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## Crisis looms over Posco project

No party to the dispute is settling for reason and compromise

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**T**HE ONGOING tussle between supporters and protestors of the proposed steel plant in Orissa by Posco-India, a subsidiary of South Korea's Pohang Iron and Steel Co, has taken a serious turn with the state government announcing that the project will be set up with police assistance.

The world's fourth largest steel maker had signed a deal with the state government in June 2005 to build a \$ 12-billion plant near Paradeep port in the coastal district of Jagatsinghpur, some 100 km from here, by 2016.

"We will not allow the company to build the plant in our region at any cos," Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) president Abhaya Sahu told IANS,

"We are fully prepared to face the police, whom the government has threatened to use against us," Sahu said after state Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik warned that the project would be set up with the help of the police.



Patnaik last week invited anti-Posco activists for a dialogue on the issue but Sahu said there was no scope of dialogue left.

"There is no scope of a dialogue unless and until Posco withdraws its proposed project from our area," he asserted.

One of the over-a-dozen organisations that are campaigning against the steel

project, PPSS had blocked roads in several places to prevent entry of government and Posco officials to the proposed plant site.

It has also abducted over a dozen government and Posco officials over the past years and released them after getting from them undertakings that they will not visit the region again.

Anti-Posco activists have conducted protest meetings in many of the affected villages over the past two days after the statement of the chief minister, Sahu also said that women and children are in the forefront of the battle against the company.

"The government seems not to have learnt a lesson from Kalinga Nagar in Jajpur district (some 100 km from Bhubaneswar), where its policemen killed 13 tribal people on Jan 2, 2006 for protesting the construction of a boundary wall by Tata Steel," a leading state social activist said.

Tata Steel has not yet been able to take possession of the land allotted to it by the government. Even local government officials and policemen are unable to enter the region since then,

"It appears the government is making the same mistake over the Posco project. It will lead to a bloodbath, killing and bloody clashes," the activist said.

While protestors are readying to battle the government, supporters of the company have also conducted several meetings in the region after Patnaik's statement.

Damodar Rout, a ruling Biju Janata Dal leader and member of the state legislative assembly from the region, visited some villages with his supporters.

He organised a meeting of both supporters and protestors and local leaders of all political parties on Oct 27 to create

public support for the proposed steel plant,

There have been numerous clashes between protestors and supporters of the project in the past. With the strong stand taken by the government, the situation seems to have worsened in the area.

"Anything can happen any time here," a senior district police official told IANS on condition of anonymity. "The situation is critical," he said.

### POSCO says the plant would affect only 500 families but would create thousands of jobs

"We hope people will come together to help implementation of the plant," said district superintendent of police Radhakrishan Sharma,

Over 20,000 people from around 15 nearby villages, including Dhinkia, Gada Kujang and Nuagaon, have been protesting the project. They say that it would take away their homes and livelihoods.

Posco says the plant would affect only 500 families but would create thousands of jobs.

"If the project does not come up, it will affect the state's reputation," said a top state government official.