

NOTE

Sham Public Hearing

Debaranjan Sarangi writes:

Despite widespread protest, a fraudulent public hearing organized by the Orissa State Pollution Control Board took place at Tikri on Tuesday, October 17, which addressed the expansion of the illegal mining and refinery project owned by Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL), a joint venture of Hindalco (Aditya Birla group) and Alcan (Canadian aluminium giant), in the 5th Schedule areas of Baphlitnali and Doragurha in Rayagada district, Orissa.

The public hearing was a sham because it sought to address the “expansion” of a project that is illegal at the very outset on the following grounds:

The project is coming up on lands protected as 5th Schedule areas and thus violates the constitutional protection to tribal land.

Land acquisition from local people has proceeded through force and intimidation
Numerous Grama Sabha resolutions have rejected the project.

Original environmental clearance obtained in 1995 has lapsed, and fresh clearance is not applied for. Leave alone “expansion”, even the ongoing work onsite is illegal because projects have neither up-to-date environmental clearance nor forest clearance.

Tikri, the site chosen for the hearing, is away from the plant site and marked by the deployment of heavy security forces, at whose hands the local people have suffered severe repression, including arbitrary arrests, in the past. Holding a so-called public hearing in such an environment of intimidation and hostility speaks volumes about how much public opinion the OSPCB really intended to entertain.

Condemning the public hearing, several organizations sent faxes of protest to the Orissa State Pollution Control Board chairman, to Naveen Patnaik, the Chief Minister, and to A Raja, the MoEF Minister.

On Oct 17th, the Mumbai-based “Kashipur Solidarity Group” group also organized a dharna at Churchgate in Mumbai and distributed pamphlets strongly denouncing the bogus hearing.

Prakrutik Sampada Suraksha Parishad (PSSP), which had decided to boycott the illegal hearing, organized a massive meeting at the plant site, Baghrijbola, on the same day. More than 1000 people came to PSSP’s meeting and took an oath to stop the company’s illegal expansion plans. Challenging the existing project on the grounds of lapse of basic clearances and permits, the people resolved to resist the project in its entirety. At the same time, the people also resolved to intensify their ‘land for the landless’ struggle. ~~██████████~~

