

GRAVEST DISPLACEMENT.....
BRAVEST RESISTANCE

**The Struggle of Adivasis of Bastar, Chhattisgarh
Against Imperialist Corporate Landgrab.**

Sudha Bharadwaj

“The rule of law does not do away with the unequal distribution of wealth and power but reinforces that inequality with the authority of law. It allocates wealth and poverty in such complicated and indirect ways as to leave the victim bewildered.”

Howard Zinn

*Dedicated to the memory of
Tapasi Malik, Dula Mandal,
Lakshiram Tuddu, Satyabhama*
*Whose names we know,
And the hundreds of adivasis of Bastar
Whose names will remain unknown till we claim them.*

Why this essay?

I don't live in Bastar, and I am not an adivasi.

But I have been active in the working class movement of Chhattisgarh for the past 22 years, a movement which became legendary under the charismatic leadership of Comrade Shankar Guha Niyogi. And I strongly feel that understanding what is happening in Bastar today is of the greatest significance not only to us in Chhattisgarh, but to all those who want to understand imperialist onslaught and corporate land grab, particularly in the resource-rich adivasi areas; for all of us involved nationwide in the anti-displacement movement which is day on day becoming a fierce life-and-death struggle against all odds; and in fact for all of us in the peoples' movements who are faced with the abysmally criminal failure of democratic institutions and shrinking democratic spaces on the one hand, and growing repression on the other.

Justice Krishna Iyer, in a speech delivered in the memory of Com. Niyogi said that "he tried boldly and bravely to bring the Constitution to life for lakhs of miners and contract labourers". Com Niyogi was murdered on 28th September 1991 within a fortnight of his petitioning the highest authority of this land – the President of India. The industrialists convicted for his murder by the Sessions Court of Durg were acquitted by the High Court and Supreme Court. The thousands of workers of Bhilai, for whose cause he laid down his life, are still out of work, their cases pending in the High Court. The last essay he wrote, with an uncharacteristic urgency, was "*Rajeev Gandhi Ki Hatya Kyon?*" ("Why was Rajiv Gandhi murdered?") in which he forcefully argued that Rajiv Gandhi, though himself of the "liberalization" paradigm, was considered to be moving too slowly and was eliminated to allow "those who wanted the dollar to move in fast" to have their way. Com. Niyogi predicted that unless there was a widespread debate and churning among the patriotic and democratic sections of the people, our country would become the "grazing ground of the multinationals", for now "only those persons will occupy the seats of power, whom the multinationals favour". At that time, in May 1991, his article seemed to many, to be exaggerated or the usual leftist conspiracy theory. Now we know, it was prophetic.

This essay is part of that debate.

In the numerous industrial areas across Chhattisgarh today, the very blood of young contract labourers is being sucked as they labour for 12-14 hours, for far less than

minimum wages, without weekly holidays, and without safety or medical facility to generate the enormous wealth of “Chhattisgarh Shining!” Unionizing them today doesn’t only mean facing the goondas of the industrialists, risking the loss of precarious jobs, sustaining an uncompromising struggle against great odds, and developing a mature and bold leadership that can withstand both carrot and stick - though this is a tall enough order. It also means struggling against the serious imperialist onslaught against the people of Chhattisgarh.

An onslaught where gigantic corporations like Holcim and Lafarge are gobbling up the cement sector, they have already acquired ACC, Ambuja, and Raymond Cements. Taking advantage of rich limestone deposits, they are manufacturing the cheapest cement in the world, earning superprofits and planning to set up new capacities. Between them and the big cement manufacturers like Aditya Birla they have formed the “Chhattisgarh Cement Manufacturers Association” a cartel that has its office at a stones throw from Chief Minister Raman Singh’s residence – a proximity symbolic of their stranglehold influence over the state administration. These companies are blatantly violating well established Indian labour standards which prohibit the use of contract labour in cement manufacture, and mandate that contract labour be paid at par with regular workers, i.e at the rate of the Cement Wage Board. (Holcim, for instance, has appealed against an Award obtained by our union to regularize 573 contract workers whose contracts have been held to be sham and bogus.) They are refusing to abide by the State Rehabilitation Policy which prescribes permanent jobs for those displaced by their plants, and they are in fact creating an explosive situation in the rural areas by employing outsiders in preference to the affected peasants. Under the leadership of the Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh and the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Mazdoor Karyakarta Committee) – workers, peasants and particularly women – have been militantly struggling and have had some success in enforcing minimum wages and getting some affected peasants employed in these factories. But we still need to forge a unity of all cement workers in Chhattisgarh, across union lines, to wage a serious struggle demanding that multinationals implement the law of the land.

On the other hand, the local small and medium steel industry of Chhattisgarh is facing a severe crisis and hundreds of units – mini steel plants, sponge iron units, rolling mills - are closing down, thousands of workers are facing the threat of retrenchment. This crisis is another facet of the imperialist onslaught. The best quality iron ore of Chhattisgarh is literally flowing out as slurry, day after day, to be shipped out to Japan at a mere Rs. 400 a tonne. The State government is only too keen to sign MOUs with the big corporate houses – Tata, Essar, Mittal, Jindal.... and to practically gift away the best deposits of iron ore as captive mines at a measly royalty of less than Rs. 50 a tonne. But the local industry is having to purchase iron ore at open market rates, which had touched upto Rs. 5800 per tonne recently. Along with our union the Jan Adharit Engineering Mazdoor Union, the CMM has been continuously protesting against these pro-imperialist policies in order to save local industry and jobs, and exhorting the local industrialists not to be “penny wise and pound foolish” in trying to make up the lakhs of losses on raw material costs by squeezing a few thousands out of the workers legal wages.

Increasingly it is becoming more clear to us that the factories are not the only battleground against imperialist and monopoly capital, the hardest struggles are in the countryside where these companies are zeroing in on mineral resources, and are engaged in a land grab on an unbelievable scale. Whether for coal blocks in Raigarh, or a power plant in Premnagar, cement plants in Tilda, or a large industrial area in Rajnandgaon, bauxite mining in Sarguja and Jashpur, sponge iron plants in Raipur or

diamond mining in Devbhog, peasants everywhere – particularly adivasis and dalits - are facing and resisting displacement – weakly compromising at some places, facing repression determinedly at others. 41 and now 65 more villages near Raipur are to be displaced for a glittering new capital region of Corporate Chhattisgarh; 9 villages for an army camp for a revamped High Court premises close to Bilaspur; 7 villages for an air force base in Rajnandgaon. Not to mention the displacement for the Tiger Reserve, Elephant Reserve, Wild life Sanctuaries etc. in Bilaspur, Jashpur and Dhamtari districts... The list is endless.

CMM has also been active in the anti-displacement movement – in opposing the demolition of urban *bastis*, particularly in the industrial areas where the lowly paid contract workers live; in organising the already displaced peasants around industrial establishments to demand jobs and compensation; and in playing a prominent role along with the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha in stalling the acquisition of 7 villages at Rajnandgaon for a Special Industrial Zone. It has expressed solidarity with the Raigarh Bachao Sangharsh Samiti which has been fighting the total domination of the Jindal group and its 'private army' notorious for its land grabbing, brokering of material inputs for local small industry, rampant exploitation of workers and the pollution of the air, soil and water of Raigarh district. A peasant woman Satyabhama lost her life, ironically on the 26th of January, when being force-fed to break the indefinite fast she had undertaken to save the waters of the Kelo river from pollution by Jindal (In yet another example of the obscene hypocrisies that we now take for granted, the Jindal Steel and Power Limited recently received the "Srishti Green Cube Award 2007 for Good Green Governance" from Sheela Dikshit, the Chief Minister of Delhi!) The CMM has been an active participant in the anti-displacement front Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, which was launched at Ranchi on 23rd March 2007, and which has been attempting to unite the people's resistance to displacement countrywide.

The struggle to bring into the public domain the MOUs of Tata and Essar in Bastar and Dantewada; the fake gramsabhas in Lohandiguda and Dhurli blocks conducted at gunpoint to obtain consent for land acquisition, and presided over by the Salwa Judum supremo and District Investment Promotion Board Chairman Mahendra Karma; the arrests of vocal villagers including when they were on their way to keep a scheduled appointment with the Governor; the slapping of cases under the National Security Act on activists of the Adivasi Mahasabha; the FIRs that were finally lodged, after repeated complaints, against sundry dalals of Tata for the "fake compensations" given to the wrong persons and even in the name of the dead; these are events about which I and the CMM have had personal knowledge, and about which we have continuously raised our voice. CMM had organized torchlight processions in several industrial centres protesting against the arrest of Manish Kunjam and other leaders of the Adivasi Mahasabha on the eve of the alternative gram sabhas organized in Lohandiguda and Bhansi to protest land acquisition.

But I could only grasp the enormity of the information blackout – the silence, half truths and sheer lies – call it the "wall of silence", that exists between Bastar and the rest of Chhattisgarh, when as an active member of the Chhattisgarh PUCL, I joined several fact finding teams to investigate into fake encounters. When we found out that the shiksha karmis and student killed in Gollapalli allegedly in "Naxalite cross fire" had actually been murdered by the police and SAF even after they had repeatedly asserted their identity; when the "dreaded Naxalites encountered" in Nayapara turned out to be adivasis who had returned to their ancestral village in search of work; when the theory of "accidental firing because of hidden Naxalites" in the Cherpal Salwa Judum camp was boldly

rubbished by the villagers in the camp who were furious at the killing of a woman and a small baby by a trigger happy CRPF jawan. In the media we repeatedly saw a total silence about ordinary people on the one hand, and cymbal-clashing war-cries against Maoists, always pictured as AK-47 toting with sinisterly covered faces, on the other. Each time we uncovered the truth, which, mind you, was absolutely self-evident to the local people, and tried to cross the “wall”, it was buried again under a heap of papers – false statements, enquiries, and the inevitable conclusions justifying the atrocities. In short, back to square one. This is another attempt to scale that wall.

“Rich Lands of Poor People”: Scenario of Chhattisgarh

Chandra Bhushan, a researcher on mineral policy writes:

“India announced a new National Mineral Policy (for non-coal and non-fuel minerals) in early April, after two-and-a-half years of wrangling between mineral-rich states and the central government, between steel-makers, iron ore miners and exporters. The objective of this policy, NMP-2008, is clear: it will promote privately-owned, large-scale, mechanized mines—if they happen to be controlled by multinationals, still better.... NMP-2008 ignores the fact that mining in India is not only about minerals and a simple 'dig and sell' proposition, it is about tribals and backward castes and their land and livelihood alienation. It is about poverty, backwardness and Naxalism. It is also about deforestation and biodiversity impact, water security and pollution.”

Ravi Tiwari, General Secretary of the Chhattisgarh Cement Manufacturers' Association accidentally blurts out the truth when he states in an article dated 25/9/2007 in the “*Jansatta*”. “This State is as rich under its soil, as those who dwell on it are economically impoverished.” He tells us that Chhattisgarh has more than 28 precious mineral resources including limestone, dolomite, coal, iron ore, diamond, gold, quartzite, tin ore, tin metal, granite, corundum, marble, beryl, bauxite, uranium, alexandrite, copper, silica, fluorite and garnet. In September 2008, a road blockade by hundreds of villagers of the “Jameen Bachao Sangharsh Samiti” stalled a proposal for handing over an area of 105 square kilometers situated in 30 villages of Kunkuri Tehsil of district Jashpur to the Jindal Power and Steel Limited “to prospect for gold, diamond, platinum group of minerals, precious and semiprecious gemstones”.

