

# Janadesh News

April 2008

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## National Land Reforms Committee Members Visit SEZs

This month several members of the National Land Reforms Committee visited Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu, and met with affected communities to better understand the issues in each area. In Maharashtra, Committee members visited an SEZ in Lavasa, where 35,000 acres of land have already been acquired for promoting tourism near Pune, in Bori where an SEZ along the coastline of Mumbai and Thane has displaced fishing communities, and in Pen where Reliance Industries Ltd. has purchased thousands of acres of fertile agricultural lands for its Maha-Mumbai SEZ project.

In Tamil Nadu, Committee members visited Tutukurin where Sterilite Industries India Ltd. has acquired thousands of acres of paddy land and Tata Steel Ltd. has proposed the construction of a Titanium Plant that would affect the fertile coastal lands and the communities who depend on the natural resources of the area for their livelihoods.

SEZs in Kanker and Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh were also visited by Committee members who met with state officials and local communities to discuss the issues surrounding SEZs, land acquisition and displacement. One of the responsibilities of the Committee is to recommend measures to prevent or minimize the use of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes. Visits to SEZs across the country will help the Committee to ensure that the concerns of SEZ affected communities are central to the development of a National Land Reforms Policy that will introduce public policy measures to help achieve a more egalitarian society.

Committee members also held meetings with grassroots activists and land experts from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa to draft state profiles of land issues and policy needs and to plan for future Committee field visits. These visits allow Committee members to understand the ground realities of the various land struggles around the country and to discuss the unique needs of each community. The thoughts and suggestions of grass roots activists and community members are vital to the design of a National Land Reforms Policy that truly represents the interests of the people.

## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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## "LAND RIGHTS AND RESEARCH WORKSHOP" HELD IN DELHI

From April 12- 13 members of the National Land Reforms Committee and Ekta Parishad partners from the National Campaign for Land and Livelihood participated in the "Land Rights Research Workshop" in Delhi. Activists and organizations involved in the land rights struggle in Rajasthan and Gujarat attended and were debriefed about the principles of the Janadesh campaign as well as introduced to Committee members and the role of the Committee. Discussions had three areas of focus:

1. To explore strategies to ensure the most effective modes of action for the Committee;
2. To invite grassroots activists to suggest their ideas about the activities of the Committee;
3. To identify and discuss region specific land issues and plans for future actions.

### Issues Identified in Gujarat:

- A Game Sanctuary in the Kutch area has led to mass displacement in the surrounding communities.
- The state government has been distributing lands for high-tech agriculture since May 2005 to agricultural companies and large farmers. Currently a people's movement to distribute these lands to landless and small farmers is growing in the area. They are calling for detailed studies of the lands that have been distributed for high-tech agricultural purposes and that have been earmarked for future distribution to be made public.
- To pressure villagers to vacate their lands, the state government is acquiring village common lands which are used by many as grazing lands and common farming lands. When these lands, which can be acquired by the government on the grounds that the land is not owned by any person holding a land title, are lost, villagers are no longer able to sustain themselves and are in a position to have to sell their lands and migrate to search for an alternative source of livelihood.
- Companies are acquiring lands classified as "waste land" but communities in the area claim the lands are actually agricultural lands that should be distributed to the landless. They believe that the state government is purposely classifying agricultural land as "waste land" to receive kickbacks from companies who are interested in acquiring lands for their projects.
- The state government has yet to fulfill its promise to distribute land titles to small farmers occupying government land.
- Although villagers in the Kutch area have not yet received official notification, media reports and company surveys have led communities to believe that up to 10 thousand acres of village lands will be acquired for the proposed development projects of Adani, a company who already has a port in the coastal area.
- Villagers who have been living in national park areas without land titles for generations are being pushed out as companies are acquiring lands surrounding the villages.
- Cement companies are illegally mining on village common lands and sanctuary lands. When confronted by villagers, companies claim to have purchased lands from the state government.
- Large scale fishing and salt farming companies have acquired common lands, resulting in the loss of traditional livelihoods of those who are unable to compete with production levels and prices.
- Shared land titles for joint farming list only one or two names on ownership papers. While many people may be jointly dependent on these lands, only those whose names appear on the titles have the power to sell joint lands, making the rest vulnerable to the greed of only a few.
- Due to the large areas of community land being acquired for development projects and the increasing population, there is a shortage of land available for community cemeteries.

