

LETTERS

REJECTING FOREIGN AID

A country standing up to global capital is Eritrea, which some 10 years ago adopted a self-reliance programme that has enabled it to introduce free health and education services. With a meagre budget, but by means of mobilising the masses, Eritrea scores as high, and often higher, than neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia and Kenya on a variety of UN health indicators, including life expectancy, immunisations and malaria prevention. Eritrea is now rejecting foreign aid on the principle that "Fifty years and billions in post-colonial international aid have done little to lift Africa from chronic poverty".

Eritrea's independent stance is not endearing it to US which is proposing to add it to its list of "state sponsors of terrorism", with a view to doing everything possible to damage its economy, including encouraging Ethiopia, ever the willing puppet of America, to restart the Ethiopia/Eritrea war that cost some 70,000 lives between 1998 and 2000. Eritrea's alleged sponsorship of 'terrorism' includes supporting the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia and the Ogaden Liberation Front in Ethiopia (the Ogaden being Ethiopians of Somali ethnicity).

A Reader, London

NARMADA TO NANDIGRAM

From Narmada to Nandigarm, Mumbai to Kashipur. No respite, no regard—for human lives and livelihoods! Corporate profit is the only thing that counts! Nothing else matters!

Nandigram is a burning leaf, still burning, from the pages of that ongoing history. It is in a remote corner of West Bengal in East Medinipur district 180 km from Kolkata. On January 3 this year a notification was issued by the Haldia Development Authority indicating that 19000 acres of cultivated land would be acquired for establishment of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the area to be developed mainly by the Salim group of Indonesia as a chemical hub. But the villagers of Nandigram protested and refused to budge and all hell broke loose. On March 14 the police came, and came the CPI(M) cadres from outside, to raid the villages. The villagers were fired upon. Official death toll stood at 14. But still the villagers refused to budge. And because of High Court intervention the raiders had to turn back. After a relative lull of about 8 months, large gangs of professional mercenaries came down heavily on the area on Nov. 5 early morning from all the sides to recapture Nandigram with sophisticated arms - gunning down people, burning huts, looting and raping. The state machinery deliberately looking the other way chillingly mimicking, in fact even surpassing, what had happened in Gujarat in early 2002. Roads were blocked. Journalists were stopped. So were social and political activists. Prominent and well-known respected figures were publicly roughed up.

The mayhem is still on. However, the operation recapture got virtually over in about a week. Thousands stand evicted, tens killed, innumerable huts burnt, women raped.

Sukla Sen

National Alliance of People's Movements

POLLUTING WATER

The mining industry is a major water polluter, contributing metals that commonly include cyanide. From Argentina to South Africa, however, women are fighting back.

'The Choropampa Defense Front', a Peruvian organisation led by Juana Martinez, rallied and demanded the cleanup of a disastrous mercury spill and filed a lawsuit against Newmont, the US-based corporation responsible.

Carrie Dann and her late sister Mary Dann of the Western Shoshone Nation have not only battled to save traditional territory from a federal land grab, but they have also taken on the mining giants. The US government handed over huge tracts of Shoshone land to mining companies including Newmont, Placer Dome, Barrick, and Kennecott. Under the national mining law, these corporations don't pay a dime to the Shoshones or the US public for royalties or for mitigating the consequences of their destructive practices.

In Plachimada, India, indigenous women organised a sit-in outside the factory gates of Coca-Cola after the company heavily depleted the groundwater and then began contaminating the aquifers by pumping polluted water into boreholes designed for solid waste.

The sit-in attracted international solidarity and forced the local plant to close. And the struggle has spread to other areas of India where Coke and Pepsi are depleting and polluting the aquifers.

Erin Mustain, California, USA

SHAMEFUL EVENTS

We, the undersigned have been dismayed and revolted by the events of the past few days in and around Nandigram in West Bengal's East Medinapur district. The manner in which the anti-socials of the dominant party in the ruling front attacked the residents to reestablish the domination over the area exposes the party's lack of commitment to democratic values, principles and norms. The actions of these people under the benign indulgence of the State administration can only strengthen the criminalized and anti-democratic forces in the polity. For four days since the operation began the media and journalists have not been allowed to enter Nandigram, indicating that there is much to hide.

We condemn the assault by the anti-socials carrying the Red flag and functioning under the protection and encouragement of the ruling CPM on the group of reputed social activists, writers, intellectuals and artists led by Medha Patkar who were on a visit to Nandigram to find out first hand what was going on and express their solidarity with the hapless residents evicted from their hearths and homes. Not only were they prevented from entering Nandigram, they were subjected to physical violence and intimidation. The events in Nandigram are inconsistent with the norms of democratic functioning, claims of creating an alternative political culture and the traditions of Bengali culture.

We see in this the application of the so-called "Dum Dum dawai" that a senior CPM Polit-Bureau member approvingly advocated the other day. This is unfortunate since this slogan was coined as a part of the democratic resistance during the memorable food movement in the State in 1966, whereas it is now sought to be applied against the people themselves. All this is reflective of not just intolerance but a strong anti-democratic tendency in the dominant component of West Bengal's ruling party today. What is happening in West

Bengal today is indeed unprecedented in contemporary India and has doubtless besmirched the State's rich history of democratic struggles so that even the Governor of West Bengal who has shown tremendous restraint has been pained to issue a statement against the unfolding events in the State.

We are dismayed at the attitude of the CPM's State and Central leadership which not only did not rein in its cadres but did not deem it necessary or worthwhile to tender unqualified apology to the group led by Medha Patkar for the undemocratic actions of their cadres. This suggests that they are condoning such activity.

If such activities continue even for a day more it would be tantamount to the State government abdicating its constitutional responsibility and a breakdown of the constitutional functioning in the State.

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