The way companies are zeroing on mineral resources can be seen in the cement sector. There are about 8225 million tones of limestone in Chhattisgarh, predominantly in the Raipur, Durg, Janjgir, Bilaspur, Rajnandgaon, Kawardha and Bastar districts, a large proportion of which is cement grade. Today more than 6% of the country's cement is produced here by 7 large and 4 small cement plants with a total capacity of nearly 10.5 million tones. In the past decade the plant of the public sector Cement Corporation of India at Mandhar has closed down. While the well known brands of ACC and Ambuja have been taken over by the Swiss multinational Holcim, indeed 12.5% of Holcim's sales are now from its 24 Indian plants. Lafarge has also taken over two cement plants. The Raman Singh government in its last term has signed MOUs with 11 companies, for setting up new plants as well as expanding old ones. If these new capacities are achieved, it would more than triple the cement production to about 36 million tones.

Seven percent of the country's bauxite, about 198 million tones, is available in the Sarguja, Jashpur, Kawardha, Kanker and Bastar districts. It is being mined at present in Sarguja by the now privatized Balco (Sterlite) company in Chhattisgarh and the Hindalco company of Uttar Pradesh. More than 200 adivasi families have lost their lands to Hindalco so far and the process is still continuing. Although there is theoretically a lease agreement, which states that the company would restore the land to its original condition

as far as is practicable, but in reality no rent whatsoever is paid, and in the name of employment one person from the affected family works as lowly paid contract labour. Discontent is rife among these landless adivasi miners. It is pertinent that Dheeraj Jaiswal, a notorious SPO in erstwhile SP Kalluri's retinue charged of many fake encounters and rapes in the name of fighting Naxals, doubles up as a goonda for Hindalco to keep its labour in order. Bauxite is processed into aluminium, an important input in the aviation and defence industry. There is a global bottleneck in this mineral, hence the corporate hawks are very much on the lookout for potential deposits.

Sixteen percent of the country's coal, a whopping 39,545 million tones is to be found in the Raigarh, Sarguja, Koriya and Korba districts of northern Chhattisgarh. On 5th January 2007, the adivasis of Village Khamariya, Tehsil Tamnar were subjected to vicious and brutal lathicharge when in a public hearing ostensibly arranged by the district administration, but clearly dominated by the Jindal company, they raised objections to giving up their lands to the Jindal Coal Mines.

The public hearings for environmental clearances for three more power projects including AES Chhattisgarh Power (a joint venture with the American energy giant) were recently stalled by villagers protesting that they had not been notified and they apprehended widespread pollution.

The Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Ltd (IFFCO) had to withdraw its proposal of setting up a 1000 mw coal-based thermal power plant in Premnagar in Sarguja district in March after strong protests. The villagers organized in the "Gram Sabha Parishad" had attacked IFFCO officials conducting "secret surveys" and had protested the diversion of the Atem river for the plant. When the company persisted and got their leader arrested, over 1,000 people marched to the police station to get him released. The new site subsequently chosen by IFFCO, 10km away, also came into serious controversy recently, when villagers who had passed a resolution against the project, found that their Sarpanch was being whisked away secretly to a meeting in a police jeep, disguised as a policeman! All this would have been amusing, had it not been so dead serious.

The very first notification issued by the BJP govt. of Chhattisgarh after its recent electoral victory was of the splitting up of the Chhattisgarh State Electricity Board into 5 separate companies, a move which had been consistently resisted by the workers' and engineers' associations. This move is being seen clearly as a hidden privatization, for which foreign, particularly American, companies are also reported to be in the running. Chhattisgarh produces the cheapest electricity in the country and private players after taking over the CSEB would use cut-throat competition to push other State Electricity Boards out of the running. It would also mean neglect of rural electrification which entails greater distribution costs. The workers of CSEB, particularly the independent "Vidyut Karmachari Janta Union" are on strike, and ESMA has been invoked against them. Even for the proposed power plant of the CSEB at Bhaiyathan in Sarguja, a private developer Indiabulls Power Generation Ltd would be the main player, the CSEB basically providing the fig-leaf with a 26% stake, since the coal blocks have been allotted in its name.

Even otherwise, in the coal sector, the presence of the coal mafia is so overpowering that an MLA of Dhanbad has alleged that "SECL could earn only Rs 800 crore profit in the fiscal year 2006-07, whereas it (the earning) could have been more than Rs 30,000 crore if the government could have reduced the pilferage." In particular it is an open secret that in Chhattisgarh the Aryan Coal Beneficiaries (also associated with the daily newspaper Haribhoomi) has a monopoly over the washery business and therefore makes a lot of money at SECL's expense.

With the changes in mining policy permitting foreign companies, the Arrow company has started drilling the first of thirteen wells at the Tatapani-Ramkola blocks approximately 90 km south of Ambikapur in district Sarguja. The well is being drilled by the Australian drilling company South West Pinnacle Drilling and coal is expected to be touched at a depth of 500-900m.

Remember Dilip Singh Judeo, "Raja" of Jashpur and BJP leader of the aggressive re-conversion movement against the Christian community, being caught taking bribes on camera from a company representative before the last assembly elections? What is rarely revealed is that the company was the Australian mining giant – Broken Hill Properties.

One-fifth of the country's iron ore – about 2336 million tones averaging 68% purity is found in the Dantewada, Kanker, Rajnandgaon, Bastar and Durg districts. The Bhilai Steel Plant is one of the world's most efficient steel plants, yet it is being deliberately tripped up by private players particularly Jindal Steel & Power. The scramble for the best deposits have started between the public sector NMDC and the Tata and Essar groups, with litigation pending in the Delhi High Court. But this is not all. It is claimed that Tata has acquired Corus. And that Essar Steel is to buy the American steel firm Esmark. Last year, Essar bought Minnesota Steel for an undisclosed sum, only days after it also agreed to acquire Canadian firm Algoma Steel for \$1.6bn. The elite of India choose to regard these events as a coming of age of India Inc. and a mark of our becoming a global superpower. The Esmark chief executive James Bouchard, is more forthright and says "Esmark needed a strategic partner as raw material and transport costs rose". In other words, Essar and Tata are going to be the Indian face of the big foreign mining companies who are facing a raw material crunch today. All these acquisitions have been financed by hefty loans from FFIs, which are going to be a stone around the necks of these companies in the present financial crisis.

On 17th May 2008, about 5,000 tribals from 25 villages took out a two-day 'padyatra' under the banner of 'Adivasi Mahasabha' from Bhansi, where the proposed steel plant of Essar is to come up, to Faraspal of district Dantewada, to protest mining of iron ore from the Bailadila mountains. They claimed that the government has granted mining leases to 96 industrial houses besides Tata and Essar in the Bailadila area and demanded that the mountains, 40 km long and 10km wide, which contained iron ore deposits to the tune of 300 crore tonnes should not be given on lease to private companies for mining as it could pose a threat to the existence of the mountains as also the culture of local tribals.

As regards the earnings of the state, Praveen Patel of the Tribal Welfare Society reveals some startling details:

"There is nothing to take pride in the news that Chhattisgarh has earned Rs.7 billion in mineral royalty on coal, bauxite and iron ores during the first nine months of the current fiscal 2007-08.

The government states that over 2 lakh tonnes of iron ore has been excavated in first nine months but what about the rate of Royalty earned in iron ore only? Why that figures are not shared with the public. Let me throw some idea to lift the veil. As per my information, the average royalty of iron ore which the state has collected is about Rs. 27/- per metric tonne only where as the current international rates of iron ore are in the range of above US \$ 210. It would have been better, if the government would have stated bluntly that they are allowing the daylight robbery of the iron ore, parallel of which is not seen anywhere else in the world."

The Bastar region is one of the richest in mineral resources – not only in iron ore, but also perhaps a host of other unexplored minerals including limestone, bauxite, and even diamond and uranium. In 2005 it was not only with Tata and Essar and Texas Power Generation that confidential MOUs were signed allotting iron ore deposits, coal blocks,

water reservoirs and hectares and hectares of land, but scores of companies were given prospecting and mining licenses. Unfortunately for the powers that be, however, there happened to be lakhs of adivasis – neglected, exploited and oppressed by the “mainstream” - literally sitting on top of these most precious assets, and even more unfortunately for them, since the early 80’s the Naxal movement had dug deep roots there. The estimate of the then Director General of Police DGP Rathore was that there were about 50,000 “Sangham” or members of the peasant committees and frontal organizations (women and youth organizations) of the Maoists in the year 2005. And so started the “Salwa Judum” a massive and brutal ground clearing operation which was to affect about 3.5 lakhs of adivasis in 644 villages, the most widespread displacement anywhere in the country. “Draining out the water and killing the fish” was the expression used by Mahendra Karma.

“Jan Denge, Jameen Nahi Denge!” - A Fierce Resolve.

“Those who are going to become homeless and uprooted in this race of so-called development, they will also be finally forced to accept the bitter truth that they cannot stop the loot of their lands and resources by any democratic and non-violent means. This is a dangerous situation. Even a combative organization like “Narmada Bachao Andolan”, which included a large number of educated persons, has accepted the bitter truth that is no administrative or legal means of preventing the loot of resources. Now it is only through unity and by force that these plunderers can be stopped. That is the reason why today, in Kalingnagar, Nandigram etc. there is a situation of “do or die”. All these struggles are proving to be landmarks in stopping the loot. The people of these areas have firmly resolved that come what may, they will not let any government officer set foot on their land. In these circumstances if the government uses force, violence may erupt.”

*Prashant Bhushan, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court
“Stop Land Acquisition”, Nai Azadi Udghosh, February 2007 (Translation ours)*

All over the country the peasantry is up in arms against the policy of land acquisition and Special Economic Zones. Jhajjar in Haryana, Dadri in Uttar Pradesh, Raigarh in Maharashtra, the Chengara struggle of Kerala, the struggles in Polavaram and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh, agitations against the acquisition for JP Cement in Rewa and for Reliance, Essar and Hindalco in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh.... Within a year of the passage of the SEZ Act, 300 SEZs had been sanctioned giving 1,40,000 hectares of land to private companies. The draconian provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and the SEZ Act, 2005 do not give the peasant any remedy once the state rejects any objections he/she may have, and declares that his/her land has to be acquired for public purpose. The Judiciary of this country, led by the apex court, has been, if anything, implementing the policies of imperialist globalization more consistently and harshly than the Executive. It has refused to review what is considered “public purpose” by the government in the name of not interfering with government policy. It has stated that the directive principles which hold that the resources of the people held in trust by governments must be used for the greatest common good, and that the concentration of wealth in a few hands be avoided are not enforceable by a court of law. In other words, the “socialism” of the Preamble has no place in this era. Our Indian Judiciary has gone a step ahead of the British colonial masters who at least distinguished between “acquisition for companies” and “acquisition for public purpose” by providing for them in two separate chapters of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. In fact, earlier, when the government acquired for companies, it was necessary to follow the rules framed in this regard which mandated that the government ensure that other alternative non-agricultural land was not available, and that the company had made adequate efforts to

purchase the land itself before it stepped in. Under the euphemism of “public private partnership”, development has been redefined to mean that public resources are to be used for private profits! So much for the Constitution!

Interestingly the Secretary of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation came out with a report recently, expressing grave concern that rich countries and rich companies were taking over vast tracts of lands in poor nations, seriously jeopardizing food security. The report gave an instance of 10 lakh hectares of land being taken over in Madagascar where conditions of starvation are prevailing among the rural masses. It said this tendency could be described as “neo-colonialism”! Our country is indeed faithfully following the path charted out for it.

The loot of precious mineral resources, pristine forests and abundant water resources in particular, has further intensified in adivasi areas all over the country. And the adivasis, with their sense of identity and dignity, their communal way of life in co-existence with nature, and their strength of collectivity have been resisting it with all the strength at their command. The eastern states of Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh and the contiguous parts of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh have become the storm centre of this resistance. In Jharkhand alone, 46 MOUs have been signed including with Arcelor Mittal, but so far not even a single company has been able to set up its plant. Peoples’ movements have sprung up spontaneously and are holding out their own against powerful companies. And no doubt the overarching presence of the Maoist movement in the background has prevented the State from deploying overwhelming force to crush the peoples’ movements.

