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STEEL

It's 'war zone' at Posco project site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Posted online: Tuesday, April 17, 2007 at 1241 hours IST

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BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 17: Four Opposition parties have urged the Centre to intervene in the face of mobilisation of 'massive police force' by the Orissa government in an area where land has been earmarked for South Korean steel major Posco for its mega project.

In a letter to the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the four parties said that a "war zone" like situation was prevailing in the area as the state government was planning to move protesters by force.

"Please intervene and prevent another mayhem in Orissa," they pleaded in a letter signed by the president of Orissa Gana Parishad (OGP) Bijay Mohapatra, secretary of the state unit of CPI (M) Janardan Pati, secretary of the state unit of CPI Nityananda Pradhan and general secretary of the state unit of Janata Dal(S) Krushna Chandra Patra.

"We are not opposed to industrialisation but strongly feel there should be a balance between human rights, dignity and economic growth," they said.

"Industrialisation should not be at the cost of the people," they said while pleading that the project should be shifted to barren areas instead of allowing it to come up on lush green agricultural land.

Concerned over what they described as "confrontational mood" of the state government, the leaders said nothing should be imposed on the people against their wishes.

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The PMO had been monitoring the progress of the Posco project and had invited the Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for a discussion at New Delhi on April 19, they said.

But it could be viewed as "undue and unjust" when several projects like the regional centre of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), oil refinery project of the

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) at Paradip, National Institute of Sciences, IIT or the development of KBK region did not attract such attention from the PMO, they said.

"We protest the misplaced notion of the Naveen Patnaik-led government that equates sustainable development with forced land grabbing to promote industrial growth," the leaders said.

Stating that there was no clear policy for sustainable and scientific exploitation of the state's mineral wealth, they said no holistic environment impact assessment had been done so far.

The Orissa government had so far signed 45 MoUs with major industrial houses who were keen to set up steel plants in Orissa.

"Going by the mega plans of the state government vis-a-vis the iron ore deposits, it is evident that Orissa is going to be bereft of ore after a decade or in little more years. This, we think, is a confused agenda that lacks vision," they said.

The combined land requirement and other logistics, in fertile coastal tracts, is sure to end up turning sizeable number of farmers into an army without livelihood with only option to become daily wage earners.

"We would like to reiterate that as proud citizens of the country we are not opposed to industrialisation. But we are certainly against the idea of bartering our precious mineral wealth at throwaway prices to private greed," they said.

Referring to the decision taken by the empowered group of ministers under the chairmanship of Pranab Mukherjee not to use force while acquiring land in SEZs, the leaders said "unfortunately, the decision here in Orissa is just the opposite".

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