

# **AN APPEAL TO THE VISITING M. P. 'S TO SAVE THE PEOPLE OF BALIAPAL - BHOGRAI FROM DESTITUTION**

## **People's Movement Against Location of National Test Range**

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1. At Baliapal and Bhograi in the East coast of Orissa, Govt of India. Ministry of Defence is hell bent to locate the National Test Range which will fire long distance missile and rocket and send satellites up in the space more than thousands of kilometres. This will become one of the biggest space research and defence installation centre in the country. The Defence Minister of State Mr. Arun Singh has said that this area would be a centre of high technological advancement in the country and as important as the Cape Kennedy of USA,

## 2. The Human Misery

If was announced in the beginning that about a lakh of persons from 125 villages in the Baliapal, Bhograi and Basta Block of Balasore district have to face eviction. Now the area is cut to contain 68 villages. But actually more than ten lakh persons have to be evicted. As a matter of fact eviction notices have been served on many persons. This area is a rich, fertile and agricultural prosperous one. It is spread over 400 Sq. Kms. where Defence Ministry proposes to set up the project. It grows all sorts of crop like rice, wheat, cashew, coconut, chilli, betel leaves, oil seeds etc. There are about 30,000 betel vineyards which export crores of rupees of betel leaves to all parts of India and abroad. About 50,000 fishermen eke out their livelihood from the catch of fish in the sprawling and shallow sea. In a memorandum which was submitted to the Prime Minister in the month of March '86

the affected persons called the area as the " Oasis in the economic desert of Orissa "

3. Soon after the Chief Minister of Orissa announced on 1st August '84 that the National Test Range ( NTR ) will be located at Baliapal-Bhograi, and will displace some persons who will be provided with jobs, massive movement against the location have been launched.

4. The affected persons and the sympathisers have formed a non political organisation 'Khepanastra Ghati Birodh Committee' i. e. committee to resist location of national test range and have systematically voiced their strong opposition to the location of the project at a populous area and demanded its shifting. They had held massive rallies where thousands of men and women have joined. The students, women peasants have voiced their protest. They have marched to Balasore. The Dist. Head Quarters and also to Bhubaneswar a distance of 100 to 300 Kilometers respectively in thousands to protest its location and to demand its shifting.

5. I have visited the affected area number of times and held several meetings. Many national leaders have come and addressed the gatherings of 50,000 and more. The people have said 'We will face bullets, what may come, but we will not leave our houses and land.' They have formed 'Marana Sena' (volunteers who are ready to court death.) They have stopped the entry of all Government vehicles to their area by erecting a barricade on the road.

At the blow of croneh shells thousands of them gather and protest any Govt. encroachment into the area. On the 7th october last even after Chief minister of Orissa cancelled his much vaunted meeting at Baliapal about 40,000 men and women with black flags and broom sticks gathered and burnt Chief Minister's effigy. The 4000 armed Police constabulary looked at the bon fire helplessly.

#### 6. Trust Betrayed

The delegation of the affected persons met the Prime-Minister on the 20th March' 86 under the leadership of Prof. Madhu Dandawate M. P., I was also present in the meeting. After half an hour of discussion the Prime Minister told the delegation. "I had no facination for any particular place for its location. I was told that Baliapal Bhograi is a suitable place therefore I had agreed. If you can suggest any alternate site please do so, we will consider it" He looked at Madhu Dandwate M. P. and said "Madhuji you can discuss with your expert body and let us know". When there was demand that he should visit the area he said Let some 'home work be done first then, I will visit .. ....".

We all returned happy for atleast the Govt is ready to discuss alternate proposals. When we were in the midst of work to find alternate sites for its location and were consulting experts the junior Minister Shri Arun Singh invited Dr. H. Mahatab, Biju Pattnaik and myself to discuss "Land acquisition and rehabilitation" programme of the displaced persons on the 16th April' 86 only after three weeks the Prime Minister assured that he will consider suggestions if made on alternate sites. We felt terribly betrayed. How can this happen

in any civilised country where a Junior Minister has the cheeks to negative what Prime Minister commits to the people. This is indeed strange.