***“We shall give up our lives but not land.” The slogan is overwhelming across the state of Jharkhand against displacement induced by the development projects. It is not only a slogan for the Adivasis but it is also their determination, pledge and hope to ensure their ownership rights over the natural resources i.e. land, forest and water. They have already won the battle against the Field Firing Range in Netarhat and the Power Project in Koel-Karo near Ranchi, which has inspired another ten thousand Adivasis of Kathikund and Shikaripara blocks of Dumka district too. They have called off a “Janta Curfew” in the areas against the police firing, which took place on December 6, where activist Lakhiram Tuddu lost his life and 7 people were severely injured including 3 police men.

The incident took place, when 5 thousand people had gathered near Kathikund Police station under “Jail Bharo Abhiyan” against the arrest of activists - Munni Hansada, Charan Kumar, Hopna Baski and Rajcharan Murmu and demanding for their immediate release.The problem had started in the region in 2005 when the RPG group power utility, CESC Ltd had signed MoU with Arjun Munda, the former chief minister of Jharkhand on 15 of September 2005 for setting up a coal based mega power plant with the capacity of 1000 mega watt with an estimated investment of Rs. 4,000 crore. The company requires 1000 acres of land for the plant, where 6 villages would be ruined and 10 thousand people would be displaced. But the fact is the company would provide merely 250 mega watts to the Jharkhand State Electricity Board at regulated prices while rest 750 mega watts would be given to the national grid. In this case, how the state government envisages of addressing the power crisis?

Another big traditional meeting was held at Pokharia village of Kathikund in Dumka on May 8, 2008, where thousands of Adivasi men, women and children had gathered in the blazing sun. The agriculture minister Nalin Soren was socially boycotted for offering Rs. 13 lakh cash, one vehicle and Rs. 20 thousand per month as honorarium to the village-head Fulo Marandi of Amgachi of Dumka district for convincing the villagers to surrender their land for the proposed power plant. The other five villagers were found guilty as they had guided Basant Soren the son of Sibin Soren in approaching the village head while he had visited to Amgachi village to convince the village head for the project and the crime of the police officer Jai Prakash Toppo was for denying to hand over these five middle men to the villagers therefore he was also socially boycotted. It was also declared in the “Dishum Baishi” that the land would not be given for the company at any cost and every one would be punished who would be found guilty in land alienation activities.”

Gladson Dungdung, Indigenous India Blogspot.

“The war for land surfaced with a vicious intensity in Jharkhand when angry villagers first thrashed Bhushan Power and Steel Company’s surveyors, then blackened their faces and made them chew their

shoes before garlanding them with slippers and parading them at Sarmohuda village in East Singhbhum district.

The incident forced Bhushan Power and Steel Company Limited to announce suspension of its acquisition drive for its Rs 12,000 crore greenfield steel plant in Potka block of the district. Apart from the three million tonne Greenfield steel plant, Bhushan also proposes to set up a 900 mw power plant.

The three land surveyors, Yusuf Ahmed, Sahdeo Singh and Sheetal Kumar were stopped by villagers who had gathered under the banner of Gram Ganraj Parishad and Bhoomi Sudhar Andolan, and after the thrashing, bound and dragged them to the police station, a Bhushan Steel spokesman said .

Bhoomi Sudhar Andolan Convenor Ramesh Hansda alleged that the company was conducting the land survey without permission from the district administration, a charge denied by Bhushan Steel."

Sanjay Ojha, TNN, 13 September 2008

"Step into Jharkhand's Tentoposi village in Seraikela district and you will be greeted with hostile glances. Sitting on rich mineral reserves of iron ore, residents of this village are constantly under the fear of displacement and loss of livelihood sources. Tata Steel has already announced that it will set up a 12-million tonne integrated steel plant in the area at an investment of Rs 42,000 crore and has signed MOU with the state government. The villagers suspect that there are people lurking around the village to usurp their land. Hence, they are on alert. They have created a security cordon around the village. Volunteers, wielding bows and arrows, guard the barricaded village at all hours. No government official or a media person is allowed in.

There are several other companies eyeing the rich mineral deposits of this tribal-dominated state. Since the state was carved out of Bihar in 2000, the state government has signed 44 MOUs with companies like Arcelor Mittal, Tata and Jindal for mega industrial ventures worth Rs 198,362.26 crore. These prospective investors will acquire over 45,000 hectares and eventually displace more than 1,000,000 people, mostly from the east and west Singhbhum and Seraikela-Kharswan region, says Xavier Dias, coordinator of Bindrai Institute of Research Study and Action (birsa), a Jharkhand-based tribal rights group.

Recent incidents at Singur (in West Bengal) and Kalinganagar (in Orissa) have incensed the tribals more. They have vowed to sacrifice their lives to protect their land rather than vacate it for industrial development. All villages where the industrial giants have announced to set up projects are currently under the vigilance of more than 60 tribal organizations. Under the banner of Jharkhand Mines Area Coordination Committee (jmacc), these groups have announced a battle against mining and displacement. "The minerals will be tainted with blood if any of these companies dare to acquire even an inch of tribal land," says Puneet Minz, general secretary of jmacc. Minz refuses to divulge names or any information about the tribal groups involved in the anti-displacement movement. "Police and the state machinery are after us. Once we disclose the names, they will be either picked up or tortured to quit the movement," says Minz."

A K Gupta, Down to Earth

In Orissa, the Hirakud dam was in the news for two reasons recently. One was that the oustees of the dam received compensation after 4-5 decades. The other was that the farmers of the area were strongly protesting the diversion of the water from the Hirakud dam to industry. This in a nutshell spells out the cruel apathy that development has been for tribal people, and lays bare the sound reasoning behind what appears to be a stubborn irrational resistance to acquisition and industrialization. That is, that not only the displaced but even the so-called beneficiaries are bound to be cheated when the state's singular concern is to aid the fattening of private capital (and incidentally the fattening of its own representatives in the bargain).

"Farmers say they will not accept anything less than a complete ban on industrial use of the dam water. On March 23 Bhagat Singh's 76th martyrdom day the farmers renewed their pledge to continue their fight for water. They gathered at 'Chasi Rekha', a border wall inside the reservoir beyond which industrial units are not allowed to draw water. Holding the dam water in their palms, they pledged: "We will not allow company raj on Hirakud water."On November 6, 2007, some 30,000 farmers had gathered at the reservoir in Sambalpur district. Many were injured in police lathicharge (see 'Groundswell', *Down To Earth*, December 31, 2007). Soon after the incident, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced a Rs 200-crore package for the repair and renovation of the Hirakud canal system. Lingaraj, convenor of the Western Orissa Farmers Coordination Committee, says the package is aimed at diverting attention from the core issue of water diversion.

They want the government to cancel all post-2003 agreements with industrial units and reach water to over 20,000 hectares in the command area. Another of their demand is that Patnaik should punish companies illegally drawing water from the dam.

Ranjan K Panda

Meanwhile the private violence by company goons of POSCO and the Tatas against the adivasi communities has been intensifying. Abhay Sahoo, the popular leader of the Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti was arrested on 12th October when he was undergoing treatment at Bhutmunde, Paradeep and 23 false cases were foisted on him so as to deny him bail.

The events of Orissa have forced the organizations and activists of the anti-displacement movements to think and debate how to resist state violence and private corporate violence, and to assert the right of the people to resist under all circumstances and by all means. We in CMM also experienced this when we visited the Boringpader village in Lanjigarh (Niyamgiri). When a police jeep was seen in the distance, the entire village came out - women, men and children with whatever they could lay hands on - axes, sickles and sticks. The jeep stopped at a distance and a policeman came out with his hands raised in a gesture of surrender. When he came closer he told the leaders apologetically that he had been sent from the police station to get the details of the visitors. After taking those he left, and the people relaxed. Later the villagers explained that the first time they had taken out a procession against Vedanta company, the company goons had attacked them ferociously, people had fled in fright and had been chased away for several kilometres. Ever since then, they said, they always carry their traditional weapons and no-one has dared to attack their processions and meetings!

JAGATSINGHPUR, June 26: Lawlessness reigned supreme in Govindpur village as anti-Posco activists, on the rampage since last week following the death of one of their activist Dula Mandal, today confined two persons and claimed recovery of huge cache of weapons and bombs from Govindpur school premises.

The Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samity (PPSS) activists claimed to have made a break through to the assault and murder of Dula Mandal. We confronted a pro-project activist Mr Narottam Mohanty, confined and interrogated him, they said.

Some of the anti-Posco activists then assaulted schoolteacher Mr Jadumani Das to ascertain as to who had attacked Mandal. Basing on the information provided by Mr Mohanty and Mr Das, they raided the school premises and claimed to have recovered six boxes containing country bombs, 75 swords and other weapons.

It may be noted here that Mandal and other anti-Posco activists had clashed near the Govindpur primary schools premises on 20 June. Bombs were hurled and Dula Mandal died in the attack.

The PPSS which is observing a Black Week since 22 June, had alleged that it was a pre-planned attack by goons who had been hiding at the school. The counter version was that a pro-project faction was holding a meeting at the school when their rivals started pelting stones leading to the violence. Police had arrested 22 people in this connection with the clash even as PPSS activists aggressively held a meeting attended by CPI leader Mr AB Bardhan and leaders of all Opposition political parties."

Statesman News Service

"Trouble started brewing in Kalinga Nagar when on Monday TATA people tried performing religious rituals at the proposed site in Kalinga Nagar despite strong protests from locals. They were chased away by the local people but ultimately performed the ritual in a different place near Maithan steel plant. On Tuesday they made yet another attempt to break the people's resistance with about 200 people camping in two different locations near the proposed site supposedly for the construction of the boundary wall which has stopped since 2nd Jan 06 when the police shot dead men, women and children.

Kalinga Nagar Anti-displacement Forum activist (BBJM) Rabi Jarika claims these are not construction workers but goons deployed to attack and harm the tribals protesting against TATA. He is sure that the plan is to surround them from all sides and attack like it has happened in similar situations elsewhere be it proposed POSCO site at Dinkia or Nandigram.

Seeing the heavy deployment of the goons the locals have now also assembled at the proposed site and have braced themselves for yet another confrontation to save their land. The tension reached a high point yesterday when almost two dozen people in 7-8 motorcycles tried entering the proposed site. The locals claim some of them were the likes of goons from Jamsedhpur deployed by TATA in Kalinga

Nagar. The locals captured these motorcycle borne troublemakers who were not harmed, though the motorcycles were set afire and broken "to make it loud and clear to the State and TATA company that they would continue to resist the land grab and any such attempt to snatch their constitutional rights" said Jarika. The motorcycle borne assailants are now hiding inside the Jindal steel plant premises.

Rabi Jarika alleges that the district administration and police are hand in glove with TATA goons as they only could have allowed such a massive deployment of armed goons. According to the locals the TATA goons are well armed and have come in cars and motorcycles using the main roads. BBJM activists claim that such free movement of the goons can only be possible with the aid of the state. "Do they want another massacre like 2nd Jan" asked Dabar Kalundia who had survived a murderous attack on him by Arbind Sing, a TATA accomplice, on 1st May this year. In that attack Amin Banara, another BBJM activist had been killed by the bullets of the TATA goons. Previous to that Jogendra Jamuda had been attacked by armed men which he miraculously survived. "While the goons are armed with guns and bombs to attack us we are armed with our traditional weapons like arrows and axes to protect ourselves" said Kalundia. Some of the locals also allege that BJD minister Prafula Ghadei has a big role to play."

Surya, posted on the Cgnet.

