

Joint Press Release

Civil society condemns GoM changes...Wants debate on MMDR Bill

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There are hordes of examples and every scam in the newspapers are all about this and yet the Government thinks that the corporates will honestly share the “true-profits”.

The national alliance of mining affected communities and support groups, mines minerals and PEOPLE (mm&P), Oxfam India, SPWD and PIC resolved to restore the original provisions in the draft MMDR Bill which provides for significant ownership rights to the mining affected communities. Responding to the changes being brought about in the wake of the recent meeting of the Group of Ministers, we strongly condemned the move to dilute the provisions and make way for a bureaucracy led institution that has failed miserably in the past.

Ms Nisha Agrawal, CEO, Oxfam India said “these changes are a huge let down from the promises made in the original bill from promising the affected communities 26% equity by mining companies, to 26% profit sharing and now down to just sharing royalty, the Government has managed to water down its commitment towards inclusive growth’.

“Mining industry is the most opaque and murky and profit reporting is more an art than commerce and regulation”, says R.Sreedhar, Geologist and Chairperson of mm&P. There are hordes of examples and every scam in the newspapers are all about this and yet the Government thinks that the corporates will honestly share the “true-profits”.

Taking a cue from the former Minister Handique’s statement at the National Consultation (Jointly organized by Oxfam India-mm&P-SPWD and PIC) last year that this was not a dole but it was the right of the people, we believe that the affected communities must be made co-owners to stem the rot of illegal mining as well as the huge backlog of poverty in the mining regions. It is sad that the Minister has been unceremoniously dropped for his sensitivity on the issue.

That’s why we at mm&P have been calling for a moratorium on new leases until the existing ones are settled along with settlement of other rights under the existing laws and cleaning up the mess, both in terms of financial and environmental terms” says Ravi Rebbapragada, the General Secretary of the Alliance of mining affected communities.

The constitution of District Mineral Foundation is such that representatives of affected people must have the consent of DM to be a part of body. “I have apprehensions that this new body will only add to a number of such fund rich government bodies which have little concern with the purpose for which they were constituted,” says mm&P member from Dehradun, Ravi Mittal.

The discretion to State Government, District authority or gram sabha to verify the data and determine the affected persons by said mining is not correct. Executive Council Member Adv B.T Venkatesh from Bangalore cites instances to prove that a village may be made 'be-chirag' (literally 'deserted') village and deny any rights to person hailing from the village. Better model would be 'kumnidar' of Goa. Persons belonging to or living in the village as on the date of the granting of license or lease should be entitled for rights in the village. Guaranteeing them merely MNREGA wages is rubbing salt to their wounds.

The draft now says compensation to be provided to only those recognised as having being dependent on the land in some form. In the context of the improper implementation of FRA and issues related to common lands there will be a lot of problems as the POSCO case shows, warns Viren Lobo, Executive Director- SPWD.

The notional owning of share is actually a farce. As experiences of activist shareholders too indicate how little such shareholders have a say in the day-to-day management of the mine – the communities demand that they have a direct control over resources if States were handing it over to the corporates in a platter without any oversight.

Gopal Jha of PIC points out that the new draft should ensure transparency by making the Detailed Project Report (DPR) available in public domain. The issue of reclamation is also not addressed completely by the bill and this has serious implications even after the mine is closed in terms of their livelihoods. Reclaimed areas should not left for the company to use for its recreation.

The other clause that the government talks about to bring in 'inclusion' by the institution of a Sustainable Development Framework which looks to be a non-starter as it relates to some philosophical principles but does not indicate specific parameters to look for on the ground says Nishant Alag, CIO of the Mining Information Clearinghouse of India (**MICI**). There are several aspects that need detailed consultation with affected groups before the law can be enacted.

The alliance is stepping up the nation-wide debate with consultations in various states beginning with one in Orissa on the 30th of this month at Rourkela. These proceedings will be placed before the Parliament Members before the bill is passed.

<http://www.indiafoline.com/Markets/News/Civil-society-condemns-GoM-changes...Wants-debate-on-MMDR-Bill/5209477889>

Press Release

9th June, 2011

REVOKE THE ILLEGAL LEASE GRANTED IN THE KANNEDHARA HILLS: 120 TRIBALS ARRESTED, PREVENTED FROM MEETING A.P. CM

Brief Background:

Who We Are:

- We, who are protesting against this destructive mining of our hills, are from the **Savara** and **Jatapu** tribes.
- We are culturally, socially and economically bound to the glorious Kannedhara Hills in the Pulliputti panchayat, Seethampeta mandal, Srikakulam Dist. where no quarrying is allowed.
- We worship the Kannedhara Konda as our deity and temples dedicated to Lord Anjaneya and local deity Polamma have existed here for centuries .
- Apart from being rich in various medicinal herbs, Kannedhara is a precious water-source, filling 14 tanks that help raise 2,000 acres of paddy.

