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Patna, October 1: “There is no question of being unsympathetic to Bihar as we prepare to give 15th FC recommendations,” said NK Singh, Chairman of the Commission, today in Patna. He was addressing a 150-strong gathering of academics, business leaders, politicians, senior officials of state and central government and members of intelligentsia on the occasion of the one-day national seminar titled “Addressing the problems of Inter-State and Inter-District Disparity of India” organised by the Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI).

Welcoming the guests on the occasion, ADRI’s member-secretary Shaibal Gupta said “the problem of inter-state and inter-district development disparity is not academic alone. It is a serious development challenge and reduction of this disparity demands responses from various sources such as central and state governments, national and international development agencies, academicians, professionals, civil society organisations, media and others.”

Speaking after Gupta, Sujata Chaturvedi, Principal Secretary of the Finance Department of Bihar government, outlined the major objectives of the seminar and said “the deliberations would identify major causes of backwardness that will help the planners identify region-specific development strategies. The seminar would also discuss the relative roles of central and state governments in promoting a balance growth pattern”.

Saryu Rai, Jharkhand’s Parliamentary Affairs, Food and Supply Minister, said “while the northeast always had a council working towards bringing development to the seven sisters, the eastern Indian states remain bereft of any such focus.” Despite having abundant natural resources, many states in eastern India (now Bihar being the exception) severely lack the infrastructural facilities. The 15th FC would be of great help to these states if it recommended favourably for these states, added Rai.

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In his inaugural speech, delivered in Hindi, NK Singh said the worries of Bihar Assembly Speaker Vijay Kumar Chaudhary conveyed in latter's presidential address on the occasion truly reflects the wants of the entire population of the state. He said the issues that the 15th FC has been finding to be 'very complex' have actually been found exactly so by all the Finance Commissions so far. He also highlighted that the historical experiences of countries like Italy are very helpful in understanding issues facing Bihar and such other states. Singh stressed on the urgent need for evaluating centrally sponsored schemes in the country, which he said were numerous, with an aim to bring efficiency and streamline their finance.

Stating that the 'Terms of Reference (ToR)' of the 15th FC has followed the provisions contained in Article 280 of the Indian Constitution, he said the FC decision on divisible pool of resources will try to strike a balance between the provisions and the demands arising countrywide. Singh expressed concern at the expanding Concurrent List and talked about the need to revisit the provisions of the 7th Schedule.

Speaking before NK Singh, Speaker of Bihar Assembly Vijay Kumar Chaudhary emphasized the need to monitor the implementation of the 15th FC recommendations and said this will be necessary for realising the goals set forth by the commission. Once again raising the demand of 'Special Category' status for Bihar, Chaudhary said "if Bihar's geographical (which is a top parameter for granting this status to states) make-up is considered, the state fits the bill for first and foremost."

ADRI's Director Prabhat P Ghosh paid the vote of thanks on the occasion.

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