

Kerala minister denies irregularities in titanium plant deal

Denying irregularities in the deal with a Russian company to build a 10,000-tonne titanium sponge plant at Kollam, Kerala Industries Minister Elamaram Kareem Tuesday said the cost of the project had exceeded initial estimates since the cost of land was being included in the total amount.

The opposition Congress party said the project was conceived by its 2001-06 government and it was then estimated to cost Rs.10 billion. It alleged that cost has gone up to Rs.15 billion since the present government was corrupt.

Kareem said 100 acres of land has been acquired for the project and this, as well as the cost of additional infrastructure, has been taken into account while calculating the total cost of building the plant at Kollam, about 70 km from here.

'A technical committee has evaluated the project. The cost aspect will be evaluated by Engineers India. Moreover, the preliminary discussion for the project took place in [New Delhi](#) with T.K. Nair of the prime minister's office being party to the discussion. Everything is clear and transparent,' the minister told reporters.

The plant is to be built by Rosoboron Exporters, a company run by the Russian government. Kareem said talks were on to determine the stake of the Kerala government in the project.

'They have said that the share will be a minimum of 26 percent but below 50 percent. It is unfortunate that the opposition has levelled allegations that the Communist Party of India-Marxist is going to get a portion of the project cost as commission,' said Kareem.

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