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Land acquisition: State to benefit from SC ruling

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Mumbai: More than a dozen special economic zones (SEZs) and mega power projects across the state, the launch of which had been indefinitely delayed owing to non-acquisition of land, are all set to be expedited following an apex court verdict on the state's power to acquire land for public purposes.

Disposing of an appeal filed by the Andhra Pradesh government, the Supreme Court had on Friday held that it was well within the powers of the state to acquire land for public purposes for a project, which will bring in foreign exchange, generate employment and secure economic benefits for the public at large. "It will certainly help states like Maharashtra to initiate projects, which have been delayed owing to non-acquisition of land. Once we get a copy of the order, we will take necessary steps," a senior official told TOI on Saturday.

Despite the fact that Maharashtra tops in terms of industrial investments, the progress on a large number of SEZs was very slow owing to the land hurdle. These include Mukesh Ambani's Rs 40,000-crore SEZ, which will generate 20 lakh jobs, and India Bulls. Both these as well as four other mega projects are located in the same Konkan region. While Ambani will require nearly 10,000 hectares of land, other SEZs will need nearly 5,000 hectares of land. The power projects will require nearly 8,000 hectares of land.

Initially, the state had started an initiative for taking over land according to the Land Acquisition Act. In fact, when a proposal was mooted by leading industrial houses, a section of farmers in the Konkan region had given their consent.

Subsequently, when villa-

gers started protesting, chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh said his government will not be involved in acquiring land and that promoters of SEZs should deal directly with the owners. A week after Deshmukh's statement, land acquisition came to a grinding halt, though the promoters of SEZs offered adequate compensation. Villagers led by senior PWP leader N D Patil have made it clear to the promoters that they are opposed to setting up SEZs in the Konkan region.

Significantly, now in view of the apex court order, the Congress-led democratic

front government will have to rethink its land acquisition policy, said sources. "We feel that Deshmukh will have to reconsider his policy," a leading industrialist said. According to him, on the one hand, he invited Ratan Tata to set up his unit anywhere in Maharashtra and on the other, he declined to cooperate with the SEZ promoters for acquisition of land. "In view of the apex court verdict, Deshmukh should step in for fast acquisition of land for the delayed SEZs and power projects," he added.