What We're Protesting Against:

- **1980 acres** in the **Pulliputti** panchayat, Seethampeta Mandal have been surveyed as containing **granite** worth Rs. 1000 crores.
- Out of this, 10 hectares worth Rs. 100 crores have been leased to Virgin Rock Pvt. Ltd.
- This company is owned by **Ram Manohar Naidu**, son of Roads and Buildings Minister, **Dharmana Prasad Rao**.
- The lease was given on the basis of a fraudulent NOC issued by the Revenue Dept., when Dharmana Prasad Rao was the Revenue Minister for the State. This is a brazen case of conflict of interest.
- Moreover, many tribals had been allocated land in Survey No.289 where mining lease was granted.

Present Situation

Our group of 120 girijans was arrested this morning, while we were on our way to discuss our situation with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister (CM)Kiran Kumar Reddy in Srikakulam.

We had undertaken a 3-day *padayatra* (protest march on foot) from our villages in the Kannedhara Hills, to protest against the mining lease granted to Ram Manohar Naidu, son of State Revenue Minister Dharmana Prasad Rao.

Finally reaching the city, after covering a gruelling 65 km by foot, we were confronted by new obstacles. First, the police barred our entry into the city, only to let us go after we sat down in the middle of the road and refused to budge. Then, herded by 3 police jeeps and 1 truck full of constables, we were prevented from meeting the minister and made to wait another night.

We were finally given an appointment to meet the CM at 9 am this morning. As we made our way to the RIMS hospital at 8:30 am, where Mr. Reddy was fielding members of the media, the police moved in and arrested our entire group.

We strongly condemn the arbitrary arrests made by the police, especially since it was senior officers who had conveyed the time appointment time in the first place. Why were we prevented from exercising our right to express our grievances non-violently?

We condemn the apathy of the state. When members of a vulnerable community have endured severe hardship, walked for three days across the forest and tar roads in the blazing heat, many of us falling sick along the way, isn't it the responsibility of the state to at least listen us and find out why we've decided to take such a difficult journey?

With no mention of why we were arrested and what we'd done wrong, the only justice that we got to see was in the back of a police truck. We were taken to a facility 40 km from our destination, where we were later released and told to go back to where we came from.

We see this as an affront to democracy and an act of extreme callousness on the part of state officials. We call for a serious enquiry into the its granting of mining leases in Kannedhara hills and a redressal of issues directly affecting us.

We are determined to protest till our Kannedhara konda is saved, and request you to join our fight.

On behalf of Kannedhara Porardha Samiti,

Thotasavara Mukhalingam
Sarpanch, Pulliputti Panchayat
Seethampeta Mandal, Srikakulam
Andhra Pradesh.

Local contact:

Mr. BSanjeeva Rao, President, VELUGU: 9440283837

For hi-resolution images and additional information, please contact:

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agrariancrisis.in/.../revoke-the-illegal-lease-granted-in-the-kannedhar...

Girijans and NGOs lodge strong protest against laterite mining

G. Narasimha Rao

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A proposal to exploit laterite through opencast mining over 121 hectares near Bhamidika village under Sarugudu Panchayat in Nathavaram mandal in the Visakha Agency has evoked strong protests from the Girijans, political parties and NGOs.

Girijans say it would affect their livelihood and culture. Also, there are fears that the Varaha and Tandava rivers that irrigate thousands of acres in the Agency and Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts will almost become dry.

Villagers allege that the AP Pollution Control Board's decision to hold a public hearing on November 17 at Erkampeta would be in violation of rules concerning Girijans living in the Scheduled Area. The board had not conducted grama sabhas in the affected villages, and the environment impact assessment report lacked many details. The Girijans allege that big shots supported by politicians were operating behind the scenes.

The applicant, an autorickshaw driver, is not a Girijan since his father belonged to a forward caste, alleged the CPI (M). The AP Girijana Sangham has already lodged a complaint with the revenue authorities.

The CPI (M), Samata, an NGO, and convenor of the Forum for Better Visakha E.A.S. Sarma demanded that the government drop the proposal.

Jartha Lakshmana Rao, better known as Auto Sreenu, of Kakarapdu in Koyyuru mandal, applied for mining lease and was given permission. Sreenu, who lives in a hut, would be investing Rs. 80 lakh over a period of 14 years. Mining would be undertaken at Bahimidika, Sirpuram, Muntamamidireddi, Erakampeta and Torada where farmers are raising crops, including paddy, and collecting forest produce.

Mr. Sarma asserted that the villages are still under the Scheduled Area, though officials in the past had unauthorisedly transferred them. He and executive director of Samata, Ravi Rebbapragada, pointed out that Land Transfer Regulation cases were still pending. This proved that the villages were not outside the Scheduled Area. It was only the President of India who could transfer the villages and not local officials, he said.

CPI (M) district secretariat members K. Lokanadham and M. Appala Raju and Paderu division secretary M. Suryanarayana, who checked the antecedents of the leaseholder demanded that the mining proposal dropped.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/article2561014.ece>