

## Orissa villagers dig river mouth to drain out floodwaters

Over 2,000 people from seven Orissa villages dug a channel in a river mouth in Jagatsinghpur district Friday to drain out floodwaters submerging many villages. They also protested the proposed port in the region by South Korean steel major Posco.

The floodwaters of Hanusa river were not flowing into the sea through the nearby Jatadhari river because of silt deposits at its mouth. Villagers cut a channel in the river mouth themselves after the state government failed to clear the silt despite repeated calls.

The villagers also said they were also opposed to Posco's plan to set up a captive port at the mouth of the Jatadhari river as this would lead to more floods in the area.

The villagers, mostly members of the Posco Pratirodha Sangram Samiti (Anti-Posco Agitation Committee), crossed the Hanusa river in four mechanized boats and using crowbars and spades, dug out silt from the river's mouth near the Bay of Bengal, Samiti leader Abhaya Sahu told IANS.

'We dug the mouth because the floodwater was blocked and we wanted to clear it. Besides, we also want to send a message to the government and Posco that we are not going to allow Posco to set up a port here,' he said.

'More than 200 villages have been submerged with floodwaters of Hanusa and thousands of residents have lost their property and paddy crops,' Sahu added.

Residents of the area repeatedly requested the state government to de-silt the mouth of the river, but all in vain, he said.

'We dug the river mouth and helped the water flow into the sea smoothly,' he said.

Posco, the world's fourth largest steel maker, signed a deal with the state government in June 2005 to build a \$12 billion steel plant near the port town of Paradip by 2016. It also later announced plans to develop a captive port at the mouth of Jatadhari river, 10 km from Paradip.

However, there has been little progress on the ground as activists and villagers have been agitating against the project, which they say would take away their homes, lands and livelihood.

The company says the plant would affect only 500 families, but would create thousands of jobs.

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