

A special day for special guests — farmers who parted with ancestral land

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Jewar: Farmers from villages in Jewar reached the site of the ground-breaking ceremony in large numbers on Thursday, being as much an integral part of the occasion as the airport itself.

The ones who have parted with their ancestral land to make way for the Noida International Airport — 1,334 hectares were acquired for Phase 1 — were given special status equivalent to VIPs and sat in special enclosures that had been set up near the main stage. Many who arrived earlier managed to find seats while the others mingled within the four enclosures created for VIPs or blended in with fellow villagers in the crowd.

“We have been given the status of ‘vishisht atithi (special guest)’. Many of us didn’t know we would be allowed within the VIP enclosure with a pass, so only a limited number of people who had it came. The others are watching the proceedings live from the screens,” said Pravin Agarwal, a youth in late 20s from Kishorpur, one of the villages acquired for the airport.

Pravin’s neighbour Bhagwat Prasad, who is in his late 40s, was informed in advance by a contractual employee deputed in Jewar tehsil about the importance of the passes, only 600 of which had been issued to landholders and local residents, according to an administrative officer.

Others who were not offered any special status had no complaints either. For many, it was an occasion to celebrate what they saw as a new wave of development for the region, one that would help them and their families prosper with many new job and business opportunities. For instance, Satyavir Bhati, his relative Ravindra and two others heading back home on a bike spotted a few villagers and immediately stopped to distribute sweets they had bought soon after leaving the venue.

“I am from Falaida Bangar in Jewar. Our village has not been acquired. But it is the first time we got to see an event of this scale in our area. Though my village is connected to Delhi via a wide expressway, I had never experienced city life the way I felt on Wednesday noon. I just feel overwhelmed and elated,” said Satyavir.

Satyavir and Ravindra, who is from Karauli Bangar, enthusiastically participated in Thursday's event along with their families. While their wives and children were packed together on a tractor-trolley from the village, the two men rode to the venue on their motorcycles.

At the same time, Ravindra acknowledged that dozens of families are still camping under tarpaulin sheets in the biting cold, not too far from the fanfare. "They claim their rehabilitation and resettlement (RnR) benefits have not been paid yet. We feel sorry for them and hope the administration resolves their problems if they are genuine," he said. The group of villagers standing nearby added that more than 95% of people have already got their dues.