## Issues Identified in Rajasthan:

- In the Bara district the Saharia tribal communities live on un-surveyed lands that are claimed by both the Forest and the Revenue Departments. Communities are being displaced by department officials claiming they illegally occupy these lands despite government policies that give them the right to the lands they have traditionally occupied.
- Large areas of agricultural lands are being used to cultivate Jatropha for bio-fuel.
- Small farmers who are unable to pay back loans are losing their lands which are being taken as payment on loans.
- In the Chaksu Block of Jaipur district the Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) has acquired and fenced in common village lands, closing roads and footpaths off to the community. Those who may have had to travel only 3kms from their homes to reach their fields now have to travel up to 18kms. Villagers have taken the matter to the courts to stop the JDA from further encroachment, but the case is pending.
- There are several mega highways in Rajasthan, including one that runs from Kishangarh to Hanumangarh. Lands surrounding the highway are being acquired for what is vaguely referred to as "public purpose." Companies involved in the development of projects for "public purpose" and the state government refuse to disclose information about how the lands being acquired will be used for the benefit of the public. Land surrounding other mega-highways in the state has been acquired to build shopping complexes and hotels and residents in the Hanumangarh area suspect that the land being acquired for "public purpose" will be used for the same type of construction. They do not agree that this kind of development is in the interest of poor and small farmers in the region.
- Along the Pakistan border there are large areas of land being used for wind and solar energy. This has deprived communities that depend on the lands to graze their cattle of their livelihood and left them without compensation for their loss.
- Farmers are being offered company shares as an incentive to sell their lands, adding to the growing amount of agricultural lands being used for non-agricultural purposes.
- There is not currently a land ceiling in the State.

## *La Via Campesina Visits Ekta Parishad Field Area....*

*ON MARCH 27TH INTERNATIONAL BOARD MEMBERS OF LA VIA CAMPESINA FROM MEXICO, INDONESIA, GERMANY AND NORWAY VISITED A TRIBAL VILLAGE IN GWALIOR DISTRICT WITH EKTA PARISHAD ACTIVISTS TO DISCUSS JANADESH FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AND TO EXPLORE POTENTIAL FUTURE COLLABORATIONS. LA VIA CAMPESINA IS AN INTERNATIONAL PEASANTS MOVEMENT THAT PROMOTES SOLIDARITY AMONG SMALL FARMER ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE WORLD TO PROMOTE PEOPLE'S FOOD SOVEREIGNTY. THEY SHARE EKTA PARISHAD'S VISION OF A WORLD WHERE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES, LOCAL AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO LIVELIHOOD RESOURCES ARE SECURED FOR ALL PEOPLE. VISIT THEIR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION [HTTP://WWW.VIACAMPESINA.ORG](http://www.viacampesina.org).*



## *Janakalyan Santhsa Leads Rally to Kalahandi District Collector to Demand Change*

Janakalyan Santhsa (JKS), or “for the welfare of the people,” is an organization working in Kalahandi with communities struggling for their land rights. On March 29th, JKS led a rally of more than 700 people through Bhawanipatna to the Kalahandi District Collector’s office to demand that development in the region be done in the interest of the communities

Ekta Parishad activists were there to show their solidarity and to encourage people to unite peacefully to demand their rights to the lands and natural resources they depend on. Some of the demands of the rally were that residents be provided with access to health facilities, a high school, and a paved road. They also called for lands to be demarcated and for forest-dependent communities to be allowed to have access to forest produce without being charged with forest or wildlife violations. Many of the people in the area are being denied access to the forests they depend on because they are entering forests that have been declared sanctuary areas. Others are denied their rights to health and education facilities because they live in un-surveyed villages that the State Government does not officially recognize in its development schemes. JKS and Ekta Parishad activists working in the area regularly meet with villagers to discuss their rights and to ensure that lands are surveyed and demarcated as quickly as possible so that communities can begin to enjoy the benefits of government schemes that have so far failed to reach them.

