

NOTE

## Shehla Masood and Rio Tinto

G Krishna & P K Roy write :

*"I am proud to be an Indian. Happy Independence Day."*

*—Shehla Masood, 15 August, 2011*

*Gandhi said "the purpose of civil resistance is provocation". Anna has succeeded in provoking the Govt and the Opposition. Hope he wins us freedom from corruption...."*

*—Shehla Masood, 16 August, 2011  
few minutes before her martyrdom.*

[Shehla Masood, a Madhya Pradesh based civil rights and environmental rights activist was shot dead by an unidentified person in front of her residence in Koh-e-Fiza locality in Bhopal around 11 AM on 16th August, 2011.]

IT IS THE IRONY THAT TIGERS, tribals, trees and civil rights and environmental rights activists are being hunted and killed in the same manner.

The possible connection between her murder and Shehla's raising the issue of illegal Diamond mining project in Chhattarpur district, Madhya Pradesh by Rio Tinto, a transnational mining company headquartered in the UK, combining Rio Tinto plc, a London and NYSE listed company, and Rio Tinto Limited, which is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange must be investigated along with other suspicions by a high level probe team.

She was active to save the watershed of the Panna Tiger Reserve and the Shyamri River, one of the cleanest in the country from Rio Tinto's mining activity along with other activists.

There is every reason to believe that the considered timing of her elimination during the ongoing anti-corruption campaign when she was on her way to support Anna Hazare's fast is meant to overshadow the issue of illegal Diamond mining project in Chhattarpur district, Madhya Pradesh by Rio Tinto and the political Mafiosi.

The mining block is inside a forest which is the northernmost tip of the best corridor of teak forests south of the Gangetic plain. It is an established law that mining is non-forestry activity. There is an immediate need for a probe to determine who allowed the mining to take place in such an ecologically fragile area.

The Bunder mine project, near the city of Chhattarpur in Madhya Pradesh, about 500 kilometres south-east of Delhi, is likely to be one of the largest diamond reserves in the world. It is estimated that there is a "inferred resource" of 27.4 million carats, a diamonds resource seven times richer than the Panna mine, country's only working diamond mine.

A statement dated March 22, 2011 was laid in the Parliament (Lok Sabha) on "need to review the diamond mining project in district Chhattarpur, Madhya Pradesh posing serious threat to environment in the region".

Prior to the statement in the Lok Sabha, on March 10, 2011, the FOREST ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING of Ministry of Environment & Forests listed Agenda no. 6 on "Prospecting of diamond at 143 additional locations in 2329.75 ha. forest land located in 18 compartments in Buxwaha Range in Chhattarpur district of Madhya Pradesh by M/s Rio Tinto Exploration India Private Limited. [File No.

8-49/2006-FC-(Vol.)]" to discuss it but did not do so stating, "Due to paucity of time the proposal could not be discussed during the meeting".

Rio Tinto project is threatening unique forest resources in the area affected by the mine in Chhattarpur, MP. In this context, it may be noted that Roger Moody, a veteran journalist in his book *Plunder*, describes Rio Tinto's activities as ranging from "brow-beating opponents, leaning on governments and price-fixing, to violating international law, union-busting and management of one of the world's biggest commodity cartels". His book outlines numerous examples of its environmental irresponsibility.

It is germane to recollect what Sir Roderick Carnegie, as Chairman Rio Tinto-Zinc (RTZ) had said at its 1984 shareholders' meeting: "The right to land depends on the ability to defend it". □