In West Bengal the Singur Krishi Jameen Raksha Committee won a well-deserved victory with the retreat of the Tatas who left "without paying their bill" (as aptly put by Shri D. Bandhopadhyay, ex Secretary for Land Reforms) of more than Rs. 532 crores spent by the West Bengal government on land acquisition, construction of boundary wall, police protection and subsidy on land transfer. After this, a vicious media campaign was carried out by this influential corporate group, personally targeting Mamta Bannerji, to deflect the attention of the readership from the just struggle of the people of Singur against the acquisition of multi-crop fertile agricultural land and for the rights of tillers (as opposed to absentee landlords). Ratan Tata even issued an Open Letter to the youth of West Bengal exhorting them to side with Buddhadeb to get development and jobs! The CPM cadres too set up a Nano Bachao Committee! A CBI court convicted Suhrid Dutta, CPM Zonal Secretary, in the murder of the young agitator Tapasi Malik.

The CPM loudly proclaims itself as anti-imperialist, how then can it fail to see that today Tata, Ambani, Jindal, Mittal are the Indian face of that imperialism? The pattern of "development" being aggressively pushed by these corporate barons neither represents a rational and sustainable use of resources; nor substantial expansion of purchasing power and local markets; nor improvement in the extremely poor living standards of masses of our people, but is a mere integration into the loot machine of finance capital. The results are before us – a handful of billionaires, nearly two lakh peasant suicides, and 77% of our population earning less than Rs. 20 a day.

In Nandigram, the notification for an SEZ - a chemical hub of the Salem group (notorious as "the mass killer of communists" in Indonesia) had to be cancelled following the widespread outrage against police firing on protesting peasants. After this there were repeated efforts by the government and CPM cadres to "recapture" Nandigram by brute force, which were militantly resisted by the Bhoomi Ucched Pratirodh Committee. The state's argument was, that after the notification was cancelled the people did not have a right to prevent the entry of the police and government servants, that would amount to a setting up a "parallel governance" which could not be tolerated. In a sense, this captures a fundamental feature of the radical resistance to acquisition – the assertion of the people's right to self rule - as opposed to a struggle only for better compensation and rehabilitation.

The embers of Singur and Nandigram had hardly died down, when Lalgarh in district West Midnapore burst into flames:

"The entire chain of events started after the 2nd November land mine explosion targeting the convoy of West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and union steel and mines minister Ram Vilas

Paswan as they were returning from the inauguration of the Jindal Steel Works special economic zone (SEZ) in Salboni in West Midnapore district. Around 5000 acres of land have been acquired for this project, of which 4500 acres have been handed over by the government and 500 acres have been purchased directly by Jindal from landowners. Reportedly, a large portion of this land was vested with the government for distribution amongst landless tribals as part of the land reforms program and also included tracts of forests.... Understandably, there were major grievances amongst the tribals against this, although the mainstream media had constantly portrayed a very rosy picture of the entire project. The land mine explosion was blamed as usual on the Maoist insurgents allegedly active for a long time in Salboni and the adjacent Lalgarh area..... The police and CRPF, led by the officer in charge of Lalgarh police station, Sandeep Sinha Roy and the superintendent of police of West Midnapore district, Rajesh Singh, unleashed a reign of terror in 35 villages encompassing the entire tribal belt of Lalgarh. In raids throughout the night of November 6th, women were brutally kicked and beaten up with lathis and butts of guns. Among the injured, Chitamani Murmu, one of whose eyes was hit by a gun butt, and Panamani Hansda, who was kicked on her chest and suffered multiple fractures, had to be hospitalized. Chitamani's lost her eye because of the injury. Eight other women were badly wounded. These police brutalities soon reached a point where the adivasis had no other option but to rise up in revolt.

On 6th November they assembled near the Lalgarh police station and surrounded it, effectively cutting it off, and the policemen inside, who had been rampaging in villages the previous night but had now locked themselves inside the police station, did not dare to venture out. Electricity to the police station was disconnected and all the lights were broken. What began as rumblings of protest took the shape of a spontaneous mass uprising the next day. On 7th November, when the ruling CPI(Marxist) was "observing" the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution throughout West Bengal, ten thousand Santhal men and women, armed with traditional weapons, came out and obstructed the roads leading to Lalgarh, disconnecting it from Midnapur and Bankura. Roads were dug up and tree trunks were placed on the road to obstruct the entry of police vehicles, in the same way as it had been done in Nandigram. Towards the night of 7th November, the people also disconnected telephone and electricity lines, virtually converting a vast area into a liberated zone.

The apex social organization of the Santhals, the Bharat Jakat Majhi Madwa Juan Gaonta took up the leadership of the struggle, although the leader of the organization, the "Disham Majhi" Nityananda Hembram has himself admitted that the organization has no control over the movement; rather the movement is controlling the organization. Smaller organizations of the tribals, such as the Kherwal Junit Gaonta, that have been playing active roles in the struggle have openly called for armed resistance, stating that there is no other way for the survival of the adivasis. The demands of the adivasis were so "earthy" and original that the administration did not know how to respond. The demands were that the superintendent of police Rajesh Singh should publicly apologize by holding his ears and doing sit-ups, a traditional way of punishing errant youngsters, the guilty policemen should crawl on the streets of the villages where they had tortured people, rubbing their noses on the ground, again another traditional way of humiliating wrongdoers, and Rs 200,000 compensation for the injured and assaulted. The demands were marked by the total reliance of the adivasis on their traditional systems of dispensing justice, and not looking up to the formal judicial process which they have realized is by nature weighted against the poor and marginalized..... On 10th November, adivasis led by the tribal social organizations set up new roadblocks in the Dahijuri area. When the police lathicharged the assembled people and arrested some of the leaders of the Gaontas, the situation turned explosive. The tribals surrounded the police officials present and a crowd of few thousand adivasis, armed with bows and arrows, axes and daggers, and led by women wielding broomsticks, chased the police for four kilometers along the road leading to Jhargram. The police

were forced to retreat from the area and release all the leaders of the social organizations they had arrested....

The state has been helpless in front of this upsurge and has been trying to "negotiate" with the tribals. But what has been frustrating their efforts is the essentially democratic nature of this upsurge. Although the administration has been holding multiple all-party meetings with the dominant political parties, CPI(M), Trinamool Congress, Congress and the Jharkhand Party, the leaders of these parties have openly admitted to their inability to exert any influence on the adivasis. The adivasis are not letting any political leaders access to the movement, including tribal leaders like Chunibala Hansda, the Jharkhand Party (Naren faction) MLA from Binpur. They are demanding that any negotiations be carried out in the open rather than behind closed doors. Even traditional leaders like the "Disham Majhi" Nityananda Hembram and other "majhis" are having to talk directly with the adivasis before talking to the administration. Villagers of the ten villages in Lalgah have formed ten village committees with one coordinating committee to negotiate with the administration.The state and the CPI(M) have not dared to respond with overt violence yet, although there are news that a motorbike-borne militia is being assembled nearby by Sushanta Ghosh, the notorious CPI(M) minister and Dipak Sarkar, the CPI(M) district secretary.It is quite expected that radical political forces would have been active among the adivasis as the latter have been the most downtrodden people in India and it is their land and resources which is being handed over for corporate plunder. However the presence and participation of the Maoists or similar forces in no way delegitimizes this seemingly spontaneous, and democratic, expression of people's anger. This is amply expressed by what Arati Murmu, a woman who had been assaulted by the police, and who had gone to block the Lalgah police station had to say: "Whenever there is a Maoist attack the police raid our villages and torture our women and children. For how long will we suffer this oppression by the police? All of us are Maoists, let the police arrest us. Today we have come out."

Partho Sarthi Ray, Sanhati, November 13, 2008

Global mining companies see Maoists as the greatest challenge to their penetration.

In his article, "The State As Landlord: Naxalism feeds off genuine issues. It calls for policy, not police", Prem Shankar Jha writes:-

"Lakshmi Mittal of Arcelor fame is finally about to deliver on his promise to invest in his home country. The plans he has unveiled are mind-boggling: Rs 1,00,000 crore (\$24 billion) to be invested in two steel plants and iron ore mines in Jharkhand and Orissa that will produce 24 million tonnes of steel when they come on stream. Planning for the project is going well: all that remains is to identify a source of iron ore for its Orissa plant. Herein lies the rub. For, if the Maoist insurgency in central India continues to develop at its present speed, he may never find the iron ore he needs to operate his plants....."

Twenty-nine months after the first 'swarm attack' by 500 Maoist cadres backed by local tribals on the jail, police station and armoury in Jehanabad, 'Naxalism' is no longer considered a fringe phenomenon. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has candidly acknowledged that it is the most serious threat the country faces. But there is a huge gap between this realisation and the efforts that the government has made so far to meet it. Literally, all that it has done so far is to meet state governments' increasingly urgent demands for modern weapons, additional CRPF battalions, and the training and despatch of counter-insurgency forces. But New Delhi knows that repression alone is not the answer. The Approach Paper for the 11th Plan could not have put this better or more explicitly: "Our practices regarding rehabilitation of those displaced from their land because of development projects are seriously deficient and are responsible for a growing perception of exclusion and marginalisation. The costs of displacement borne by our tribal population have been unduly high, and compensation has been tardy and inadequate, leading to serious unrest in many tribal regions. This discontent is likely to grow exponentially if the benefits from enforced land acquisition are seen accruing to private interests, or even to the state, at the cost of those displaced. To prevent even

greater conflict...it is necessary to frame a transparent set of policy rules that address compensation, and make the affected persons beneficiaries of the projects, and to give these rules a legal format."

Despite its clear perception of the problem, the Manmohan Singh government has done nothing to 'frame a transparent set of policy rules' and give them a 'legal format'. A part of the problem is that the power to acquire land for mines, in particular, was largely devolved to the state governments during the NDA regime, through an amendment of the 1957 Mines and Minerals Act. The NDA government also allowed foreign companies to enter this politically charged area of mineral development. These two enactments have given Naxalite leaders all the moral justification they need to mobilise armed resistance. With only a few exceptions, state leaders have used their powers of land acquisition to enrich themselves or fund their parties. It is no coincidence that the Communist Party (Maoist) came into being only two years after these amendments.

While India Inc dreams of overtaking China, the Maoist insurgency has intensified. Since '04, there have been more than 50 'swarm' attacks on jails, police stations and armouries. All have met with total success. In two attacks in Orissa last month, the Maoists captured 1,600 weapons, including machine guns and AK-47s.

In Orissa, 12,000 out of 30,000 posts in the police are vacant, and in three districts they have stopped wearing their uniforms. But Orissa pales into insignificance before the intensity of the uprising in Chhattisgarh, which recorded 531 incidents and 413 deaths in 2007. The Maoists have a single rallying cry: "Development projects are taking away our land and our traditional rights. We will not allow them to proceed." They are succeeding."

Manjeet Kriplani echoes similar sentiments in his article, "In India, Death to Global Business. How a violent - and spreading - Maoist insurgency threatens the country's runaway growth" in the American journal *Businessweek*.

"On the night of April 24, a group of 300 men and women armed with bows and arrows and sickles and led by gun-wielding commanders emerged swiftly and silently from the dense forest in India's Chhattisgarh state. The guerillas descended on an iron ore processing plant owned by Essar Steel, one of India's biggest companies. There the attackers torched the heavy machinery on the site, plus 53 buses and trucks. Press reports say they also left a note: Stop shipping local resources out of the state, or else!....."

India has lots of unmined iron ore and coal - the essential ingredients of steel and electric power. Anxious to revive their moribund economies, the poor but resource rich states of eastern India have given mining and land rights to Indian and multinational companies. Yet these deposits lie mostly in territory where the Naxals operate. Chhattisgarh, a state in eastern India across from Mumbai and a hotbed of activity, has 23% of India's iron ore deposits and abundant coal. It has signed memoranda of understanding and other agreements worth billions with Tata Steel and Arcelor Mittal, De Beers Consolidated Mines, BHP Hilton and Rio Tinto. Other states have cut similar deals. And US companies like Caterpillar want to sell mining equipment to the mining companies now digging in eastern India...."

