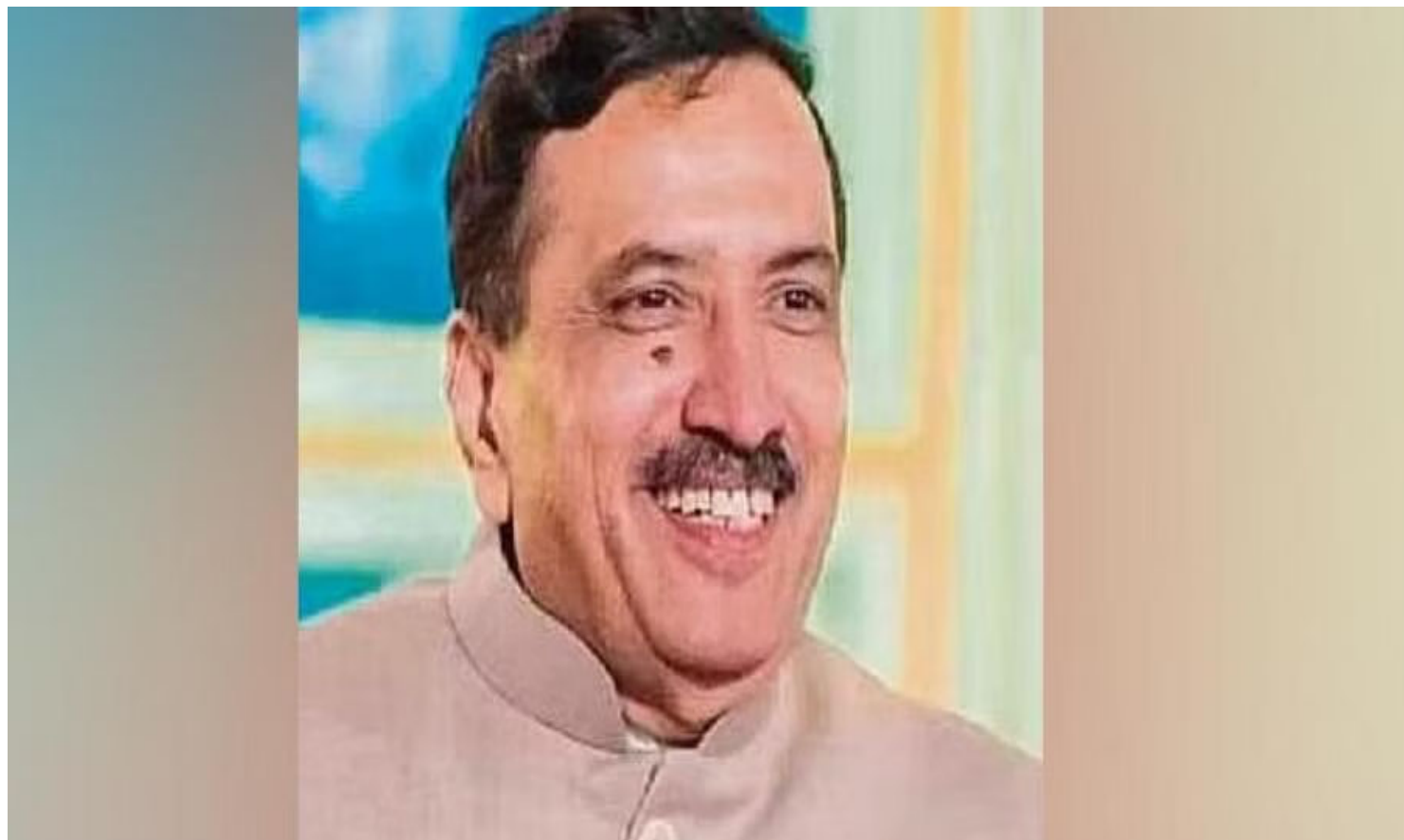
# Odisha should carefully identify tribes: Harsh Chouhan

*The NCST chairperson Harsh Chouhan said there is an increasing trend in the country of communities demanding to be recognised as tribal communities.*



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Harsh Chouhan

By Express News Service

**BHUBANESWAR:** The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) on Monday said the state government should meticulously identify tribal communities and define them within a robust mechanism frame.

Speaking on Odisha government's recommendation on including more than 160 communities in the Scheduled Tribes (STs) list, the NCST chairperson Harsh Chouhan said there is an increasing trend in the country of communities demanding to be

recognised as tribal communities.

“We have asked state governments to carry out an overall impact study and assess eligibility with all responsibilities before suggesting inclusion of any community. Any wrong inclusion would lead to injustice instead of doing justice to existing communities,” Chouhan told mediapersons here.

Suggesting that the state should adopt a conservative approach to prevent ‘powerful’ communities from being listed in ST list, he also demanded that the government carved out a separate department for tribal development as STs constitute 23 per cent of the state’s population.

From absence of health facilities and mobile connectivity in ST lands, misuse of district mineral fund (DMF) and non-utilisation of Scheduled Tribe Component (STC) funds for tribal development, rejection of forest rights claims to poor representation of tribals in PSUs, a panel of NCST led by Chouhan took up the issues with state government on Monday.

Chouhan said diversion of DMF for purposes other than development of STs is one of the biggest concerns in the state. Stating that DMF is a neglected area here, he said a majority of the tribal population is affected by mining but neither the tribals nor the officials associated with DMF are aware of its provisions.

Similar is the case with STC funds. Chouhan pointed out long-term delays in rehabilitation of project-affected tribals, pendency in provision of compensation to tribals who have been displaced by various projects. He said although several schemes are being implemented for tribals, their last point delivery is not happening.

On the education front too, the NCST team has found students living in inhuman conditions at the residential schools. He said the commission has suggested the state government to frame PESA rules.

After NCST teams visited areas inhabited by ST people and investigated their socio-economic development over the last few months, the panel reviewed the government schemes and funds meant for STs in Odisha on the day. They later met chief secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena and asked the state government to submit its report on the issues pointed out by NCST within a month.

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