

LETTERS

ATTACK ON RAMDEV

The National Alliance of People's Movements condemns the sudden and unwarranted police attack on protestors, who were peacefully assembled at the Ramlila Maidan Ground, in support of Baba Ramdev, seeking stringent measures to combat the vice of corruption in the nation. We do understand that there are and would be differences between the approaches and ideologies of various groups, striving to achieve a corruption-free State and society. However, we equally condemn the Government's undemocratic manner of dealing with the peaceful agitation of the people.

People in a democracy have a right to assemble and protest peacefully and when a large gathering had reached the national capital, only with a social cause, the Government should have continued its position of engaging with the agitation through a conclusive and meaningful dialogue, instead of employing such devious ways of 'dispersing the crowd'.

We, at NAPM, have always taken the position that the struggle against corruption must be linked with wider struggles against corporatization, communalism, capitalism, criminality, consumerism in order to be sustainable and equitable. The campaign led by Baba Ramdev is certainly questionable on some of these fronts. All the same, there is today a national atmosphere against corruption, loot of natural and human resources and injustices inflicted on millions of ordinary people, which the powers-that-be must address if the national anger and anguish is to not spiral out of its control, which is already happening in many districts.

Medha Patkar,
Madhuresh Kumar, Shrikanth

POSCO EVICTEES

Dear Prime Minister,

We condemn the outrageous and illegal attempt by the Odisha government, with the connivance and support of the Centre, to attack and seize the land of the villagers affected by the proposed POSCO project. We understand that on June 3rd, 17 people - including five children - were arrested and beaten by the police because they refused to allow the destruction of their farms. We also understand that the administration has been announcing through loudspeakers that they will use force against anyone who does not submit to the takeover of their land within the next 24 hours. Thousands of people are peacefully protesting while 24 platoons of police have been deployed in the area, probably for use in a brute force attempt at taking the land of the villages of Dinkia and Gobindpur TODAY - Monday, June 6th - or in the coming days. This is occurring even as court cases by the villagers are pending in the Orissa High Court and are due to be heard shortly.

This attack on the lives-and livelihoods of thousands is doubly outrageous because it has been repeatedly shown, and accepted by three different official committees, that the takeover of this land is illegal and in violation of the Forest Rights Act. The Environment Ministry has violated the law and its own orders and stated as much when giving the clearance. We note that in February of this year the National Advisory Council had specifically asked you to ensure that the practice of handing over forest land to companies in gross violation of this "landmark law", as you yourself described it, should be halted and action taken against the officials responsible.

Further, the project is proceeding despite the fact that an official committee said it had "potentially disastrous impacts" on the environment that could "cause loss of life"; and after an independent study showed that it would lead to a net loss of employment, destitution and impoverishment of around 50,000 people while producing no benefits for the local economy. Indeed, there is such a pattern of illegality around this project that five prominent anti-

corruption activists have recently called for an investigation into "criminal collusion" between government officials and the company.

We call upon you to immediately ask the Odisha government to halt this illegal attack, to withdraw all clearances given in violation of law, and to take an impartial position in the court cases filed by the people. Failure to stop this attack will show that the UPA government's much vaunted concern over issues of displacement, forest rights and "inclusive growth" is simply an eyewash.

Deep Joshi, PRADHAN and Member, National Advisory Council, Aruna Roy, Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti and Member, National Advisory Council, Kavita Srivastava, People's Union for Civil Liberties and 25 others.