

## Social activists want Posco project shelved

*'Government should refrain from acquiring land for Posco since MoU was signed in 2005'*

As criticism continued to mount on the Naveen Patnaik Government over land acquisition for the proposed steel plant project of Posco, two prominent social activists on Tuesday termed the whole process of land acquisition as "illegal" and demanded that the project be shelved without delay.

At a press conference here, advisor of Odisha Jana Sammilani Rabi Das and president of Lok Shakti Abhiyan Prafulla Samantara said the State government should respect the existing laws before using police force to acquire land for the project.

The State government should make the people know as to how much the State would gain if Posco established the proposed steel plant and how much it would lose in terms of environment, water and natural resources, they said.

Condemning the use of armed police in the land acquisition process, they said that the land acquisition exercise was unjustified as the environment clearance granted by the Union Ministry of Environment for the project had been suspended by the National Green Tribunal in March last year.

They further said that the State government should refrain from acquiring land for Posco since memorandum of understanding for the steel project that had been signed in June 2005 had expired in June 2010.

The government had also not been able to renew the MoU till date, they added.

With regard to the State government's claim that the betel vineyards being destroyed were located on forest land, they said that the government cannot go ahead with the land acquisition as the local Gram Sabha had refused its consent for the same.

Mr. Das and Mr. Samantara were also of the view that the Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) cannot acquire land for any company as was being done in case of Posco. The IDCO official who had beaten up the villagers when land acquisition work resumed on Sunday should be taken to task by the government, they demanded.

They also demanded that police be withdrawn from the site earmarked for Posco project and land acquisition be stopped forthwith.

On the other hand, Opposition Congress staged a dharna outside Raj Bhavan and urged Governor Murlidhar Chandrakant Bhandare to intervene in the matter to ensure that police excesses were stopped in the project area.

Pradesh Congress Committee president Niranjana Patnaik said that their party was not against the steel project, but they were opposed to land acquisition in Dhinkia area where the locals were not willing to part with their land and livelihood sources to make space for the venture.

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission issued notice to the Chief Secretary of the State Government and State Director General of Police to submit their report with regard to the police action against the villagers opposing establishment of Posco steel plant in Dhinkia area of Jagatsinghpur district.

The NHRC issued the notice on a complaint filed by Chandranath Dani, a human rights activist and lawyer.