

LETTER

RESISTING 'POWER PROJECT'

National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) condemns the brutal firing of three villagers and ruthless lathi-charge on hundreds of peaceful protesters in the Sompeta Mandal of Srikakulam district, resisting the Thermal Power Project by the Nagarjuna Construction Company, which is to prove a major threat to the livelihoods of hundreds of farmers, fish workers and rural artisans and also irreversibly destroy the fragile ecology in the region.

It is clear that the act of unjust provocation and violence has been the working of the goons let out by the company and the police administration. With a situation of life and death confronted by them, yet determined to save their lands and livelihoods, the people faced the police, but were subjected to severe lathicharge and many villagers, including women and leading persons of the struggle like Krishnamurthy, were overpowered by the police and thrashed on the road. It is also reported that one woman was molested during the altercation.

Responding to an urgent petition filed before it by S Jeevan Kumar of Human Rights Forum, Justice B Subhashan Reddy of the AP Human Rights Commission directed the state administration to immediately (within 10 minutes) withdraw the two-thousand strong police force deployed in the area to silence the people's voices. It also directed the District Collector to furnish a detailed report on the entire issue by July 16th. After the killings and brutality, another petition has been filed before the Human Rights Commission by NAPM and other groups. National Convenors of NAPM including Medha Patkar, Sandeep Pandey and others activists like Shankar Sharma have strongly reacted to the brutality unleashed on the nature-based communities and shall visit the area soon to express solidarity with the people and stand by their side in their assertion for participatory development and livelihood with dignity. Due to the SHRC intervention and wide-spread support to the people's struggle, the police has dared not detain anyone in its custody. Along with many democratic organizations, NAPM (AP) called for a Dharna at Indra Park in Hyderabad on 17th July to denounce the indefensible firings and a team including activists Ramakrishnam Raju, Ajay Kumar and Ratnam would visit the place on the 18th July.

The silver lining amidst this dismal scenario is that the National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA) quashed the environment clearance granted to the Sompeta Thermal Power Plant citing "concealment of information and non-disclosure with respect to the nature of the land" as the reasons. The NEAA also directed that "no new power project be approved in the State of Andhra Pradesh till a survey of all wetlands is completed".

NAPM