

Press Statement

Brundaban Chandra Raj

Camp : Delhi.
Dtd : 13 Dec, 1990

(X.D. 17)

In his letter to Sh. Samarendra Kundu dated 6 Nov 1990 Sh. V P Singh had mentioned in the context of establishment of National Missile Test Range (NTR) at Baliapal-Phograi that "... in view of the State Government's views in the matter, alternative sites will be examined within the overall interest of the country."

Even though this does not amount to a categorical statement relocating the proposed NTR to be built at Baliapal in Orissa as has been consistently demanded by the people of the area since 1 Aug 1984 we have received it with a glimmer of hope. Even though the National Front govt. has lost majority we have received it with optimism as it has led to the opening of the issue anew for further consideration.

However, Sh. V S Arunachalam, the Senior Scientific Adviser to Min. of Defence has recently emphasized on 7 Dec 1990 that there was no question of changing the site and that despite enormous pressure the govt. has not acceded to the demand. The Govt. persists in its argument that Baliapal is the best location for setting up an instrument test range as a national facility. Sh. Chandrasekhar PM has not given a categorical assurance regarding the annulment of the proposed NTR at Baliapal either. He has merely said at a press conference at Bhubaneswar on 9 Dec 1990 that "... he would look into the technical details." The Govt. of India has still not announced its decision not to locate the NTR in the thickly populated area of Baliapal.

The Govt.'s stand has created ambiguity. This has caused serious misgivings in the minds of the people living in Baliapal-Bhograi, where more than 102 sq.km. of agriculturally rich land ~~covering more than 55 villages~~ are sought to be acquired for the purpose. Cash crops like betel vines, cashewnut, groundnut, coconuts and small farmers, fishermen (most of the fisher-folk and agricultural labourers in this area own and operate their own land) apart from others stand to lose a lot, if the site is not changed. An average farmer here can earn an income of Rs. 40,000/- p.a. from agriculture (3 crops with the use of least fertiliser and irrigation facilities). The income of a betel vine (paan) grower ranges between 40,000 and 1 lakh, annually.

The people of Baliapal have united themselves in struggle against the decision to locate the NTR in their homesteads ever since 1984 and have successfully stopped entry of government officials and vehicles apart from preventing construction work on the said project. All sections of the society have stood united in struggle raising basic questions regarding development alternatives, environmental balance and the right of the people to decide their future and issues that affect them critically. We had hoped that the Janata Dal and National Front who had made an electoral campaign pledge to shift the location of NTR to do the same when it acquired power, ~~it is now clear that they have backed out.~~ V P Singh's letter to Sh. Kundu.

even with its ambiguous stand on the issue was not written until the penultimate day of his reign. The response of the present government doesn't seem to inspire much hope either.

We express deep concern and protest at the indifference shown by the Central govt. to the consistent demand of the people. We reiterate that no amount of compensation or rehabilitation measures can fulfil demands of the people who want immediate cancellation of the project. We urge once again the Govt. to take immediate decision to review the location of NTR and fulfil aspirations of our people. We are left with no option but to continue our struggle in the meanwhile.

in spite of the fact the state govt. and the chief Minister Mr. Biju Patnaik have repeatedly expressed his views against the location of the scheme it is obviously clear the central leadership have failed to keep up with their please and even

[Handwritten signature]