

Ganatantrik Adhikar Surakhya Sangathan, Odisha

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25 persons have been arrested in last three weeks in the three districts

Such arrests are for mining bauxite of Vedanta Co., Adani Co. and HINDALCO

Provocative incidents are being instigated with the help of local police so that the protesting villagers could be arrested.

Even though Adivasi people of these areas do not want development, the so called 'Vikas' is knocking at their doorstep - to destroy their land, forests and hills, above all, their livelihood

We, on behalf of 'Ganatantrik Adhikar Suraksha Sangathan, Odisha' strongly condemn the ongoing state repression in various proposed mining areas of south Odisha for last three weeks. On August 23, 2023, two office-bearers of the Mali Parvat Suraksha Samiti, Koraput, Abhi Sodi and Das Khara were picked up by plain clothed motorbikers. They are suspected to be the police in view of two similar cases we saw in the Niyamgiri area of Kalahandi district on August 5 and Sijimali and Kutrumali areas of Rayagada district on August 16. Despite the fact that the family members of both Abhi Sodi and Das Khara have filed separate FIR before the Patangi Police station, their where-about is still unknown.

In Niyamgiri area, Krushna Sikakkaa and Bari Sikakka of Lakhpadar village, the two Adivasi activists, while returning from Lanjigada weekly market were forcefully being abducted by plainclothed Odisha Police personnel on 5th August. Upon an enquiry by the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti activists about the whereabouts of their fellow activists, the police denied their involvement. Thus on August 6, local tribals staged a protest in front of the Kalyansinghpur police station and submitted demand for their release. While they were returning, the local police forcibly tried to arrest another Adivasi activist named Drenju Krisikka of Lakhpadar village. The villagers unitedly resisted and their efforts prevented the arrest.

But, the local police mentioning the protest of Adivasis as “unlawful activities” have filed an FIR under highly undemocratic laws such as the UAPA and several sections of IPC against eight Adivasi activists associated with the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti. Kalahandi district Ambadola village resident, Upendra Bag, against whom the FIR has been filed, was picked up by the Rayagada police. His arrest was not acknowledged until his son went to file habeas-corporus. He was then produced before the Court and sent to jail after three days of detention. His family members report that he has been tortured while in detention. How protest of tribals against illegal detention could be the activity of “terrorists” for which the state government has used UAPA? The threat of the government to stop exercise of minimum democratic rights by the people and to whitewash own wrongdoings, such use of the UAPA is the display of mere authoritarianism. The police, that were denying detention of Krushna, later forwarded under a false case filed in 2018, released Bari and sent to his village.

Though the state government has decided to hand over Bauxite mining from Sijimali located in Kashipur area of Rayagada district to Vedanta Company, the public hearing and Gram Sabha approval process is yet to be completed. In this situation, some office-bearers of Maitri Infrastructure and Mining India Private Limited, claiming that they have been awarded by the Vedanta company to perform mining work at Sijimali went to that mining area on 12th August with the help of the local police for site-visit. This action of Maitri Private Limited irked the local people and they protested such site-visit. This resulted into forceful

abduction of Dhanafula Majhi, the former Sarpanch of Sindurghati Panchayat, also known as the office-bearers of the "Sijimali Kutrumali Suraksha Samiti", and Sitaram Majhi and Anil Majhi, both the former Samiti Members by Rayagada police on August 16. They were arrested on 19th of this month as people's protests escalated. Meanwhile, 21 villagers have already been arrested from Sijimali area under different sections of the IPC, Criminal Amendment Act and Arms Act. While avoiding the unlawful arrest, one of the villagers fell off the roof and got severe spine injury. Now he is being treated at M.K.C.G, medical college, Berhampur.

The act of protecting one's own land, forest and nature is not a criminal act under the Cr.PC or IPC that the police can arrest someone for this. It has been observed time and again that in order to keep these protesting villagers behind the bar for a pretty longer period of time, provocative incidents are being instigated with the help of local police at first. And then after the villagers get agitated and show some reactions, random arrests are being made under various non-bailable sections of the IPC such as attempt to murder, dacoity, rioting, arson and applying the Criminal Amendment Act as well as the Unlawful Arms Act. For the police to arrest someone, someone must have done the crimes listed in the IPC. The same tactics of the state government took place during the gherao of Kalyansinghpur police station, as well as in Niyamgiri area and in Sijimali area of Kashipur.

Now similar incident is happening in the Maliparvat area of Patangi block of Koraput district. On August 23, 2023, some civilian posing themselves as policemen picked up Shri Abhi Sodi and Shri Das Khara, the two office-bearers of the "Mali Parvat Suraksha Samiti", from two different places. Nearly, 42 villages are now opposing the proposed HINDALCO bauxite-mining project. The Odisha High Court cancelled the Public Hearing (October 2022) held by the State Pollution Control Board, Odisha and instructed to organise it again. In the subsequent Hearing (January 2023) the public expressed their opposition. Despite the cancellation of the Vedanta Company's contract following the gram sabha's decision in Niyamgiri, till date, the state government has not assured the local Dongria adivasis that the Niyamgiri hills will not be handed over to any company.

In the case of Sijimali, the state government is not questioning the Maitri Company entering the area without any legal permission. Even in the Maliparvat case, despite the High Court's verdict, the state government did not review the pro-corporate involvement of the District administration. It is hard to believe that the state government desires to have development through democratic process.

Even though Adivasi people of those areas do not want development, the so called 'Vikas' is knocking at their doorstep. Because, aim of the government is to destroy their land, forests and hills, above all, their livelihood. It is not out of place to point out here that this recent clampdown of the Odisha govt. on the anti-mining resistance activists has to be seen in the context of the recent amendment to Forest Conservation Bill which ceased the existence of 'deemed forests' with no rhyme or reason. In Niyamgiri, as per reports, over 90 percent of the forests fall under this category. We are aware of the fact that this is meant to enable trade-offs between the mining corporate houses and the State and Central Governments.

We, on behalf of GASS, strongly condemn these anti people policies of the Governments, the police brutality, the process in which UAPA and Arms Act is being drastically applied with an aim to attack the rights of the democratic movement.

We also appeal to all political parties, progressive organisations, trade unions, writers and media persons to oppose the government's repressive, undemocratic and destructive policies to save this planet from further destruction, so that, our earth can sustain longer.

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