

Cong. leader joins issue with Irrigation Minister

By Our Staff Reporter

KHAMMAM, APRIL 21. Mr. Jalagam Prasada Rao, Congress leader and former Minister, demanded a probe by an independent agency into the alleged encroachment of Government lands by the Minister for Major Irrigation, Mr. Tum-mala Nageswara Rao at Gandugulapalli in Dammamet mandal.

Addressing a news conference, Mr. Prasada Rao alleged that over 300 acres of land was in the illegal enjoyment of the Minister's family members and relatives in the village. He also alleged that the benami landholdings of the Minister would account for about 170 acres. He ridiculed the Minister's declaration that he had only 15 acres of land including eight acres of wet.

The Congress leader condemned the police lathicharge on tribals at both Gandugulapalli and Kotturu villages of Dammamet mandal. He called it a deliberate act aimed at silencing the tribals protesting against the land occupation by non-tribals. He sought protection for tribal farmers who were being harassed in the area. Hundreds of pumpsets distributed to tribal farmers were in the possession of non-tribals.

He questioned as to why the administration and for that matter even the National Human Rights Commission remained unmindful of the plight of the tribals. Calling the land distribution programme an eyewash, he wanted the Government to ensure a

fair deal to the tribes. He made it clear that he was not against the non-tribal farmers who had acquired lands well before the tribal laws came into force.

The Congress leader made it clear that he was not in possession of any tribal land in violation of the scheduled area regulation. He claimed to be owning only four acres of land in Bayyanagudem village in addition to 18 acres of patta land in possession of his wife. He admitted that his daughter had as much as 25 acres of land in Dammamet village — the centre of tribal non-tribal conflict.

He said his family had surrendered about 60 acres of land in Bayyanagudem village after the Land Ceiling Act came into force. Besides this, more than 45 acres were distributed to the landless in the same village.

Mr. Prasada Rao said that the Government should not go in for any lift system for drawing Godavari waters as it would become only a temporary measure. A diversion scheme aimed at drawing water from the river near the Lottipittala Gandhi point in Khammam district was already investigated by the State Government in 1991 and submitted to the Centre.

The scheme would help irrigate over five lakh acres each in Warangal and Nalgonda districts and two lakh acres in Khammam. The Government should have a sincere approach to the issue, he said.

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