

NOTE

'NO' TO BAUXITE MINING

NAPM writes :

In a great show of unity and strength against bauxite mining on the Deomali range, about 15,000 tribal and non-tribal community members from across four blocks of Koraput district gathered on Deomali hill, Orissa's highest mountain peak at 1673 mts. The meeting was organized under the banner of *Deomali Anchalik Paribesh Surakhya Manch* (DAPSM or the Deomali Regional Environment Protection Forum) and attended by members from more than 10 people's resistance fora like Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh (CMAS) Narayanpatna and Bandhu-gan, Maliparbat Surakhya Samiti, HAL Sunabeda Bisthapita Sangha, Deomali Surakhya Samiti, Niyamgiri Surakhya Samiti and many more. Apart from this, leaders from several tribal social organizations like Kui Samaj, Paraja Samaj, Durua Samaj, Mali Samaj, Matia Samaj and Gadaba Samaj also attended in order to stand in solidarity with DAPSM.

The striking feature of the meeting was that it was organized, hosted and held together by a hundred tribal youth volunteers of CMAS and DAPSM. It was motivating to see the energies of these youths, who would have perhaps migrated to cities as poorly paid and tortured construction labourers or brick kiln workers as is the trend in most tribal villages of the region due to several reasons, being channelized for a cause that would go a long way in strengthening the unity of the tribal communities struggling for survival and dignity.

It was also heartening and yet sad to hear the troubles faced by thousands of tribals who trekked for three long days to arrive at the meeting venue which was about 70 odd km from Bandhugan and Narayan-patna. They also narrated that the Border Security Forces (BSF) troops stationed at Podapadar and Narayanpatna had reportedly threatened several women and men against attending the Deomali meeting. To further instill fear in them against consequences they might face for attending the meeting, the security forces allegedly beat up many tribals seen alone around their camps. Tribals also alleged that the forces reportedly entered Basnaput village two days before the meeting and beat up several men and youth warning them against going for the Deomali meeting. It may be noted that even on the day of the meeting, two police jeeps were stationed at Kunduli from where the 20 odd km ghat road to Deomali begins and prevented the entry of many vehicles carrying community members coming for the meeting. These vehicles were forced to take a long and arduous circuitous road to Deomali hill top and reached almost at the end of the meeting. But it was the determination to attend the meeting and stand in solidarity with the struggle against bauxite mining that motivated them to take a risk of coming on the highly dangerous and almost non-existent ghat roads through Andhra Pradesh into Orissa and to Deomali hill top.

The meeting began at about mid-day with a rally by a stream of people, women, men and children, among the shouting of slogans, tribal folk music and dance. The hyper mood of people's power of resistance was set with the rally and the revolutionary songs and aggressive dancing. The public meeting began with a Kui song describing woes befallen tribals due to tribal to non-tribal land alienation, forest eviction and mining. It called on the toiling masses to unite and resist such oppression and seek justice for their miseries.

The first public address was by the leader of CMAS Nachika Linga. This was Nachika Linga's third public appearance following negotiations initiated for review and withdrawal of cases against him and more than 300 CMAS members. These negotiations on cases against CMAS members are one of the 14 demands made by Maoists in Malkangiri Collector abduction episode. It may be noted that Nachika Linga has been able to make these public appearances since incessant repression on CMAS by security forces is in a stage of lull as

part of another demand of the Maoists in the abduction case. Nachika Linga called on members of all the people's resistance fora to unite against corporate grab of their lands, forests, hills and rivers. He also stressed that mining of Deomali was akin to killing one's mother as the hill was the source of about 70 streams in the region and irrigated fields of thousands of tribal farmers which is also the rice bowl of the region. He called on people to protect their source of livelihood from predatory capitalists and Government security forces whose aim was to help the Government evict tribals and capture their lands and forests for corporate investment.

Other key speakers of the meeting were former MLA of Gopalpur Narayan Reddy who reminded the people that if they could throw out Tata from Gopalpur, then they can resist any company from taking over their lands and hills for mining. Dandapani Mohanty, Convenor of *Jana Adhikar Manch*, used the opportunity to explain to the public the 14 demands made by Maoists in the Malkangiri Collector abduction crisis and stressed on the importance of protecting Deomali from being mined and environment of the region being destroyed. Senior poet and leader from Andhra Pradesh C Prasad of the Revolutionary Writers' Association and Annapurna, General Secretary of Vishakhapatnam unit of Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) also called on the people of the region to resist mining and industrialization in tribal regions which have brought only sorrow and impoverishment for the thousands of tribals and non-tribals. They shared the experiences of struggles by the farmers and tribals of Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam agency areas who have borne the brunt of police bullets and faced death in the course of their resistance against mining and land acquisition. Among others, Narendra Mohanty of Banabasi Adhikar Manch of Kandhamal and Lingaraj Azad of Niyamgiri Surakhya Parishad also spoke on the occasion.

Powerful speeches in Kui were given by Sarpanch of Pakjhola, the Panchayat where HINDALCO proposes to start its mining of Deomali, by leaders of *Mali Parbat Surakhya Samiti* where HINDALCO has initiated a mining pit in Maliguda village and by leaders of Deomali Surakhya Samiti. Leaders from several other local struggles against past displacement by Hindusthan Aeronautics Limited and Government's land acquisition for setting up a camp for the elite COBRA Battalion also spoke about their experiences of struggle and declared their solidarity for any people's resistance movement against bauxite mining on Deomali Hill. □□□