## **BY 2017, BIO-FUEL WILL MEET 10% OF TRANSPORT NEEDS**

**9 APR 2008, NITIN SETHI, THE TIMES OF INDIA**

**Disregarding the consequences of the use of scarce land to grow bio-fuels on environment and food security, India is readying a national bio-fuel policy, which aims to set a target of meeting about 10% of total transport fuel with bio-fuels by 2017.**

**The policy is open to changes, but estimates suggest that 12 million hectares of land would have to be brought under bio-fuel crops to meet the target.**

**Though the government has said that it would use only revenue and forest wastelands for plantations, the continued premium on bio-fuels is sure to cause consternation to the growing numbers who feel that the land resources should be harnessed solely for growing crops or animal feed.**

For the full story visit [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/By\\_2017\\_biofuel\\_will\\_meet\\_10\\_of\\_transport\\_needs/rssarticleshow/2936405.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/By_2017_biofuel_will_meet_10_of_transport_needs/rssarticleshow/2936405.cms)

### **Upcoming Events....**

**From May 8-13 in Motihari, Bihar a meeting will be held for Ekta Parishad activists to discuss the challenges of implementing Land Reform Policies. Activists will explore strategies to build awareness within communities and to mobilize people to demand that the state properly implement new policies for the people.**





*Villagers meet to discuss sanctuary*

## ***KARLAPAT SANCTUARY THREATENS TO DISPLACE THOUSANDS OF TRIBAL VILLAGERS***

In the Kalahandi district of Orissa, the state government has classified areas covering 17,503 kms of forests as sanctuary lands. More than 250 tribal villages and 450 households live within the boundaries of what is now the Karlapat Sanctuary.

All of these communities are directly dependent on forest product collection and all have been forbidden from the livelihoods they have known for generations. More than 300 villages that are on the outside boundary of the sanctuary have also been forbidden from collecting forest produce. While the recently enacted Tribal Rights Act allows traditionally forest dependent communities to continue to access forest resources, the realities on the ground are quite different. Forest Department officials regularly demand bribes from poor villagers who want to avoid being charged with forest protection violations. Hundreds of men who were unable to pay bribes have been charged with various violations and face numerous court visits, regular travel to courts, lost wages, lawyer bills and lengthy cases that sometimes span years. Officials confiscate the tools used for forest product collection and beat those who protest. Rarely are villagers aware of their rights and as a result they are easy targets for greedy Forest Department officials.

Most of the villages in the area have formed Forest Rights Committees at the request of Panchayat leaders. The role of these Committees is to physically verify the locations of village lands and their use so that people can begin to be given land titles. None of the Committee members have any idea of what the role of the Committee is and claim that they formed the Committee because they were ordered to do so without any explanation. It is this kind of lack of awareness combined with the insensitivity of officials that makes the implementation of national policies at the state level so difficult. Ekta Parishad and a local organization, Janakalyan Sanstha, are working with communities to generate awareness and facilitate the distribution of land titles. The exploitation of forest-dependent communities can only be stopped when the communities themselves understand their rights and are able to demand that national policies created for their benefit be implemented at the state level.

## *VEDANTA IN TALKS TO GET LEASE TO MINE IN NIYAMGIRI HILLS*



*Vedanta refinery at the base of the Niyamgiri Hills*

Before Vedanta Alumina Ltd. set up its alumina refinery in 2004, the people of Chhatrapur village led a simple life. They farmed and raised dairy cows and goats, their children were healthy and they could depend on the Bansadhara River to bring them clean water from the Niyamgiri Hills.

When Vedanta came they watched as a road and helipad were built and listened to stories of police beating people in the area who had dared to speak out against the company acquiring village lands. One morning 45 year old Kanda Harijan took his buffalo to the river for his usual bath. Hours later his skin was covered in circular burns. In three days he was dead.

Word spread that Vedanta had been dumping their waste into the river at night and people stopped using the river. Now the 3000 villagers of Chhatrapur share a small pond barely deep enough to cover their ankles.

While the hills in Kalahandi are being “protected” from the tribal communities of the Karlapat Sanctuary, the Government of Orissa is in talks with Vedanta to grant the company a lease to set up a Bauxite mine in the Niyamgiri Hills. The hills are the source of rivers and are home to tribal communities and diverse wildlife. People all over the area depend on them for the fruits and other forest products they collect. A mining project of the scale being proposed by Vedanta would doubtlessly destroy the biodiversity of the area and poison the rivers permanently.

Because of massive protests led by villages united from all over the area, Vedanta is tied up in court fighting for a mining lease. While the communities remain united and willing to fight for their right to live with clean lands and waters, the fact remains that Vedanta has the support of a state government eager to make Orissa the next haven for industrial developers. Its resource rich lands are a draw for mining and power generating companies and it is always the people with the most to lose that are left out of the dialogue for “public development” projects.

Ekta Parishad activists continue to work at national and state levels to ensure that pro-poor development policies are created for communities affected by industrial growth and development projects and that these policies are implemented at the village level.