MGNREGA activists take out protest march in Bihar

Allege harassment for questioning graft in rural job scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Noted economist Jean Dreze and Right to Information activist Nikhil Dey, along with thousands of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) activists, on Friday protested against the “harassment and intimidation” of those who have raised questions of corruption related to the rural job scheme in the Muzaffarpur district of north Bihar.

The protest march led by Mr. Dreze, Mr. Dey, Rajendran Narayanan and Sanjay Sahni began at the Jubba Sahni park in Muzaffarpur and ended at the District Collectorate. Later, they submitted a letter to District Magistrate Mohd. Sohail and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sunil Kumar, demanding a fair and transparent probe into the allegations. They also urged officials to ensure that whistle-blowers are protected. “We also put our demand for work under the MGNREGA be met within the stipulated 15 days time, and a bi-monthly dialogue with officials be organised to address grievances,” Mr. Narayanan told The Hindu over phone.

‘Fabricated cases’

Earlier, several allegedly false and fabricated cases against MGNREGA activist Sanjay Sahni and some members of his group, the Samaj Parivartan Shakti Sanghthan (SPSS), were lodged at different police stations in Muzaffarpur, for raising questions over corruption in implementation of the scheme. The activists had submitted a fact-finding report to the Bihar Director General of Police in June 2017. “But more false cases were lodged against them. More recently, an FIR was lodged against them on September 6 at the Maniyari police station this year,” said Mr. Narayanan, an MGNREGA activist and assistant professor at the Azim Premji University.

“The implementation of social security schemes in Muzaffarpur has seen a distressing downward trend as nearly ₹636 crore due payments are to be made by the State government towards wage and material costs,” said Mr. Narayanan. In Muzaffarpur district, only 94 households have been able to avail their legal entitlement of a 100 days of work in the year, he added.