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Steel flyover row: Protesters claim bigger support

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BENGALURU: Nearly 42,000 citizens, mostly from north Bengaluru, lent support to the 'bridge beda' brigade by vetoing the proposed steel flyover, making a strong argument against letting the government to "plunge a steel dagger in the heart of the city". While votes counted at the consultation meeting organized by Citizens for Bengaluru (CfB) were representative of the growing concerns against the flyover+ , organizers said they would not count the "for" votes+ as the "government is already listening to them".

That nobody from the government + turned up for a debate could not be seized on by the opposition, whose leaders also skipped the meet, sending lower-rung members for the meeting.

Tanveer Ahmed (JDS) represented former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy, Katte Satyanarayana (BJP) came in place of Jagadish Shettar, and Vinod James (AAP) represented Prithvi Reddy . Pointing out the drawbacks of an obsession with building big structures to show develop ment, historian Ramachandra Guha said: "This problem has been around from the time of Jawaharlal Nehru. But he was self-critical and had said such an outlook will not lead India to a good place." Ramachandra Guha said, "At that time, the disease of gigan tism could be attributed to folly, but today it must be attributed to fraud. Larger the project, larger the cuts."

Prakash Belawadi, who pointed out that nobody from the government's Vision Group was present at the debate, asked: "What kind of vision is this?" He spoke of the unease the citizen's movement has caused in the corridors of power. "They thought we would assemble, take selfies and go away . The fact that we have not, has caused a lot of uneasiness among them and we must, today, tell them we are not going at all, not until they go," Belawadi said.

Experts pointed to the various problems this project would give rise to -from eco logical concerns to the problem of excluding a huge section of the population -and argued against the project.

IISc professor TV Ramachandra pointed to the grave concern of losing 812 trees; architect Naresh Narasimhan spoke of how the city is losing its aesthetics and environment.

Philosopher and author Prof Sundar Sarukkai said Bangaloreans lack a sense of belongingness that is a basic fabric in all other famous cities like Paris and Mumbai, and blamed it on shrinking shared spaces and systematic killing of our art and education systems, with the latter becoming a group of closedgate communities.

Ashwin Mahesh, who has worked with several government projects and protested against many, hailed the congregation of people. "The government is also 'by the people' so we must actively be part of decision-making. I say this because we just shouldn't come out when we want some project stopped, we must also get together when we see a five-year-old begging on the streets. We must have such strong commitments for us to be taken seriously ."

While all representatives of opposition parties said they would oppose the project, the organizers remained wary of their commitment."We must not stop at this. We must take our fight to the next level and are contemplating legal action," Belawadi said.

Advocate Harish Narasappa, while pointing out that citizens must not rely too much on the courts, said: "A very concerned division bench of the high court not only passed strict orders but is also monitoring the way our garbage is dealt with, but where are we on that?"