The gravest displacement of our time – an imperialist military strategy

The following excerpt of the letter written by a group of environmentalists, scholars and activists to Chief Minister Raman Singh in early 2008 regarding the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the state describes the extent and gravity of the forced displacement that was caused by Salwa Judum:

"However, we are particularly concerned about the rights of those villagers in Dantewada and Bijapur districts who have been compelled to leave their villages due to the ongoing Salwa Judum campaign against naxalites. The total population of about 1200 villages in the two districts is 7.19 lakhs, of which 78.5% is tribal. About 50% of these villages, with an approximate population of 3.5 lakhs, is currently displaced from their villages. While about 47,000 are living in roadside camps set up by the state government, another 40,000 or so have fled to the forest areas of Andhra Pradesh to escape the ongoing violence between Salwa Judum and naxalites. The whereabouts of the remaining 2,63,000 villagers from the abandoned villages is unknown.

In at least 644 abandoned villages in the two districts, no gram sabha meetings required under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act for initiating the

process of recognition of rights can be organised under present circumstances. At a meeting organised by the Department of Tribal Welfare of Andhra Pradesh, it was decided that the Gutti Koyas who have sought shelter in AP's forests from the naxal -Salwa Judam violence in Chhattisgarh will not be eligible for recognition of land and forest rights in Andhra. However, due to being displaced from their own villages, they will not be able to claim their rights even in their original villages in Chhattisgarh. Their being deprived of rights in both Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh will be a terrible subversion of justice.

Consequently, we appeal to you to suspend implementation of the Act in the affected areas while facilitating speedy return of the villagers to their own villages. In the meantime, no land should be allocated to outsiders and no leases or prospecting licenses for minor minerals should be given in these villages as under PESA. These also require Gram Sabha permission, which is not possible under present circumstances.

Yours sincerely,

Madhu Sarin, Environmentalist and Scholar; Nagaraj Adve, People's Union for Democratic Rights; Rohit Jain, Society for Rural, Urban and Tribal Initiative; C.R.Bijoy, People's Union for Civil Liberties (Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry); Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights; Shankar Gopalakrishnan, Campaign for Survival and Dignity; Gautam Kumar Bandyopadhyay, People's Alliance for Livelihood Rights, Chhattisgarh; Dr. Nandini Sundar, Delhi University; Xavier Manjooran, Adivasi Mahasabha; Sharachandra Lele, Senior Fellow & Coordinator, Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment & Development; V.S.Roy David, National Convener, National Adivasi Alliance, Kodagu 571234, Karnataka; Tribal Association for Fifth Schedule Campaign (TAFSC), Tamil Nadu; Shubhranshu Choudhary, Journalist; Professor Virginius Xaxa, Delhi University; Kundan Kumar, Phd Scholar; Dr Urmila Pingle, Anthropologist; Soma KP, gender and women's rights activist, New Delhi; Erica Rustom; Ville-Veikko Hirvelä; Rajesh R; James Pochury; Felix Padel; Manshi Asher, independent researcher, Himachal Pradesh; Malini Kalyanivala; Rishu Garg; Rajesh, Nange Paon Satyagraha, Chhattisgarh; Renji George Joseph, Alliance for Holistic and Sustainable Development of Communities."

The fact that about 644 villages, some estimates put it even higher at around 700 villages, were emptied out and a population of about 3.5 lakhs had been displaced from the Bijapur and Dantewada districts at the heyday of the Salwa Judum operations is undisputed. The Government would like us to believe that this happened voluntarily because all these adivasis fled from Naxalite violence. The Salwa Judum camps, 16-21 in number were, according to them, set up to shelter those fleeing from such violence. Time and again surveys of the camps have shown otherwise, that people were usually brought to the camps forcibly or against their will and often brought back if they tried to escape. Besides plain arithmetic shows that, even if we are to believe this, there were 47,000 in the government camps which accounts for only 13% of the displaced population. 75% of that displaced population, or about 2.6 lakhs, chose not to go to the camps, and preferred to live in and out of the jungle, even it meant being treated as outlaws.

The theory that such a huge and absolute displacement could have occurred spontaneously, is on the very face of it untenable. Let us look at the following facts:

That ground clearing for mining and other companies was an important motive and in fact provided the driving force is clear from the MOUs with Tata, Essar, Texas Power Generation, Arcelor Mittal, BHP Biiton, DeBeers, Rio Tinto, Godavari Ispat, Prakash Industries etc and the around 96 mining leases with various companies in the Bailadila area. A bare perusal of the MOUs show that they were being practically handed out high quality iron ore deposits, coal blocks, water from the Indravati river etc. Apart from this, a large number of mining and prospecting licenses were handed out (sold?), in case "all went well", which remain undisclosed. The corporate vested interest is also apparent from the fact that it was the Essar company that provided funds for setting up of the first Salwa Judum camps. It is reported that a company called "Crest" has been given a contract to survey mineral deposits in the South Bastar, Dantewada and Bijapur districts. This company had said that it could undertake this mammoth survey only once the land was cleared.

It is now an admitted fact that the ground clearing operation that was attempted to be carried out through Salwa Judum is a military strategy referred to as “strategic hamletting”. This involves clearing out villages and bringing them to roadside camps. The strategy was used by the Americans in Vietnam and the Indian State in Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Manipur.

In Bastar this strategy has been closely overseen by the Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College, Kanker headed by Retd. Brigadier BK Ponwar. Brigadier Ponwar earlier headed the Warrangte Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School of the Indian Army at Mizoram.

In the year 2006 left political parties as also the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha had protested against the statements of two officers of the American Consulate - one heading its Commerce Wing and the other a Regional Security Advisor, who had visited Kanker and Raipur and offered the Chief Minister American assistance in dealing with the state’s insurgency problem. We had condemned this as undue interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. A few months ago I came to know that the current Chief of Economic and Political Affairs - Michael Neville and a Regional Security Officer - William Inman had visited Kanker and Raipur again. As an advocate familiar with Dr Binayak Sen’s case I had been requested to brief these officers by a staff member of their Mumbai Consulate. I had declined stating that I believed that human rights could not be separated from the policies of globalization and militarization which their country was supporting. It is pertinent that putting Indian Maoists on the American terror list, gives a handle to the Americans to interfere in the internal affairs of our country ostensibly for protecting American interests (read companies!).

The third factor is the heavy military deployment – 19 battalions of CRPF and 2 Naga and Mizo IRB battalions – which were used with ruthlessness to commit all manner of barbarities to cow the adivasi people into submission. The presence of the Salwa Judum, who also no doubt used brutal force themselves, added a factor of unaccountability and spontaneity. Their role was also as informers and guides.

In the past three years the incidents of such barbarism have appeared many times in the press, only to be quickly covered up. Some brave journalists notably Shubranshu Choudhary in his column “Basi Ma Uphan” in the evening daily paper Chhattisgarh has reported scores of such cases. We are giving here only a few instances;-

On 13th March 2007 when the Naga Battalion and the Salwa Judum entered the Nendra village of Gaganpali panchayat, everyone ran away. But the children of the village were bathing at a hand pump. When the Naga jawans could not find anyone else in the village they shot these 12 children between the ages of 2 and 20 dead. We are giving their names not because it would make a difference to the reader but to remind them that 12 is not a statistic but represents human beings (their ages are in brackets) – Soyam Raju (2), Madvi Ganga (5), Midium Nagaiyya (5), Podium Adma (7), Vetti Raju (9), Vanjam Raja (11), Soyam Raju (12), Sodi Adma (12), Madkam Aite (13), Madkam Budraiyya (14), Soyam Rama (16), Soyam Narya (20).

280 persons of Gangrajpadu village were taken by the Salwa Judum to the camp, but 175 of them were murdered, killed in sacking and thrown in the river, because they were protesting against going to the camp.

A CRPF jawan of the 119 Battalion, G company told a journalist that they had been given orders that if they saw anyone in those villages after 15 March 2007, he/she would be a Naxalite and if he ran away we could them.

On 7th April 2007 a jawan of the Chhattisgarh Armed Force told a journalist that he had been posted there since the 15th of January 2007 and since then his unit alone

had killed at least 60 persons. He said that as soon as they would reach a village with the Salwa Judum, people would start running. "We cannot understand the language of the adivasis here. Whoever we could catch, we would kill like a chicken or a goat, on the say so of the Salwa Judum. All this is happening because of our orders from above, and I am very unhappy about it."

The other significant aspect of this strategy was the outlawing and cordoning off of those adivasi people who refused to come to the camps, the total withdrawal of health services, ration shops and local markets. In other words starving out or "sanctions". This is described in the following excerpts:

"Because of Judum the Haat markets were closed down.

In the Naxal stronghold areas of the Konta area, after the start of Salwa Judum, the weekly markets had closed down, then the Naxals had started holding a market at Gachanpalli for their so-called people.

After the attack of the force on this market, the Naxalites have changed the venue of the market. The weekly markets are the most important part of a forest products based economy. It is from these markets that Naxalites also get the articles for their daily needs. After the start of the Salwa Judum campaign in 2004 (sic) the villages around the main centers were depopulated. The markets of these centers were also closed down and the economy of South Bastar crumbled. In the interior areas where the Naxals had a stronger base, the villagers left their villages and shifted to the mountains and jungles. Owing to this problem, the markets of Jagargunda, Bhejji, Basaguda, Golapalli, Kankerlanka etc. were closed down. Markets that were operating in the interior like Bhejji were brought to the roadside. The villagers who did not join Salwa Judum were debarred from coming to these market places on the roadsides. The villagers who came to the markets carrying mahua, imli, tora and other forest products began to be victimized as Naxals. Looking to this problem the Naxals started a new market in Gachanpalli. The traders of Cherla, Andhra Pradesh used to come in bullock carts with their wares. The Naxalites had directed that the essential items be provided at reasonable prices. But the news of this reached the Salwa Judum supporters of Dornapal. So much forest produce used to come into the market, that the traders couldn't transport all of it back."

Nai Dunia, 3rd January, 2009.

"The Story of the Other Side of the Indravati

.....Quite a few people were already sitting there (in Village Niram) when we arrived. The people respectfully asked us to be seated. When we asked them about the facilities provided by the government they told us that upto two years ago the school and anganwadi centres were functioning here, though not regularly. Similarly the health workers also used to come sometimes, so at least we and our children would get some kind of relief. But as soon as Salwa Judum started, all these facilities were stopped by the government. The villagers said they couldn't understand why all these facilities were stopped by the government. Whereas no one had ever objected to their functioning. The villagers said that when Salwa Judum started, the entire populations of the villages of Chinger, Ekheli, Satwa, Bangoli, etc. were forcibly taken away by the Salwa Judum leaders and the (paramilitary) force. But we thought that if we go away, we would neither be able to do our farming nor collect forest produce which is the basic source of our livelihood. All of us will simply die of starvation there. The peasants also stated that there are facing a shortage of grain, salt, oil, chillies, clothes etc, because if they cross the river and go to the Geedam or Tumnar market, the Salwa Judum and force catch them and beat them up badly and take them and throw them in the camp or else murder them. So they don't go to the market at all. If they require these necessities of life they go walking to another market 80 km away, they have to spend three days doing so."

Shubranshu Choudhari, 11.6.2007, 'Chhattisgarh'

Like everything else, "Counter-Insurgency" has also become an industry in Chhattisgarh. Crores of rupees come in for defence expenditure and security costs. Huge undisclosed budgets exist for this purpose. And there is heavy siphoning off. (Even otherwise, out of the 1654 crores sanctioned for modernization of the police force by the Central government for the 13 Naxal affected states, only 2 to 13% have been used for

improving weaponry. The lions share has gone into building bungalows and offices!) Besides, running the Salwa Judum camps itself is a lucrative proposition for the contractors and Judum leaders, many of whom have built houses and purchased vehicles in this period. From makeshift tents, tin roof structures have been constructed in the camps. All government schemes have been transferred to the camps. Ration shops, anganwadis, schools, hostels, literacy and health missions.....all funds designated for the villages now come to the camps. Foodstuffs, medicines, relief materials including those sent by international agencies intended for lakhs of people are claimed to be distributed to a few thousands. And even those are distributed on paper, for now the majority of people, having neither employment nor food have run away. No wonder that the journalists who were trying to expose this scam were beaten up by Salwa Judum goons in the police station. The following news item gives us an idea:

“Patwari suspended in rice case.

