

Sunday, August 27, 2006

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**SUNDAY
PIONEER**

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FORAY

TOP STORIES**Is PM's Orissa agenda a hoax?**

Pioneer News Service | New Delhi

PM's programme includes inauguration of a power plant that has been generating power for at least three years, laying the foundation stone of an institute for which there is neither a Cabinet sanction nor a budget and packaging a Rs 130 crore reduction in Central aid to the country's most backward region



The "creative politics" section of the Prime Minister's Office has been burning the midnight oil to make Mr Manmohan Singh's maiden visit to Orissa in 27 months a resounding success.

With the State up in arms over the Centre's "neglect" of Orissa, the Prime Minister's programme for August 28 and 29 includes the inauguration of a power plant that has been generating power for at least three years, laying the foundation stone of an institute for which there is neither a Cabinet sanction nor a budget and packaging a Rs 130 crore reduction in Central Government assistance to one of the country's most backward regions as evidence of the UPA Government's commitment to Orissa.

The Prime Minister will first travel On Monday morning to the NTPC power establishment in Talcher to dedicate a 2,000 MW Super Thermal Power Project to the nation. It is likely to be an act of re-dedication since the newly established units have been generating power since August 2003. The last unit began production in August 2005!

On returning from Talcher, Mr Singh will lay the foundation stone of an alleged Indian Institute of Science inside the Department of Atomic Energy-run Institute of Physics in Bhubaneswar. The erstwhile NDA Government had, indeed, announced the establishment of an IISc in Bhubaneswar for which the State Government had earmarked land. However, after the UPA came to power, the establishment of new IISc was cleared for Pune and Kolkata but Bhubaneswar was dropped from the list.

To date, the establishment of a new science institute in Bhubaneswar has not been sanctioned by the Union Cabinet and no budget has been set aside for it. "We are grateful that the Prime Minister is gifting a plaque to Orissa", said a senior official.

On Tuesday morning, Mr Singh will travel to different parts of the backward KBK (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) region where he will be confronted by charges that the quantum of Central assistance has shrunk by Rs 130 crore.

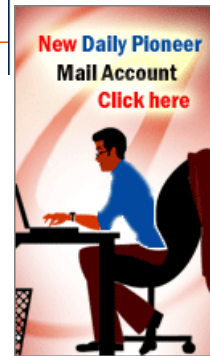
Last Friday, he told Parliament that the allegation was baseless. "Nothing has changed", he told indignant MPs. The facts suggest otherwise.

Earlier this month, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs(CCEA) announced that the entire quantum of the Centre's special assistance to the KBK region would be pegged at Rs 250 crore per year for the entire five-year Plan period. In other words, the entire Backward Region Grant Fund allotment of Rs 15 crore per annum for the eight districts of KBK would be deducted from Rs 250 crore. The original package for KBK formulated by the NDA Government was Rs 250 crore per year, plus the normal entitlements.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has complained that KBK has been short-changed by Rs 600 crore for the five-year Plan period by this sleight of hand. "Any hungry child will tell you the arithmetic", he told *The Pioneer*.

Patnaik claimed that while Rs 5,527 crore was also sanctioned under the Revised Long Term Action Plan (RLTAP) to meet the overall requirements of KBK, only Rs 1,200 crore were made available by the Centre.

This, he claimed, was despite a record of 97 per cent utilisation by the State Government. To meet some of the shortfall from the Centre's cutback, the Chief Minister has announced a Rs 60-crore Biju-KBK scheme by the State Government. To bolster his claim, Mr Patnaik referred to the RLTAP evaluation report for KBK districts by the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad.



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According to the study, 314 micro-watersheds have raised the ground water table significantly, reduced the average fetching distance for drinking water from 1 km to 0.5 km, increased the yield from 9-12 kg per hectare to 25-30 kg per hectare and improved the income of marginal farmers by nearly Rs 10,000 a year. For a region that had once become equated with extreme poverty, there has been no starvation deaths and a significant drop in malnutrition. Not prone to political sparring, the Chief Minister was silent as to why, despite these achievements, Orissa had fallen off the UPA Government's map.

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