#### 7. A Deaf ear

Myself and Biju Pattnaik had attended Arun Singh's meeting with a protest. We refused to discuss rehabilitation and land acquisition programme as that was an non-issue for us and discussed the alternate sites. Mr. Arunachalam the Scientific adviser to the Govt. held the floor and explained the logistics of different sites. Interestingly though atleast six sites emerged in the discussion where this project ( NTR ) can be located without any displacement of people or loss of property. They are Dwaraka in Gujurat, Shriharikota where they have this facility now, Andaman Nicobar Island, Sagardeep area Satabhaiya in Cuttack District of Orissa, Rajasthan Deserts. The main argument against these sites from the Government was that (a) it will escalate cost (b) Dwaraka is nearer the Pakistan border. (c) Sri harikota will need more boosters (d) There are crocodiles and Tortoise Satbhaiya

The Govt. was not ready to discuss this matter in depth even the quantum of costs, for instance we had argued that slight increase in cost if located in some places like Andaman will be balanced by many other odds i.e the problem of displacement and rehabilitation. The Govt. turned a deaf ear. It appeared as if the Govt. had a close mind and they were predetermined to locate the site. The discussion was simple an eyewash. We walked out in protest.

## 8. The Three Views

There have been three strong views against the location of the national test range. **Firstly** it will displace a big population from a rich agricultural prosperous area. **Secondly** the Govt. will be forced to use willy-nilly nuclear war heads in the rockets and missiles which will be fired to long distance beyond 6000 Kms. This is a must since submarines carrying rockets / missiles with nuclear heads in the Indian Ocean have to be met with some show of deterrence. The Govt. has denied that it ( NTR ) does not have any nuclear programme. This is not believed by many. The peace initiative in the Indian Ocean will be shattered for ever. Entire Eastern India will come within the orbit of a nuclear counter attack. In the Indian Ocean the Super powers and some other big powers have their submarines which - contain rockets / missiles with nuclear warheads, can fire to a distance of 35000-Kms. up in the space. If Rs. 4000 crores have to be spent in this project and it will not have any deterrence value then it is not worth the salt. The money should be spent in some priority defence areas more fruitfully. **Thirdly** when it can be located in some other places say Andaman which even Government agree that it is a suitable place but for the cost factor the project cannot be located there. The Govt. is lip tied to discuss the cost factor except saying that it will be located at Baliapal-Bhograi at any cost.

## 9. Resist Destitution

But inspite of it all the main demand of the people of the area is to shift the project to one of the places mentioned above.

It has been pointed out to the government no where in the world & not even in big countries like USA, UK, France, USSR, China such test ranges have been located in densely populated areas. As a matter of fact the space centre in Cape Kennedy have been located in the coast of south Florida in two small marshy Islands, the USSR has located it in Siberia deserts France in French Guiana on the Atlantic Coast at a distance of 8000 miles, UK, in Australia, China in its mountain belt of Central China.

#### 10. **Only Suitable Place—A lie**

The much trumpated claim by the Defence Ministry that Baliapal-Bhograi is the "Only suitable place" in the Country for location of National Test Range is now proved to be a total lie. Shivraj Patil Minister of Science and Technology in a letter to Cong. (I) President of Karnataka has claimed that the location of N T R at Bindur in Karnataka was shifted to Baliapal since the people of Bindur opposed to locate the project there. The Prime-Minister in his letter addressed to me dated 16th Sept. '86 has admitted of the shifting of the project from Bindur to Baliapal. The project was located at Bindur obviously because the place was found suitable there and for no other reason. This makes hollow of their tall claim and proves it a lie that Baliapal is the "Only suitable place." The Govt. deliberately played up that Baliapal is the suitable site only to throw dust in the eye of the simple people of Orissa. In this nefarious game the C.M. of Orissa abetted all the moves of the centre with the sole object to fortify has tottering Chief Ministerial Gaddi in Orissa what ever may be the cost.

11. It is difficult to imagine why the Government is obtuse to the human misery and sufferings and is insisting on to locate the project at Baliapal-Bhograi, a densely populated area. Should the country not debate the futility of locating a defence and research project which destroys a green belt and renders it into a desert and displaces a lakh of persons ? Will not the Prime Minister stick to his promise ? Should not the countrymen know and debate the reason for giving priority to this defence project ? Have not the people of the area right to know and debate whether the danger area is only 6 Kms. or more ? The doubt and fear raised in the minds of men that this project is not in nation's interest should it not be clarified ? Will the ecological balance be allowed to be destroyed in these lush green belt ? These and many other questions arise which need to be answered before the bulldozers and canons move into these village.

The people are pushed back to the wall and am sure they will fight back with great vigour to resist any tempt to make them destitutes. In this hour of their perit they need precious sympathy and support from all quarters.

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