The administration has finally taken stern action in the case of blackmarketeering of rice brought for distribution to the inmates of the Salwa Judum Relief camps, and suspended the Patwari of Dornapal....

On the one hand various kinds of questions are being raised against Salwa Judum by NGOs and political parties, on the other this kind of incident raises doubts about the functioning of the administration.

On 15 December the police had raided and seized 100 sacks of rice intended for the inmates of the Dornapal Relief Camp which had been kept for backmarketing in the house of Md Ahmed at Nadi Road. He was found prima facie to be guilty.

There is consternation among the employees at this action taken for the first time since the start of the Salwa Judum. Complaints of this nature had been made several times earlier in the Salwa Judum camps. Such irregularities are not a new thing. There has been blackmarketing of all materials which come here for the past two years.....Most of the camp inmates have gone back to their respective villages, but despite this the materials are shown to be distributed on the basis on the old figures. If the administration carries out an impartial enquiry, several startling facts will be uncovered.”

Haribhoomi, 19/12/2008

This corruption has been acknowledged at the highest levels. Once the present DGP Vishwaranjan was asked to comment on the statement made by the outgoing security advisor to the government of Chhattisgarh - KPS Gill that the police of Chhattisgarh was so corrupt that the police officers posted at Bastar extort bribes for transfers and postings from jawans. He replied, “Had I been there I would have asked that how come, in Punjab, where you finished off terrorism so efficiently, that 3/4ths of the officers have houses in England and America, though they have no relatives there?” It might seem that, by saying so, the DGP is exposing corruption very frankly. But on studying this more closely we understand that its real meaning is that Gill Sahab, better not speak too much about corruption, if you do, we can expose you as well! Thus the purpose was not to expose, but to cover up corruption.

But the more grave concern is that the imperialists, particularly the American state, have had a powerful influence on the top echelons of the police. This is even more serious at present for Chhattisgarh, from where police officers regularly go to America for training. In the Punjab period, the officers did not make frequent trips abroad, as they are doing today, yet many houses got built. How many houses are being built now is anybody's guess!

In a statement of 6th May 2008 in Mr Vishwaranjan also admits, “In the Bijapur-Dantewada areas, they (the Naxalites) started raking up the old discontent of the adivasis. Actually adivasis consider the jungle to be their own, they don't accept that it belongs to the government. In 1910 a revolt took place against the local raja because he

tried to implement the Forest Act. He had to call in the British army for help. Ever since then this discontent has taken root. Later on the National Forest Act was implemented. The adivasis could not emotionally accept this.”

Recently DGP Vishwaranjan stated that there are at present about 10,000 hard core Maoists and 40,000 people’s militia in Dantewada out of which 15,000 are women. In other words we are back to the magic figure of 50,000 given by DGP Rathore before Salwa Judum started. In that case, what has been achieved by the past 3 years of forcible displacement, detention of thousands in camps, and hundreds of killings?

“The Story of a Village”

What has Salwa Judum meant for the adivasi people? The following is a narrative of the speech given by an adivasi in a meeting organised at New Delhi by the “Citizens for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh” which describes this poignantly.

“After some hesitation he (Chamru) started speaking, “It was in the December of 2005, the Sarpanch of Mirtur sent a letter to our village (Vechapal).In that it was written that now in Bastar some man-eating people are coming, so if we want to save ourselves from them we should go to the Mirtur camp.

The adivasi translating said that man-eating people meant Nagas.

Chamru continued, “We got scared. We got together and decided that first all the men would go and stay in the camp and then we would decide what to do afterwards.

In the Mirtur camp there were some old Sangham members who had now become SPOs. Every morning they would first beat us. They used to say when we went to these peoples’ village with the Naxalites, they had fed us food. After this they used to take us to other villages and tell us to set fire to houses in those villages.

After some days some people of our village ran away from the camp. Even then most of the people used to stay in the camps in the night but mostly come back home in the day time.

To scare those people who had run away from the camp, after 8 days the Salwa Judum and the police came to our village. The others ran away, but Joga Aayami fell into their hands and the Salwa Judum and police together killed him. They took away the 17 year old daughter Rukni of Sannu Oyami. As far as we know Rukni is still imprisoned in Jagdalpur jail today.

After staying in the camp for two or three months, all of us from our village decided one day that we should all run away. In February-March we ran away from the camp and came back to our village.

After this Salwa Judum started coming to our village regularly. As soon as they came, we would run away to the jungle. After our running away they set fire to 60-70 houses in our village and took our cattle away.

One day in April when I had gone to pick mahua, suddenly the Salwa Judum people came there. I hid behind a tree and they caught hold of 4 women who were picking mahua. They raped the 16 year old daughter Kumari of Sannu Oyami and the 27 year old wife Kamli of Bande Kadti in front of me. I kept watching from behind the tree. They let two older ladies go. After that they made the young girls wear Naxal uniforms which they had brought with them. They cut their hair, put a gun on their shoulder and took them away with them. These two girls are still in Jagdalpur jail accused in Naxalite cases. We have already paid 12,000 to the lawyer but he says he can only get them out if we give him 20 thousand more.

After that we started living in the jungle only, and Salwa Judum started coming very frequently to our village. Each time we would run away, but somebody or the other would get caught. In this way six people of our village have got caught.....Two of them were father and son, They were caught together when they were cutting wood. They were hacked to death and thrown in the river.....

None of these 6 was a Sangham member.

Salwa Judum people have burnt my house three times till now. Now there is not a single house in the village which has not been burnt. Now there are only walls left in the village. Whenever we make a house they come and burn it. This has happened about 10 times. Now we make houses of plastic sheets and are living in the jungle.

Jaganath (32), son of Aytu of our village used to tell people to go the camp and we suspect that he used to spy about our village to the SPOs. The *dadas* (Naxalites) came to know about this and one day during this time the *dadas* killed him.

There was a school in our village. Now the administration has transferred the school to the Mirtur camp. Not a single person from our village stays in the camp now. That's why no child of our village goes to school now.

There is no hospital in our village. We used to go to Mirtur for the market and hospital but now we cannot go to Mirtur for fear of the Salwa Judum. Now we only send old ladies and children to the market to buy salt and oil. They have to walk one full day and after that spend the night somewhere to reach the market in the morning." Chamru requested me not to write the name of that market.

"Earlier in our village there were 5 Sangham members and the *dadas* (Naxals) used to come from time to time. They used to take meetings and tell us to do agriculture well and not drink. They never did any harm to us, Sahab".

Chamru told me that this is not only the story of his village. The neighbouring villages like Timenar, Hurepal, Phoolgatta, Dorguda, Kondapal, Pittepal, Neelavaya, Madpal, Indri, Kokur, Tamud, Orvada, Paralnar, Kudalka, Peddapal...in all these villages the story is more or less the same. All of them are living in the jungle. The people of all these villages cannot come out and neither can anyone except Salwa Judum and the police come to our villages.

There was no one from the *dalam* in our village, now one has joined. From my neighbouring villages, 15-20 from some and 30-40 from others have joined the *dalam*. Before Salwa Judum there were only 1-2 persons from these villages in the *dalam*." Chamru also told the names of the villages where all the youth had gone with the Naxalites but he requested me not to write the names of those villages for reasons of security.

Chamru can be called a Naxalite. This meeting can be called Naxalite sponsored. But when Chamru was speaking there was pin drop silence in the whole hall and I saw tears in the eyes of many people sitting in the chairs around me.

The population of those 644 villages like Vechapal is about three and a half lakhs. According to government statistics about 50 thousand of them are in camps and the remaining 3 lakhs like Chamru have gone closer to the Naxalites.

This is the success of Salwa Judum"

Shubranshu Choudhari, 14.9.2007, "Chhattisgarh"

Every day the newspapers of Chhattisgarh carry disturbing news of killings, most of these are attributed to Maoists. As peace-loving people, far removed from the villages of Bastar, we shudder on reading these. We wish that there were some solution to end this seemingly endless cycle of violence. But we must remember that it is difficult to find the stories of the "Chamrus" in those reports. We have to read between the lines. If the newspaper says "commanders were felled" and shows a photograph of several young men in lungis what does it mean? If we are told the Maoists ruthlessly murdered "a villager" who also was an SPO what does that mean? And if we are told nothing at all what does that mean? Though we are often told that "the Maoists threw pamphlets", it is rarely that a statement of the CPI(Maoist) finds its way to the press, and if so to confirm its authenticity. On 22.12.2007 a statement was published in the name of Gudsa Usendi, Spokesperson of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee in the Daily Chhattisgarh in response to an article of journalist Asha Shukla. This is how it concludes:

"Whatever is being broadcast in the TV channels and newspapers is almost all one-sided. If we make only this storm of one-sided propaganda our source of information we shall make serious mistakes. Ashaji has rightly said that our Chhattisgarh is looked upon as a backward region, otherwise people would have shown the same interest in exposing the frightening and most brutal violence which is going on in the name of Salwa Judum as they have in exposing the Gujarat riots or the killings in Nandigram. Without writing or speaking anything about these women (*rape victims described earlier in the article*), and hundreds of other men and women, or even trying to find out about them, to try to blame us, or abuse us in very emotionally and literary style as Ashaji has done, shows only dishonesty towards this problem.....

Here on the one hand the violence of the Salwa Judum is on.....

On the other hand is the retaliatory violence on behalf of a historically defeated people who have been struggling for their water, land and forest for the past 27 years. It is the violence of those who have

nothing left to lose. Everything has already been looted from them.They have only two ways left: to surrender and live like slaves in the “relief camps” or to resist even at the cost of their life. I am not trying to give an argument to justify our violence, I am only repeating that the people were forced to make this choice. Sitting in Delhi or Raipur or even remaining confined to the roads of Bastar and shouting “you are killing innocent and helpless people” is very easy, but to touch the hearts and feel the pain of those whose tears have dried up is very difficult. Finally I want to say that in these last two and a half years if despite this barbaric repression there are still people alive in south and West Bastar it is only and only because of our resistance struggle. If our party had not led this peoples resistance history would perhaps not forgiven us. you may call us violent or abuse us, but this is the reality and it is our conviction that history will vindicate us.”

Knocking on the doors of the democratic state – do the adivasis of Bastar have any civil liberties?

The silence about Bastar is not “natural”. There are many brave journalists, lawyers, social activists in Bastar and Chhattigarh. And many of them have been trying to speak. But journalists have been harassed, beaten, arrested; their homes and jobs taken away from them. False cases, transfers, income tax raids, defamation - the state has a myriad ways to silence social activists. Even a lawyer, Shri Girjaram Kashyap, filing affidavits of villagers against the fake gram sabhas at Lohandiguda was picked up. The politically motivated and criminal incarceration of Dr Binayak Sen - which continues even after 22 months despite the lack of legally admissible evidence and the widespread protest, nationally and internationally - is also to “teach a lesson” and brutally enforce this silence.

Salwa Judum began in June 2005, and by December the blood had start trickling out from under “the wall of silence” – the hushed reports of repeated attacks on villages under massive paramilitary cover, the rounding up of entire villages into camps - houses razed to the ground, meager belongings looted, crops ruined and livestock slaughtered, hundreds of ostensible “Sanghams” killed, and all those who refused to come to the camps and preferred to flee to the jungles labelled ‘Maoists’.

