

## Agitation threatened over ISRO land takeover

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) seems to have hit another roadblock over its proposed education centre in Kerala with farmers whose land at Valiyamala near here has been acquired for the centre threatening an agitation if the government doesn't pay them adequate compensation.

Speaking to reporters here Saturday, representatives of the farmers' families said the compensation given to them for 50 acres of their agricultural land for the proposed institute was meagre.

'Twenty-five years ago when close to 800 acres of land was acquired for the ISRO to set up a centre at Valiyamala, the compensation was Rs. 12,000 per acre,' said Vijaysankaran, a member of one of the families.

'Today the government is offering us a mere Rs. 9,400 per acre. This is totally unacceptable. We want Rs.100,000 per acre.'

The families threatened that apart from launching an agitation they would also seek legal help to tide over this issue.

'What is strange is that even though the present campus of the ISRO at Valiyamala (30 km from the capital) has huge area lying unutilised, the state government has decided to acquire our land for the institute. This is strange,' Vijaysankaran said.

The institute has been raging in controversy since its proposal. Last year, the Congress led opposition protested after ISRO purchased 82 acres of land at the Ponmudi hills, 70 km from here, from Savy Mano Mathew, a high-profile businessman.

The opposition parties in the state alleged that the land belonged to the state government's forest department and Mathew sold it illegally in connivance with Forest Minister Binoy Viswom.

Following the protests, the government last month cancelled the deal and offered an alternative site to ISRO, so as to see that the proposed space institute is set up in Kerala.

( © IANS / India eNews)