

Update from POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) as on 19th April 2013

PPSS welcomes the verdict of Supreme Court came yesterday (i.e. 18th April 2013) on the issues of mining in Niyamagiri hills of Odisha. The verdict said that it is up to the Gram Sabha (Village-level Assembly) to decide whether to allow mining in Niyamgiri Hills by the Vedanta Group. The Supreme Court has upheld the authority of Gram Sabha to control, manage and use the mineral resources in Niyamagiri hills. This comes as a very welcome judgment where community rights over mineral resources has been protected. This is a victory of long-drawn struggle of the adivasis in Niyamagiri hills and throughout the state.

It may be reminded that Gram Sabha of Dhinkia Panchayat of Jagatsinghpur district in Odisha held on 18th October 2012 had passed a resolution unanimously against the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. With the spirit of the Supreme Court judgment on Niyamagiri hill, the state government should respect the decision of our Gram sabhha and scrap the POSCO project outright.

I would also like to bring your attention to the latest Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report. The CAG in its latest report, tabled in the assembly has found the Odisha government guilty of extending large scale undue benefits to steel major POSCO in allotment of a piece of land in the state capital Bhubaneswar. The government disregarded all norms in allotting the land with shameless favoritism. While allotting the land, zonal regulation was ignored and the land was gifted away at an abysmally low premium. The CAG report is very scathing on it.

The CAG report said that the country arm of South Korean steel major Posco-India had applied for allotment of a plot measuring 12,000 square feet for its chairman-cum-managing director's (CMD) residence-cum-guest house in 2006. However, later it enhanced the requirement twice to 25,000 sq.ft. In April 2007 and later 2 acres for the same purpose. Various committees, including committees appointed by Central Government, have unearthed serious illegalities in POSCO's other operations earlier. Many more are still buried beneath as vested authorities try their best to hide those and get away with it. While proofs are piling up, our people are bewildered by a complete hijack of governance mechanism to patronize POSCO and connive with the POSCO and harming our basic life and livelihood sources as well as the interest of the larger society.

As the government is unwilling to play the 'Rajdharm' we are determined to put up a peaceful-democratic fight against this unholy alliance between the government and POSCO.

On April 12, 2013, The Left parties and various mass movements staged demonstrations at Bhubaneswar demanding withdrawal of police force from the proposed plant site area. Demonstrations were also held in various district headquarters in response to a call by CPI to observe 'All India Solidarity Day'. The protestors held the placards saying "Posco Go Back" and "Stop Forcible Land Acquisition".

As we have shared earlier a 12-member team consisting of human rights activists, journalists, academicians, democratic rights and civil liberty activists conducted a visit to our area on March

9, 2013 to take stock of the situation after the March 2 bomb blast in which three of our frontline activists died and one got seriously injured. The report of the fact finding team brings into the fore another evidence of the state's cruelty. While releasing the report eminent legal luminary Justice Rajinder Sachar was awestruck by the fact that three people got killed in a bomb explosion and yet no inquiry was conducted into the incidence. 'The incident was ghastly and the action of the government is horrible', said Justice Sachar. That Committee in its report has demanded a high level judicial inquiry into the incident. You can read the whole report in this link <http://www.scribd.com/doc/136178201/Fact-Finding-Report-Posco-Final>

In a separate but bizarre development we have come to know, from media reports, about POSCO's attempt to influence a section media in its favour by sponsoring a pleasure trip for some journalists to Pune and other such places. But we firmly believe on the impartial character of our media friends who will continue to expose the POSCO's illegalities and the government's undue favor.

Attaching herewith an e-petition for your endorsement prepared by an organization SOLIDARITÉ based in France for your information. Here is the petition (in French): http://www.avaaz.org/fr/petition/Mettons_fin_au_projet_daccaparement_des_terres_de_la_societe_POSCO_en_Odisha_Inde/?cRguBeb. And you can also find the article (in French, English and Spanish): <http://www.solidarite.asso.fr/Petition-against-landgrab-in-the>

Kindly forward this mail widely.

Hoping for Solidarity.

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