

POSCO

Continuing Conflict

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Everyday, more than 400 villagers of Dinkia and Govindpur villages are sitting rotationally and continuing their protest against the forceful acquisition of their land for establishing POSCO at Govindpur village border in Jagat-singhpur district of Odisha.

On 27th July 2011, around 500 villagers of Dinkia and Govindpur burnt an effigy of South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak at Gobindpur village border. The protest was meant against the shameless request of the South Korean President to the President of India Pratibha Patil for expediting the POSCO project.

Villagers under the banner of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samity have been opposing the establishment of the steel plant for past six years, it is completely wrong and unethical on the part of South Korea president Lee Myung-Bak to seek Indian government's cooperation for establishing POSCO in Odisha. It is none of the South Korean government's business whether the people of India will allow POSCO project on their land or not. It has clearly exhibited the insecurity of the POSCO; therefore it is using the South Korean government for establishing the plant. This shows that the President of South Korea is dancing to the tune of POSCO and act like corporate mafia for a private company despite being the head of a democratic country like South Korea.

A three-member of team of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights led by its member Dr Yogeswar Dubey on July 4, 2011 had visited the proposed POSCO steel plant site and made an on-the-spot investigation. Their report states that "the children think that they are protecting the interest of their families which is contrary to the allegations that children are being coerced to participate in the agitation. The anxiety / apprehension on account of the prospect of displacement and loss of the source of livelihood for their families, has been apparently affecting the minds of the children. It appears to be a factor behind such conduct by the children".

The report has slammed the Odisha government over its failure to provide mid-day meals to school children and poor administration of ICDS programmes in the proposed POSCO project areas while justifying the protest of children. The report also criticised the forcible occupation of a part of the Balitutha primary school building by the police, saying the school gave an appearance of being a fortress. "The primary school and the Anganwadi-centre located inside its premises have not been properly functioning due to continued presence of the police force due to the limited space within the school compound. We found some policemen in the school in underwears. The district level officers of the W&CD and School & Mass Education

Departments never took any remedial steps to ensure proper functioning of the school and the Anganwadi centre," the Commission said, adding that provisions in the Right to Free & Compulsory Education Rules have been violated in allowing using the school building as accommodation for police force.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on 27th of July 2011 issued notice to the Chief Secretary and Director General Police of Odisha on the use of school premises as police camps to ensure safe land acquisition for the POSCO. Taking suo moto cognizance of the media reports on the issue the NHRC expressed concern over the issue and asked the Government, Chief Secretary and DGP to give a separate report within four weeks.

From 23rd of July 2011 onwards, in presence of 15 platoons of police force, the government has started indiscriminate tree cutting exercise in Polang and Gadakujang village of Nuagaon. Till today, 10,000-12,000 numbers of rich forest category trees were cut down. More than eight lakh trees like casuarinas, Jackfruit, Cashew nut and Mango groves, which have been a protective cover during the natural disasters throughout the ages will be cut down. According to a report of the forest department, more than 2,90,000 Casuarina trees are found in this area comprising three panchayats. Besides, around five lakh trees are including cashew nut, jackfruit and Mango dotting the area. Despite this particular area being vulnerable to the cyclones; the government is mindlessly cutting the trees. If actually POSCO gets materialised, still then cutting trees in these magnitude is tantamount to a catastrophe for the people of the region. □□□