It was Dr Binayak Sen who took the first brave step of organising a joint All-India fact finding team of human rights organizations to investigate these disturbing rumours. The team was obstructed, harassed and threatened, but it nevertheless let the nation know what was happening in Dantewada. The report was aptly entitled “When the State makes War on its People”. After this many fact finding teams notably the Independent Citizens Initiative, various governmental commissions such as the National Commission of Women, international human rights organizations like the International Association of Peoples Lawyers and Human Rights Watch, journalists’ and doctors’ associations (Reporters Without Borders and Jan Swasthya Abhiyan), and teams of various political parties like those of the CPI and the Congress have also repeatedly documented atrocities, lawlessness, forcible displacement, pitiful conditions in camps, cases of sexual harassment etc. Letter petitions of the Vanvasi Chetana Ashram have been taken up suo moto by the Chhattisgarh High Court, and the Forum for Fact Finding and Documentation has filed numerous petitions before the State Human Rights Commission. Finally two petitions questioning the legitimacy and violent modus operandi of Salwa Judum have been taken into cognizance by our apex judicial forum - the Supreme Court – one filed by Nandini Sundar, Ramchandra Guha, EAS Sharma and other members of the Independent Citizens Initiative, and the other by Kartam Joga, Manish Kunjam and other residents of Dantewada belonging to the Adivasi Mahasabha.

What has been the response of our democratic institutions?

Take the Ponjer fake encounter case. Not only the CPI, the Forum for Factfinding and Documentation, and the PUCL, but even a 5 member team of Congress MPs including Moolchand Meena and Jamuna Devi had conducted an investigation and declared that 12 innocent villagers had been murdered by the police in March 2007. 8 bodies were exhumed and a magisterial enquiry was ordered. But the police finally registered an FIR in the name of "unknown uniformed persons."

The BJP MLA of Keshkal and Parliamentary Secretary Mahesh Baghel had gone public stating that the 79 persons who were paraded before the press in Raipur as surrendered Naxalites in January 2007, were innocent peasants. He had claimed that not only were they not even Sangham members, but most of them were BJP cadres and he knew them personally. But only a few of these persons could be released. Presumably the rest are still rotting in jail.

The gang rape of an adivasi woman by the Mizo jawans had enraged the people of the Nakulnar area in February 2007, and they continuously agitated under the leadership of the Adivasi Mahasabha for the punishment of the jawans and the withdrawal of the Mizo batallion. Those jawans had also threatened and beaten the local adivasi police who had tried to register a case. Thanedar Khalko told an ETV reporter that, "The Mizo jawans beat up anybody. If they are not withdrawn from here, the situation can become explosive. We are only 7 and they are 117. We are helpless before them.". The Dantewada police however acted in collusion to save these jawans. The woman was made to identify the rapists in an identification parade which was well nigh impossible for her because of their identical Mongoloid features.

Apart from this denial and cover-up mode, the other official response has been offensive - to declare every person who opposes the brutalities of Salwa Judum as a "Naxalite supporter".

The extreme example of this was when, in November 2007, the Dantewada collector KR Pisda wrote to the State Government that the Y category security given to Congress MLA Kawasi Lakhma be withdrawn as he was a "Naxalite spokesperson." The "proof" given for this was, "He has not issued any statement opposing Naxalites. He has not participated in the Salwa Judum. In fact he has demanded that it should be stopped."

Even in the petitions in the Supreme Court, the reply of the Chhattisgarh government was that all the petitioners are "Naxalite supporters!"

After the recent elections, as usual, an adivasi MLA, this time Nankiram Kanwar has been adorned with the crown of thorns, namely the post of home minister. It is pertinent that in the previous cabinet he had been Forest Minister, which ministry was taken away from him when he had tried to prosecute the Sterlite company for their illegal encroachment on forest land and felling of thousands of trees. This time he has immediately towed the line. After first making a visit to the RSS office, Mr Kanwar stated that all those who oppose Salwa Judum are "anti adivasi", "Naxalite supporters" and shall be "dealt with sternly."

In which case the list of Naxal supporters is rather daunting - Sandeep Pandey, Justice Srikrishna, EAS Sharma, Nandini Sundar, BD Sharma, D.Raja, Medha Patkar, Kanak Tiwari, D. Bandhopadhyay, Hira Singh Markam and of course the inimitable Ajit Jogi. The latest addition is our Union Home Minister P..Chidambaram who stated during question hour in Rajya Sabha that "We are not in favour of non-state actors taking law enforcement in their hands,"

The CMM, which has been consistently agitating for the release of Dr. Binayak Sen, much-loved doctor of the miners and industrial workers of Chhattisgarh, has equally been a strong opponent of the brutal and forcible displacement in Bastar taking place in the name of Salwa Judum and has repeatedly demonstrated against it, for it believes that, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to Justice everywhere." No wonder that

CMM is therefore very much also in the “firing line”, as DGP Vishwaranjan made clear by his veiled threat that “Niyogi was the first Naxalite.”

Chief Minister Raman Singh and DGP Vishwaranjan are literally crowing over the results of the recent assembly elections in Bastar and interpreting them as a mandate in support of Salwa Judum. Is it so?

Most of the times nowadays elections are not fought on issues, how else can one explain campaigns using naïve if not outright dumb star celebrities and results determined by crates of liquor. In Chhattisgarh, the burning issues being faced by a region reeling under imperialist onslaught were totally absent. What to say of poor contract labour or peasants facing displacement, even the issue of the small industrialists did not figure in the manifestos of the “mainstream” political parties. They were only vying with each other in throwing crumbs to the people from the high table of loot - luring them with ‘three rupee rice’, ‘two rupee rice’, and finally even ‘one rupee rice’!

But any one who visited the Dantewada or Konta constituencies in the buildup to the elections could see that the election there was being fought like a referendum on Salwa Judum and land acquisition for companies. I quote from the newspaper Nai Dunia of 7/11/2008:

“Shri Karma has not been able to start his campaign in the Naxal stronghold areas of Katekalyan and Kuakonda, even the BJP candidate Bhimram Mandavi has not plucked up the courage to go there. On the contrary, under the banner of the Adivasi Mahasabha, Shri Kunjam has been successful in reaching his message. He is the national President of the Adivasi Mahasabha and by going to jail in the matter of giving land to the Tata industrial group, he has earned considerable sympathy. Famed as “Bastar Tiger”, Mahendra Karma, though he is an adivasi, is considered a leader of the non-advasis. But some incidents of the recent past have spoiled this image of his. Similarly his efforts to persuade the advasis of Bhansi and Dhurli to give their lands to the Essar industrial group may cost him dear.”

The defeat of the powerful sitting MLA Mahendra Karma does of course signal the unpopularity of the Salwa Judum he headed and also the land acquisitions of Tata and Essar which he personally tried to push through. And this was despite not only muscle power but even money power. He was caught on camera bribing an adivasi woman, and quickly signalled to a man carrying a sack of cash to scoot! But how then, did the BJP candidate, who was nowhere in the running, defeat such an obviously popular candidate as Manish Kunjam?

The Citizens for Peace and Justice in Chhattisgarh had expressed apprehensions in their letter to the Election Commission of India regarding electoral rolls being prepared in camps and therefore the possibility of fraudulent voting:

“According to recent media reports Government of Chhattisgarh claims that more than 57,000 people are living in these camps and their names are getting included in the electoral rolls for the camps. We have learnt through media reports that the Government has initiated a process of including their names in the electoral roles for the camps.

As per reports we have received from local civil society members and fact findings done by CPJC members, majority of people who were living in these relief camps have gone back to their homes in their respective villages. According to our information the number of residents in camps is not more than 10,000.

We are also aware of several other discrepancies existing in the preparation of Electoral rolls: many names in from the voter's list have been dropped and in some cases names of children aged 13-16 have been included in the names. Moreover, names of several people who have fled to Andhra Pradesh and other neighbouring states have been added or maintained in the electoral rolls of Salwa Judum camps when they never lived there.

We are afraid that this will inevitably result in fraud voting while the citizens themselves are deprived of their right to vote.

According to media reports Communist Party of India has also raised their objection with you on similar points. They have informed that 50 polling booths in Bijapur and 92 polling booths in Dantewada has not been inspected by Election Commission. They feel the inspection staff have refused to do their duty, probably due to threats from Salwa Judum.”

Recently Advocate Pratap Narayan Agrawal preferred a letter petition alleging that the election was neither free nor fair,

“ 9.From the preparation of voters' list, photo-identity card and polling in booth is a story of abuse of power and connivance of public servants with money-muscle- mafia candidates. The election commission abused its' power in firstly declaring that in absence of photo-identity- card the voters will be allowed to cast their votes if they have any of the other 29 proof of their identity, but suddenly the election commission debarred the voters of Dantewada and Konta-Sukma constituency who had no voters'-identity card. The commission's agency failed to update and issue voters' identity-card to each of the Indian citizen voter. Thus, the conduct of election was neither free nor fair nor constitutional.

10. The commission failed to make arrangements for security of voters from naxals and other anti-law ; is clear from the incident of voting thrice in village " G O G U N D A ' in Konta-constituency. The fear and insecurity amongst voter is proofed by the fact that only 10 voters cast their vote against the roll of 711 voters. The election-party many a times did not go the booth and made false documents of voting. The election-machinery cared and busy only to protect the election-party, they did not care to secure the voters. Thus, the election in Konta, Dantewada, Kanker, Keshkal, Narayanpur constituency were neither free nor fair nor secure nor constitutionally achieved.

11. The very fact that Collector and District Returning officer with superintendent police Dantewada having reported against the election-observer; and the observer having reported against them for corrupt practices is a proof of conduct of illegal elections.

12. The very fact that the Chief Election Officer of Chhattisgarh election commission Dr.Alok Shukla reported of non-cooperation by Director General Police and his subordinates and the District Returning officers, is a proof of conduct of elections in unfair and unfree and illegal and insecure manner.

13. The very fact that Commissioner of Bastar Ganesh Shankar Mishra, Collector of Raipur Sonmani Bora and collector of Kanker Pisda were transferred for free and fair elections, indicates unfree and unfair involvement of public-servants.

14. The fact that many of the officers were not relieved from duty despite instructions of election commission and some of them relieved on my notice, is a proof of unfair and unfree and corrupt and abusive-power involvement of public servants in conduct of elections. None of the erring public-servant is punished is the prove of their criminal conspiracy with political parties”

In fact some persons of poll parties and security parties have already been prosecuted for election malpractices by the Election Commission in Rajnandgaon and Kanker districts. 11 persons are in jail in Rajnandgaon pending trial. This poll party had never gone to the booth but had sat in the fields and pressed the EVM buttons, all for the BJP! The Congress candidate from Bhanupratappur – Manturam Pawar has filed an election petition alleging that goons of the BJP candidate (now Minister) Vikram Usendi had terrorized and chased away all the voters at one of the booths and pressed the EVM buttons 504 times in favour of the BJP. There have been dozens of cases of more than 100% voting and even more where votes were cast only for the BJP. Besides when we recall that the votes in the camps could hardly have been cast freely and that votes of government servants were ostensibly “cast by post”, it is not difficult to understand how the BJP might have won.

Recently the papers in Chhattisgarh were blazing headlines – “NHRC gives a clean chit to Salwa Judum”, referring to the enquiry made on the directions of the Supreme Court. Of course the NHRC had acted in a typical “police” fashion, traveled to villages in anti-land mine vehicles with SJ leaders and alleged perpetrators as translators and guides, and could not even protect the few villagers who were brave enough to depose before it.

Yet the recommendatory chapter of its report begins by noting that the Salwa Judum movement has now lost its momentum, and suggests that efforts should be made to rehabilitate the remaining camp inmates. It recommends that village wise lists of

missing persons be made, atrocities be investigated and villagers be encouraged to lodge FIRs, that all losses due to loot and arson be compensated irrespective of perpetrators (read “even if non-naxalites”), that paramilitary forces stop using school buildings, that corruption in camps be strictly checked, that security forces be trained to avoid human rights violations and that a more humane transfer policy be put in place to relieve them, and that rather than a security-centric approach efforts be made to address socio-economic deprivation.

