

Sanjukta Kisan Morcha, Odisha

Prof Ganeshi Lal
Honourable Governor,
Odisha State
Raj Bhawan, Bhubaneswar

January 4, 2022

Respected Prof. Ganeshi Lal Ji,

At the outset we all wish you season's greetings and a very happy New Year. Hope, the people and government of the state will continue to get your wise advice and guidance in 2022. Unfortunately, people of Dhinkia in Jagatsinghpur are not in a position to extend their greetings as their peace and happiness has been taken away by the security forces and district administration, who allegedly receive direct orders from the honourable CM's office.

We are pained to bring to your kind attention certain facts herewith, with the hope and request that, you will intervene at your earliest convenience to save democracy and ensure peace and justice for the people who are now living a condemned life in Dhinkia area of Jagatsinghpur of our own state.

1. POSCO India withdrew from a Steel Project initiative in Dhinkia area in 2015-16 for a number of reasons, the most important reason being resistance of the local people who were living a happy and prosperous life because of their sustainable and stable green economy. The land acquired for the purpose should have been returned to the people with immediate effect. But the government of Odisha wanted to do business with the forcibly acquired land. Instead of doing the desirable, the Nabin Pattnaik government publicly invited the Jindals to launch their JSW Utkal Steel Ltd in the same area which would build 13.2 MTPA crude steel, 900MW captive power and 10 MTPA cement along with 52 MTPA Captive Jetty at the same place. Since the local people were never willing to part with their multi crop fertile agricultural land and money spinning betel vines, they have been opposing the move to transfer 2900 acre of fertile land to JSW at a terrible cost to their peace and happiness. Repression is the only language the government of the day knows when it comes to deal with dissenting voices. A divide and rule lesson which they learnt from the Britshers is being applied now in the area to instigate enmity and conflicts among the locals. Surrounding the area with striking forces and turning the area into an open air jail is the latest tactics the government has used to teach the protesters.
2. We are shocked to learn that the project is being forced on the people who don't want it. They are otherwise happy and don't even require any external support for anything, other than health issues. No Gram Sabha has been convened to seek people's opinion. Arbitrary cutting of trees happened to put down any claim that it was a forest area falling under Forest Rights Act 2006. The matter reached up to the National Green Tribunal. The residents of Nuagaon, Dhinkia and Gobindpur villages have submitted applications to the local authorities to claim their land and forest rights, but these claims have not been processed since 2011. Three different official committees i.e., the Saxena Committee, the POSCO Enquiry Committee and the FAC - found that the Forest Rights Act, 2006 had been violated in the proposed POSCO area. Besides, on

several occasions in the past, the Gram Sabhas of the area have passed majority resolutions against any handover of their lands and community forest resources.

3. Ironically, the proposed project does not even have a valid Environmental Clearance (EC) without which they cannot start any construction activities. The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report prepared by the company has got several shortcomings even though the company has manufactured hundreds of consent papers in the names of locals in its favour. But the way police repression is going on, it appears, as if Sajan Jindal has got all legal documents in its hand and that it requires only land now.
4. The provisions of Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (LARRA) of 2013 have been conveniently ignored. As per the LARRA- 2013 “land acquired and possession taken over but not utilized within a period of five years from the date of possession shall in all cases revert back to the original land owner”. But the Odisha government has done a twist of the Act by bringing out a revised policy for land acquisition notified on February 7, 2015, suggesting that “Land acquired and possession taken over but not utilized within a period of five years from the date of possession shall in all cases revert back to the state and be deposited in the Land Bank automatically.”
5. Coming to the most immediate and emergency issue we would like to apprise you of the fact that for the last one week mid night raids, threatening of the locals with dire consequences if they get out of the village, and engaging some locals to file cases in one or the other pretext against their own protesting brothers and sisters have been happening.
6. After the district administration ignored people’s appeal, they turned towards sympathetic political- social forces and media persons. They got positive response also when a team of senior journalists led by Sri Rabi Das visited the area and could see it themselves how Dhinkia has been turned into an abandoned territory. An all part delegation consisting of leaders of pro people forces also visited the aggrieved people whom their democratically elected government has deserted for the interest of a private non state profiteering company. They have also raised the issue in public domain but nothing has been impacting the undemocratic and unethical forces calling the shots now.
7. You may be shocked to know the kind of anarchy and disorder the administration is deliberately creating to frighten the peaceful people’s movement. One example will suffice. On 20th of December, 2021, the villagers of Dhinkia launched a massive demonstration against the state and police repression at Mahala village border. Suddenly the police came in seven Bolero vans and entered Dhinkia village from its back side and started thrashing and beating people. The police apparently came to arrest Mr. Debendra Swain. But they picked up his paternal uncle, Ayodhya Swain aged 71, a paralysis patient and Mili Swain, his 22-year-old daughter. The police slapped false charges against them under Indian Penal Code Sections: 147 (rioting), 149 (unlawful assembly), 294 (use of obscene language), 427 (mischief causing damage), 506 (criminal intimidation). They did not even spare the passersby who asked them the reason for dragging the father-daughter duo out of their house. The police assaulted women and children after entering the village in the name of searching some accused persons, complained Dhinkia villagers to any team visited them. The villagers have been on a 24 hours duty now guarding the gates against the entry of police and private militia sponsored by the company.

8. Grassroots Democracy has been suspended as the elected Panchayatiraj representatives leading the movement have been dismissed from the positions arbitrarily and undemocratically.

Our Appeal

Since a democratically elected government has gone against its own *bonafide* citizens for the interest of private capital and the constitution of the country seems to have been suspended, we are appealing you for your kind and urgent intervention.

1. Please advise the State government to restore peace and normalcy by withdrawing all striking and police forces immediately from Dhinkia area.
2. The government should also be advised to prevent any kind of state or private repression on the villagers in the area and to please drop all cases mischievously filed against the protesting villagers.
3. The government should initiate a peaceful process of dialogue and discussion with the people to know their mind directly and to honour their wisdom when they say anything with regard to their sustainable livelihood systems.

With best and warmest regards

Yours sincerely

Members of Steering Committee, Sanjukta Kisan Morcha, Odisha

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