

NOTE

## Issuing a Death Certificate

Ranjan Panda writes :

PEOPLE ARE SHOCKED BY the decision taken by the Ministry of Forest and Environment (MoEF) minister Jairam Ramesh on the POSCO plant in Odisha. Some of the people who had been thinking Mr Ramesh, a champion of Environment and that of MoEF would find it surprising that he has in fact issued a death certificate for his own ministry by the way he has given clearance to the POSCO plants.

India is a strange democracy and here two independent committees detailed the fraud in clearance (forest and environmental), and two of the three statutory committees recommended against the coastal and forest clearances granted (only the Environmental Clearance Committee gave a somewhat questionable OK to it), the Environment Minister has left it to the Odisha Government to give an "assurance" that the Forest Rights Act is not violated. The same government who has been found cheating is now given the task to judge the theft?

This is a clear-cut indication of the Ministry being sold out to Foreign Direct Investment and can be said that this decision challenges the very existence of the Ministry of Environment and Forests itself. No balancing act between environment and development this; rather it's a complete sale of natural resources to be destroyed by unsustainable industrialisation.

The additional conditions that Mr Ramesh has put are merely eye wash. Further, the way it vests all the monitoring to be done by the state government and the other regulatory agencies (the ones who have pathetically failed to regulate and monitor pollution in this state) is a sheer mockery of democratic culture. There is no condition laid out for the company and state government to return the land to the displaced people and environmental condition to the 'previous stage' if the conditions are not met by the government.

Even the government of Odisha had itself said that it was assessing fresh the water allocation from different locations other than the Jobra barrage. However, there is no consideration of it given and serious environmental concerns have been conveniently ignored.

On January 21st this year news papers reported how visiting South Korean Trade Minister, Kim Jong-Hoon, said India should not "disregard" the importance of the proposed \$12-billion Posco steel project as the project would bring in a great deal of value for industry in the country and generate thousands of jobs. Everybody knows Mr Ramesh was under pressure from almost everyone, including the Union Steel Minister. So, finally, he has succumbed to the pressure of trade and given a ditch for his own environment. □□□