

250 protesting farmers, MCC MLA detained in Bokaro

13 00:09 IST

16 15:40 IST



Police detained 250 farmers and Marxist Coordination Committee's (MCC) MLA Arup Chatterjee for 12 hours on Friday for staging a protest at Electrosteel Casting Limited's steel plant at Chandankyari in Bokaro.

The farmers had on Wednesday enforced an 'economic blockade' against the company by blocking the gates to its Siyaljori plant demanding permanent jobs as compensation for over 1500 farmers who had sold land to the company for its 2000-acre steel plant and the area around its coal block in Parbatpur.

The district administration supervised talks between the protesters and Electrosteel officials from 5 p.m. on Thursday till 1 a.m. on Friday but no agreement was reached. At 5 a.m. on Friday, police took away the farmers and the MLA from the protest site, detaining them in a local school.

Their detention triggered fresh protests by the farmers' families in Chandankyari.

Those detained were allowed to go at 5 in the evening after Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's student wing president and Chief Minister Hemant Soren's younger brother Basant Soren proposed a meeting between the farmers and the company's representatives on October 1 in the presence of the Chief Minister.

"The company deceived thousands of marginal farmers by misleading them about the purpose of acquisition. Their middlemen bought less than an acre at Rs. 70,000-80,000 per acre, one-tenth of what the government stipulated for industry. When farmers have protested that only a few got jobs or that they were being made to undergo training for four to five years, the company colluded with local officials to name 100s of farmers in false cases," said Mr. Chatterjee. All Jharkhand Students' Union MLA Umakant represents Chandankyari in the Assembly but since last year, Mr. Chatterjee who represents Nirsha in Dhanbad has supported the farmers.

"Companies acquire land without even informing farmers what the land is for. Tribals and farmers only understand when they see company officials surveying the area. But we will fight for justice," said activist Dayamani Barla addressing the protesters.

Over 1350 villagers live in three hamlets near the steel plant and say even their movement to and from their house was restricted by the company.

"They have cheated us in every way. They said they will supply water but never did, instead, their deep-bores finished our water supply," said Atika Devi in Mahathatola. Her husband Santosh Mahatha, 60, showed documents of being named in a case for possessing narcotics in 2011.

"My family sold them 15 acres in 2008 but in 2011 when they wanted to extend their plant, I refused to sell them the 0.8 acres my shop was on. They got me implicated in a false case," he said.

His son works as a contract worker at the steel plant. Electrosteel officials said the company had offered training and jobs to 517 farmers from whom it had purchased plots bigger than

three acres.

“They are demanding higher wages and jobs for those in training. We already approved this for 200 and negotiations are on,” said Rohit Singh, Chief of Communication, Electrosteel.

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