

AFRICAN ODYSSEY

A bumpy ride for land buyers

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Africa may be an Eldorado for corporates and businessmen outside the continent. Even foreign governments are buying land heavily in several African countries. Indian corporate houses too, have joined the fray.

Government agencies and business chambers have spoken about the huge opportunities that are waiting to be tapped there. But farmers and intellectuals in the poverty-stricken continent are unhappy.

ALLEGATIONS

They feel that it will have an impact on food security. They allege that governments are entering into clandestine agreements with corporates and individuals to sell the land to foreigners. They liken this to land grabbing and warn that they will forge a broad common alliance to fight this.

Several Indian corporates and agriculture firms have made a beeline to buy and invest in several African countries.

"There is land grabbing in Burkina Faso and farmers are fighting against this. It is not clear at this time if Indian concerns are involved in this because of the limited information available in the public place," said Ms Bernadette P. Ouattara, Managing Director of Inades-Formation Burkina.

She is among a team from Africa that visited Hyderabad

and Medak for a week. The team was here to attend Bt Cotton and Beyond - Status and implication of genetically engineered crops and post-GE technologies for small farmers in Asia and Asia. It also participated in the biodiversity festival organised by the Deccan Development Society in Medak district.

The team held a meeting to share their impressions after interacting with cotton farmers in Warangal district here on Saturday.

Mr Francis F. Ngang, Secretary-General, Inades-Formation International, Regional focal point of COPAGEN (Coalition for Protection of Africa's Genetic Heritage), termed buying of land by foreigners as land grabbing. "It is unfortunate and extremely dangerous. It is like a time bomb for Africans. It will impact food security and food sovereignty in our continent," he said.

He felt that land grabbing is a ploy, a strategic offensive geared towards creating conditions for the control of world food supply by a few advanced countries or multinationals that represent their interest.

Mr Rene M. Segbenou, who represents COPAGEN in Benin, said that information on land transactions most of the times are a secret. "We have to study the issue still deeper. We cannot fight this battle alone. We have to form an alliance for this," he said.

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