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# In a first, Raigad farmers to vote on SEZ

Prafulla Marpakwar | TNN

**Mumbai:** It's democracy at work. In a first for any state, Raigad collector Nipun Vinayak has convened a special meeting of 22 villages on September 21 to determine if they want to part with their land for the Reliance Special Economic Zone (SEZ) project. All the villagers are from the command area around the Hetawane dam.

Reliance has proposed to set up its multi-product MahaMumbai SEZ on an estimated 10,000 hectares of land. The SEZ is expected to attract an investment of nearly Rs 40,000 crore and generate 20 lakh jobs.

A senior state government official said, "The villagers' opinion will be taken through a secret ballot." Thus there is no question of coercion of those opposing the project, he added.

During the monsoon session of the state legislature, an anti-SEZ delegation led by veteran PWP leader N D Patil had called on chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh. The CM had assured the delegation that the government would examine the proposal to exclude these villages from the purview of the SEZ.

More than a dozen SEZ projects



in the state are currently locked up in agitations launched by farmers unwilling to part with their land. The total number of approved SEZ projects in the state is 131, which will require 45,000 hectares of land, and which are expected to generate 60

lakh jobs besides huge investments.

Ever since the anti-SEZ campaign gathered steam, the state government has taken the view that it will not involve itself in the process of land acquisition. Deshmukh has told the Reliance group that they

should deal directly with the farmers when it comes to taking over the farmers' land for their SEZ project. Significantly, the state government has accepted the relief and rehabilitation package offered by the Reliance SEZ.

## LAND LOCKED

Land acquisition for industry is becoming a big burning issue in the country. TOI has been highlighting this by pointing out how 15 top projects (minus SEZs) are caught in the crossfire, putting at risk investments worth Rs 2.43 lakh crore or \$54 b. And the fire is just raging on. P 11

Land acquisition in Jharkhand turned ugly on Friday when angry villagers thrashed and humiliated Bhushan Power & Steel Co's surveyors at Sarmohuda village near Ranchi. The firm has now suspended plans for a Rs 12,000cr steel plant