

Arcelor-Mittal in Jharkhand

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For the tribals of villages in the Gumla and Khunti districts of Jharkhand, where the Arcelor-Mittal steel plant is to be situated, the company does not spell employment opportunities as much as an annihilation of their way of life, their culture and the environment. Unconvinced by the rehabilitation and resettlement policies of the state government and the company, they are continuing their agitation against the steel major.

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The Jharkhand government has signed 112 memoranda of understanding with various multinational companies in the last three years. Topping the list of key players is the world's largest global steel corporation, Arcelor-Mittal. It has plans to set up one of the world's biggest steel plants of 12 million tonne per annum (MTPA) capacity in the state at an investment of Rs 40,000 crore (\$9.3 billion), that is expected to start operations by 2012. The proposed steel project will be set up in two phases of 6 MT each. While the first phase is expected to be completed within 48 months from the date of agreement on the detailed project report, the second phase will be completed within 54 months after completion of the first phase.

In addition to the steel and mining projects, the steel major will explore the feasibility of setting up a 2,500 MW capacity mega power plant. It will also set up

townships for its employees as part of the project.

The mega steel project which requires 12,000 acres and a 1,500 MW new power plant for its captive consumption will be situated in the Karra, Torpa and Rania block in Khunti district and Kamdara block in Gumla district. The central government has approved the grant of lease of the Karampada iron ore mines located in the reserve forest in Meghataburu Mauja in West Singhbhum district for the proposed steel plant. Experts have opined that the estimated reserve in the mine is about 50 MT of mineralised and very good quality ore. The company has been allotted the Seregarha coal block in the state with an estimated reserve of 160 MT. The steel major has been asked to prepare the mining plan for Karampada and get the necessary approvals from the Indian Bureau of Mines so that the state can go ahead and sign a mining lease deed with the company for a tenure of 30 years according to company sources.

The total iron ore requirement is estimated at 600 MT annually once the plant reaches its full production capacity.

Arcelor-Mittal has also applied for use of water from the adjoining river Karo.

Given this scenario, the local villagers estimate that lakhs of people from about 40 villages are likely to be displaced by the proposed project. In addition, the local forests in the villages, the water sources and ecosystems will also be affected thereby imperilling the environment and the very source of sustenance of the local people. What has irked them the most is that the initial process of site selection, including the survey, etc, was done without taking the local villagers into confidence. "We were kept in the dark, the negotiations were being made in connection with our land, but we were not a party to it", they pointed out. In a bid to pacify the agitated villagers, Arcelor-Mittal has committed Rs 1,250 crore (\$300 million) to rehabilitation and resettlement in Jharkhand. The money will be spent for the improvement of health and educational services and women's empowerment.

Public Relations Exercises

The Arcelor-Mittal Foundation has been specially constituted with the objective of investing in social programmes, and promoting its commitment to society and sustainable development, focusing in particular on the communities where it operates. The foundation will seek to develop partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to push through their programmes. But the hidden agenda seems to be to use the local NGOs in order to find a foothold in the project areas, with a large flow of funds to enhance its public image.

The announcement of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes virtually took the form of election campaigns. The first move was to launch an industrial training institute (ITI) in Khunti, slated to open in 2009. Of the total candidates, 50% were to be selected by the state government and the rest by the company. Half the number of seats were to be reserved for tribal students and 50 scholarships were to be awarded on merit to deserving local students of the region. The ITI was projected as a catalyst of change for the tribal community.

Soon the Mittals also learnt of the tribals' love for hockey. The company wasted

no time in sponsoring hockey tournaments for girls and boys of Khunti and Gumla districts. The training of the players started with the support of the district and the state hockey federations. But the question that follows is, why this concern only for the tribals of Torpa-Kamdara region of Khunti and Gumla districts?

Finally, a \$300 million rehabilitation and resettlement package has been drawn up for the state. Company officials say that it is very serious about the welfare of the people, their ethnic needs and culture at the proposed site of the project. "We are here to stay and for generations", one of them said.

The Congress MP from Khunti, Sushila Kerketta, has been trying to convince the villagers that companies like Arcelor-Mittal will provide much needed employment opportunities. Both the state government as well as the company have drawn up rehabilitation and resettlement policies for the villagers.

Despite all these efforts, the villagers are not convinced. *Jaan Denge, Par Ek Inch Bhi Zameen Na Denge, Mittal Ko Baithne Na Denge... Hamare Purvajon Ka Zameen Nahi Looto* ("We may give away our lives, but will not part with an inch of our ancestral land, Mittals will not be allowed, do not grab our ancestral land...") are some of the slogans heard during the protests.

Spreading Protests

Spearheading their movement, under the banner of the Adivaasi, Moolvaasi, Asthitva Raksha Manch (AMARM) is social activist Dayamani Barla, a journalist writing in Mundari (the local tribal language). Her speeches and writings are bereft of clichés or jargon. "These communities will not survive if they are alienated from the natural resources. How is it possible to rehabilitate or compensate us?" she questions. Her book, *Ek Inch Bhi Zameen Nahi Denge* (We will not part with an inch of our land), on the anti-Mittal movement has flooded thousands of tribal homes; she has also used the medium of video to spread her message. The Manch has also been showing documentary films on the various tribal agitations that have been carried out in the course of history. These films include *Ek aur Ulgulan* (Another Revolt), on

the Koel Karo movement, *Kis Ki Raksha (In Whose Defence?)* on the army's decision to convert the temporary firing range situated on the land and forests occupied by the villagers in Netarhaat, into a permanent one, *Loha Garam Hai* (The Iron Is Hot), a stark presentation on how the sponge iron industry plays havoc with the environment, affecting the people residing in its vicinity.

That these campaigns have borne fruit could be gauged from the success of the agitations organised in the four blocks of Karra, Kamdara, Torpa and Rania, this year on 4, 7 and 10 and 25 March, respectively. The members of AMARM, also put up a successful show of strength, marching through the heart of the state's capital, Ranchi on 29 May, braving the summer heat. In the meantime, Dayamani has been receiving threats to her life. However, she says the agitation and her campaigns will continue.

The first effort of the steel giant on 20 August to hold dialogue with the villagers of Kamdara block, met with a display of brooms, sickles and *samat* (grain thresher) and *tangi* (used for clearing bushes) by the tribal protestors. Even as the rains lashed the villages, thousands of protestors, including women with infants on their backs, assembled near Polka Bazaar, shouting slogans in Mundari. "*Ote hasa abua* (Forest and land are ours), *Karkhaana Kabua*" (We do not want factory...), "*Steel nahi, anaj chahiye, Loha nahi anaj chahiye, Kaarkhaana nahi Jharkhand chahiye...*" (Neither steel nor iron, we want foodgrains, we do not want factories but Jharkhand). They had come from Kamdarra, Karra, Rania and Torpa, the other proposed sites for the project.

Barla points out that for the tribal community, land is not an asset to be sold, it is their heritage. They believe that they are not masters or owners of this heritage, but simply protectors, or preservers for the generations to come. The *sarna sthal* religious sites consist of a collection of certain trees that are worshipped by the community, *sasandari* is the land that they believe has been preserving the mortal remains of their ancestors for centuries. Each village has such sites which cannot be uprooted.