2 projects hanging fire

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KAKINADA, April 21 – The Polavaram project and the alumina mining in Chintapalli forests are the two important projects awaiting clearance of the Ministry of Environment. While he whole State benefits by these projects, 220 villages in the Polavaram, Bhadrachalam and Ellavaram Assembly constituencies are likely to be submerged under these projects.

While the rural areas of Visakha district benefit by Alumina factory and the associated industrial and business activity, it is Chintapalli Legislative constituency which would be effected by deforestation and displacement of people.

Recently, the management of Singareni Collieries had made a public announcement that the company cannot provide jobs to those whose lands are acquired for collieries purposes. It further clarified that the circular of the Central government, advising to provide employment to the displaced, is only obligatory not mandatory.

Whatever party one belongs to, the MP representing Bhadrachalam constituency also joined hands with the rest from the state in demanding these projects and never spoke a word either in or outside the Parliament about the fate of displaced tribals.

There are also serious inter-State problems between Andhra and Orissa such as the Samanthas (Khonds). Nearly 30,000 families of Samanthas displaced by the Sileru, Machkund and other projects now settled in the thick reserve forests of Chintapalli, Paderu and Ellavaram constituency. Since they are residing in the reserve forest, the ITDA's are not coming forward to take up any development programme even that of digging a drinking water well. Home minister in TDP government K. Sivaprasadarao during his visit to Daragadda, an interior village, where 5 police were killed by the PWG, has told press that they shall evict Samanthas from reserve forests since they are allegedly supporting the PWG.

Similarly the government has proposed to regularise 50,000 hectares in Podu areas inside the reserve forest in favour of the tribals. The Forest Department has propposed a tree patta scheme in these lands. But there has been no response from the Department of Environment, it was reported.

The constituency has severely suffered during 1986 floods and 1990 cyclone. Many tribals died under landslides, and their lands got severely sand cast. This year Government did not take up the task of clearing sand and boulders from these fields, instead paid one or two hundred rupees per acre. The situation is quite explosive and the government has failed to protect the interests of the tribals in terms of land, forest and proportionate representation of tribals in primary coop societies, Kharshak Parishads etc.

The liberal measures of Mr. Channa Reddy may have benefitted the Naxalites but not the Tribals. His Remote Area Development Programme has become a publicity stunt. No MP has taken any initiative neither mobilised his party to pursue these matters with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Environment.

In recent times when the TDP had proposed to repeal the 1/70 Act several Tribal youth organisations had joined together to protest it. Since then the enthusiasm of the tribal youth is nurtured by several eminent people like Dr. B.D. Sharma, ex-commissioner for SC and ST. His recent visits to Rampachodavaram, Bhadrachalam and Warangal were organised by the tribal organisations. In these meetings Dr. Sarma narrated the fight put up by Narmada oustees.

Though campaign of these issues may not tilt the balance, no doubt, these questions shall embarrass the candidates and their party leaders who always take the tribal vote for granted. Further the entire vote bank is getting divided into non-Tribal vs Tribal interests.

Now the BJP, an archrival of Naxalites is also entering the poll fray.