

Arrest Chandrapur collector & bring him for hearing: ST panel

Was Summoned Twice in Land Allocation Case

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Chandrapur: District collector **Vinay Gowda GC** incurred the wrath of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribe (NCST) by not appearing in person after being summoned twice, and sending the deputy collector instead. The NCST has now issued orders to Maharashtra DGP Rajnish Seth to arrest Gowda and bring him before the commission on March 2.

Vinod Khobragade, a government patwari, had filed a complaint with NCST alleging that the government had allocated 63.6 hectares of land belonging to tribals from Kusambi vil-

lage, in Jiwti taluka, along with other government land, for limestone mining over 40 years ago. He alleged that the land was allocated to Manikghar Cement (now Ultratech Cement) without the consent of the tribals or payment of any compensation to them.

Khobragade said the commission had sent a notice to then collector Ajay Gulhane on September 29, 2022 asking him to submit a report in this regard within 15 days. However, he failed to submit the report, Khobragade alleged. The commission again sent a notice on January 2 asking incumbent collector Vinay Gowda to submit a report in the matter within 15 days. Khobragade alleged Gowda, too, overlooked the matter and did not submit the report. Taking cognisance of

the alleged defiance, NCST scheduled a hearing on the matter and sent a summons to Gowda to appear in person for the hearing.

Collector Gowda, however, skipped the hearing on February 16, and sent a deputy collector (encroachment) in his stead. Irked, the commission exercising its civil court powers under clause (8) of Article 338A of the Constitution and issued orders on February 21 to DGP Rajnish Seth to arrest Gowda and bring him in person before the NCST. The next hearing of the commission on the matter is scheduled for March 2.

Explaining his stand in writing, collector Gowda claimed that the state government had allocated the lease of the land in contention to the cement company for limestone mining on

April 30, 1979. He admitted receiving a summons to attend the hearing before the NCST regarding the complaint. However, due to other engagements he was unable to attend the hearing in person and the same was conveyed to the commission through a letter dated February 13. In place of the collector, the deputy collector (encroachment) was authorised to attend the hearing and the commission was informed accordingly, Gowda said. The deputy collector attended the hearing. Collector Gowda clarified the detailed reports on Kusambi tribal land issue sought by the NCST had been twice sent to the commission, on October 12, 2022 and January 30, 2023. He said he would stand before NCST to explain the facts in the dispute and further action would be taken as per commission's directives.

