

Struggles

## Peasants Protest Land Grab in Bihar

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Nitish Kumar says he won't allow any SEZ in Bihar, but his government is acquiring lands on a large scale for projects of various corporate houses. Lands are also being acquired for private hospitals and private educational institutions. People are also facing forcible displacement in the name of many development schemes with the government turning a blind eye towards the rehabilitation and livelihood of the affected people. The process of land acquisition for nearly 85 industrial, commercial and other establishments is going on in Bihar while people are opposing these moves at many places through spontaneous as well as organized protests.

One of such projects is for a sugar mill to be established in Marukia village in Andharthari block of Madhubani district for which nearly 305 acres are being acquired from small and marginal peasants for Rajshree Productions Ltd., which is primarily based in south India. This mill is expected to produce more liquor than sugar. More than a thousand families will be displaced. They bought these lands in recent years from the mahant of Marukia by money earned through selling milk or toiling in the far-off fields in states like Punjab and Haryana. More than 80 percent families are agrarian workers in possession of less than a bigha of land. Some of them own up to two-three acres. Now their lands as well as livelihood will be snatched away.

This is highly fertile land with three crops a year irrigated with the waters from the Kosi canal. This is also free from the menace of flood which is a recurrent phenomenon in many parts of Bihar. Narendra Singh, a local peasant, says it's an ideal place for sugarcane production but is not able to understand why the government is acquiring his land for a new sugar mill while there are no efforts made to open three already closed sugar mills in the district which used to absorb almost all sugarcane produced in the area. And why the peasants were not taken into confidence before handing them over the acquisition notices. Now the peasants, workers and poor are resisting the acquisition and forced the officials to flee from their village who came to survey the lands. People have also decided to block the entry of mill managers in their area and will not give up their lands even at the cost of their lives.

On June 6, the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) held a dharna before the Bihar Chief Minister at ITO Circle, Patna against the ongoing land grab. Around 2000 peasants took part in the dharna. The Dharna demanded an immediate stop to grabbing of fertile land, freeing of bhoodan land from illegal occupants and redistribution among the poor, action against those guilty of atrocities against dalits and steps to prevent the same, and enquiry and stern action against those responsible for the Below Poverty Line scam. The dharna was addressed by Comrade Rajaram Singh, President, BPKS, Arun Singh, deputy leader of the CPI(ML) Legislator's team in the Bihar Assembly, Dharendra Jha, General Secretary of the All India Agricultural Labour Association (AIALA), CPI(ML) CC member K D Yadav and others.

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