Dilute as they may be, could these recommendations, which are practically a vindication of the allegations of human rights groups, be described as a “clean chit”? Well, so thinks the Public Relations Department of the Government! And so that is the Truth (with a capital T) in current vogue in Chhattisgarh.

In other words, after all that effort, we are back to square one.

Not recognising the people’s brave resistance. Missing the forest for the trees.

For the State in Chhattisgarh, there are no adivasi people, it only recognises “Maoists” or “victims of Naxal violence”.

People have been speaking. But has anyone been listening?

On 5 November 2007, about 2 lakh adivasis gathered at Jagdalpur in a rally organized under the aegis of the Adivasi Mahasabha. When we went as a team of the CMM we saw that at the venue – the huge Jagdalpur stadium - there was not a single matador, truck or bus. All the participants had come walking, some had left their villages 3-4 days before the event, carrying rice and their own fuel wood. Their slogans - “Stop Salwa Judum”, “Stop giving adivasi lands to companies”, “Down with Mahendra Karma.” Huge winding rallies poured into the city from all directions. We were surprised to see an Air Force plane hovering sinisterly overhead, making an airborne survey?

A similar rally at Dantewada on 14 November 2006 had been denied permission by the Collector Dantewada in the name of a by-election taking place in the Bilaspur district more than 500 kilometres away! The High Court had struck down the order of the Collector and permitted the rally. Despite all-out efforts by the Salwa Judum leaders and the police and para-military to obstruct and threaten, the participants of the rally did arrive at Dantewada, 50,000 of them, to oppose the land acquisition by Tata and Essar, and to oppose the massive displacement of adivasis in the name of Salwa Judum. It is interesting that despite all the government support, Salwa Judum has never been able to muster such mobilisations.

And that is not all. Six months ago hundreds of tribals had demonstrated at the district headquarters of Bijapur, protesting that CRPF jawans posted at a relief camp in the interior village of Cherpai had fired at camp residents, killing a two-year-old boy, Raju, and a woman, Ram Bai, 25. They had demanded the recall of CRPF from the village. And at Nakulnar..... At Bhansi.....At Kondagaon..... At Lohandiguda.....At Santoshpur.....At Singharam.

Yet unfortunately, for the civil society too, the adivasi people are only victims, “ground between two stones”, “caught in the crossfire”, “those whose only crime is to be neutral.” We have been appealing to the democratic institutions – the Executive headed by the Collector and the Governor in the Scheduled Areas; the Judiciary headed by the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and High Court; the National and State Human Rights Commissions, and the special committees set up to monitor the status of the scheduled

tribes and the scheduled areas; the national and local media; political parties of all hues. After many undaunted efforts, not to be belittled in the least, there has been a small stir. But small, far too small, in comparison with the dimensions of the human tragedy.

But the NHRC is right about the fact that the Salwa Judum has lost its momentum.

Now the operations are clearly police-CRPF-IRB operations. A large number of the “pakka” SJ recruits have been absorbed as “Special Police Officers” - the lowly paid (yet by adivasi standards getting a royal sum of Rs. 1500 a month) youth who serve as the spy network, guide the police parties in the jungles and literally form the physical shield around the CRPF in each of the thanas. Recently the DGP Mr. Vishwaranjan stated that more than 1500 SPOs were discharged on grounds of indiscipline (euphemism for atrocities).

The Collector of Dantewada candidly admitted to the press that 80% of the inmates of the camps have returned to their villages. When one recalls that there are 19 battalions of CRPF not to mention Naga and Mizo IRBs in Bastar and Dantewada, today, and that these security forces have been treating all those who refused to come to the camps as “Naxalites” and in fact forcibly bringing them back if they ran away, how did this happen?

How has Salwa Judum been pushed back?

The live telecasts of happenings in Singur and Nandigram have shown us what happens when people of 11-12 villages refuse to part with their lands. Now multiply this by 50. Think of the enormity of it - 644 villages, 3.5 lakh adivasis. The government figures say 50,000 are in the camps. Human rights organizations say another 50,000 have fled to Andhra Pradesh. Let us add another 50,000 for good measure. Even so, our arithmetic has failed. Where have 2 lakh adivasis vanished? Obviously into the jungle. And therefore by the government logic – they are Maoists?

It is these adivasis who have been declared outlaw, who are being cordoned off by the security forces, who are being deliberately starved of food and medicines by the withdrawal of health services and ration shops. These adivasis, whose crops are repeatedly burnt when they try to sow them in the abandoned villages. These adivasis who have to walk kilometers and kilometers to a local bazaar to avoid being “identified” as a Naxal by the Salwa Judum (or now the local SPO) and beaten, arrested or even killed. They who are swelling the overcrowded jails of Dantewada, Jagdalpur and Kanker, accused of “offences by unknown Maoists” – serving a sentence even before trial, for the word “bail” is unknown in the legal lexicon of Dantewada. Trials from which everyone knows they can only be acquitted for there are no witnesses, and no complainants, and most of time no co-accused either.

But it is also these adivasis who have refused to go the camps, who have repeatedly tried to return to their villages, who have sown their crops knowing that they might be destroyed by the Salwa Judum and CRPF, that have also been fighting to save their fields, their homes, their villages.

And yes, how can we deny it, they have resisted the Salwa Judum, the police, the CRPF physically with their traditional weapons. And again, it is undeniable, that the Maoists have supported them.

It is these adivasi people who have bravely created the conditions for those held in virtual detention in the camps to return home. It is they who are refusing to hand over their lands, their forests, to the rich global mining interests who are waiting in the wings.

It is they who have pushed back a brutal campaign like Salwa Judum. Can we refuse to recognise this brave resistance only because we may be "labelled."?

Today's imperialist onslaught is a desperate attempt to overcome crisis. And the masses of people refuse to be the sacrificial goat.

The ferocious aggression of imperialist capital, especially from the US, has to be seen in the light of the economic crisis impending since the 1990's, that has erupted now in 2008. This final economic meltdown has exploded many a myth about the illusory 'free market economy' and we are seeing a naked collusion between finance capital and imperialist governments. The 'free market' is for the devastation of lakhs of peasants, and the 'bail outs and subsidies' are for the big capital.

Even mainstream economists like Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman and many others have been demonstrating that, especially in the last decades, US has been consuming vast resources at the expense of the developing countries such as China, India and Russia etc. This has been done largely through its unique position by way of issuing dollars to reduce its mega-deficit and making the poor countries pay for its consumerist extravaganza. According to a New York Times article, since 2001, the US debt has grown by \$1.7 trillion. Foreigners financed 75 percent - about \$1.3 trillion – of this, China alone bears one fourth the burden. So, we see that the plight of the Indian peasants or that of the small industries is not a natural phenomenon, but a direct consequence of ruthless loot by desperate imperialists. But even with all this loot, they could only postpone the collapse of their economy, and finally by 2008, the crisis caught up with them.

A word of caution. By economic analysis alone, without an all sided study of our times we can never get to the whole of the truth, more importantly that truth, which guides us to work, beyond mere interpretations, to change the wretched conditions of our world,.

If we carefully think over the whole sequence of the events, we can figure out that had George Bush succeeded in taming the Iraqi people in a time period of three to six months, then he could have proceeded to conquer Iran and could have got hold of vast oil resources cheaply. In that situation the imperialists could have postponed the crash for another decade. This is what they had calculated.

The people of the oppressed world thought otherwise. At the cost of untold sufferings and sacrifices, the march of the armed might of US imperialism has been brought to a grinding halt. After Korea and Vietnam, the people of Iraq have shown that imperialism is indeed "a paper tiger". The moral of the story is that we have to go beyond interpretation, work for change, come out and organize the struggle to defeat the plunderers.

At this historic juncture of world wide economic crisis, what is the state of affairs in our country? What are the politicians of every major political party and the ruling bureaucrats doing? Of course they are working to save the country, to save the economy from the crisis. The country is - Tata, Ambani, Jindal, Jaiprakash, DLF, Indiabull, Essar, Birla, Holcim, Lafarge, ITC etc. etc. and the vast people are their subjects. More than 60 thousand crores have been injected. More may be needed. After all the country has to be saved from the economic crisis.

The crisis is of the demand side. So demand has to be boosted. Excise duty has been cut across the board. Mobikes are cheaper by 4000, cars by 20 to 40 thousands. Banks have been instructed to disburse loans to boost the consumer market. Come on citizens, the country has to be saved, the economy has to be saved, tighten your belts.

How can the employers give bonus, there is an economic slowdown? Wages less than half the legal minimum? You should understand, it is a crisis. Everyone has to do their bit. The country is taking upon itself the burden of carrying package after package, the citizens should chip in with a bit of overtime and a bit of unemployment.

And peasants.... yesterday, you were to contribute your land for development, today it is to save the country from economic crisis! Are you not expected to give that contribution at the altar of country? You see, we are all one. The govt. of the economists is leading us. We are in safe hands.

Just a minute.

The crisis is of the demand side. Then, can't the demand be boosted by paying bonus to the workers, by paying full wages and even giving a raise, by providing employment to all with a living wage (and not just a starvation wage as under NREGA)? Imagine the boost to demand when 77% of our people living with less than Rs. 20 a day start earning a minimum wage of say Rs 100 a day! What about constructing decent hospitals for the 80% of population which doesn't have them? By providing for construction of toilets for every family? To boost demand and save the economy, isn't it logical to have a moratorium on the construction of malls and all the other extravaganzas before the whole population is provided with these essentials? Or is it that only when malls and flyovers are constructed, the demand for the steel and cement industries is boosted, and when hospitals and toilets and houses are constructed, it is not?

The logic of economics is absolutely clear in this matter, that in fact, demand can only be boosted in this manner. But how can finance capital even allow you to think about think about this option, let alone propose action on these lines? Ah! There is this political side to our economy. And our economist rulers are the agents of the supreme imperialists. Indeed the whole ruling class, the politicians, the big bureaucrats! It has recently been reported in our mainstream media that the black money stashed away by this class in Swiss Banks was Rs. 1300 crore in 1984, increased to Rs. 28,000 crores in 1997 and that this amount had soared to a whopping Rs. 72,80,000 crores by the end of 2006. This amount is one hundred times more than the much worshipped FII investments in the Indian stock markets.

In its crisis ridden state, imperialist capital has become ferocious, like a real tiger in its old age. It has been waging an all out attack on the lives and livelihood of people. The crisis ridden imperialists and pliant governments have been particularly aggressive in carrying out land grab and easing out the peasants from their land on an unprecedented scale. Kalinganagar, Singur, Nandigram, Midnapur, Koelkaro, Netrahat, Raigarh, Jashpur, Jagatsingpur (Posco). Lohandiguda (Tata), Bhansi (Essar) in Bastar, and so many other places in Chhattisgarh and all over India. Displacement under Salwa Judum, as relocation under military strategy is the one of the most brutal instances. Imperialists consider the Maoist forces to be the most serious obstacle in the way of unbridled exploitation in Bastar and many other adivasi areas. To crush them, the state does not hesitate to carry out genocidal campaigns among the adivasi peoples. The representatives of the United States are frequently present to see whether the state is doing enough to protect their "long term interests" in the mineral rich hinterland of India.

This interference in our matters can not be allowed. The *dalaal* political class must stand exposed.

True, the foundation of capitalism was laid on clearing indigenous populations through genocides in many continents, on the blood and sweat labour of African slaves, on colonial extraction and plunder in India and most of the “third world”. But that was centuries ago. For progress, in the 21st century, can human civilization permit such a path of “development”?

Can the degradation of the earth and dehumanization of “civilization” be halted without doing away with the present perpetuation of obscene inequality? And is that possible without the toiling people, the wretched of the earth taking from the obviously degenerated imperialist rulers of today’s world and into their own hands – the command of politics, economy, and culture?

It is the call of the hour - support the resistance of the adivasis in the resource-rich areas, join hands to come out and organize the anti-displacement struggle at the national level.

Surely, we shall defeat the plunderer imperialists.