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INDIA BULLS AND MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT IN MASSIVE LAND GRAB OPERATIONS FOR A 'MULTI-PURPOSE SEZ' IN RAIGAD DISTRICT.

Land Sharks are in collusion with State Govt to oust over 50,000 farming families from fertile agricultural lands in Raigad Dist – Alibag – [across the harbour from Mumbai] - It appears that this is no longer 'breaking news' – because it only affects simple traditional farming communities from the primarily 'agri' community who, together with the kolis – the fisher folk, were the original inhabitants of the city we know today as Mumbai – and all along the Konkan coast.

One month ago we had sent around a message describing the immediate reaction in our villages, to news that the GOM, in an Extraordinary Gazette Notification, had notified some 22 villages in this part of Alibag Taluka to be acquired under the MIDC [Maharashtra Industrial Development Act] of 1962.

Apart from some expressions of concern and assurances of further investigation by a few journalists, very little information has actually appeared in the Press and Media. Perhaps Alibag was competing with too many other similar stories – and Singur and high profile political action certainly made better copy and headlines.....

This is a summary update on the situation one month down the line in light of several facts which have been ferreted out from various sources – both locally and from sources in the local District Collectorate, the Mantralaya (Secretariat) in Mumbai, as also the Internet.

i. *The Gazette Notification* .

On Oct 27th 2006, the Govt of Maharashtra, through an Extraordinary Gazette notification unilaterally declared this entire agricultural belt where we are living, as an 'Industrial Area' under Clause G of Section 2, of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Act 1961. (MAH III of 1962).

In short this means that agricultural lands of these 22 villages, currently under cultivation and owned by small farmers over several generations, till now designated as a green zone under the MMRDA, will now be acquired under the aegis of the office of the Special Land Acquisition Officer (1) Alibag, Raigad, ostensibly for 'industrial development'. The stratagem adopted by the GOM for this acquisition itself is clever, and demands closer scrutiny. Clubbing the MIDC Act together with the SEZ provision virtually means that there is little room for public questioning or even recourse to the law, since the law itself, in the words of a former MIDC CEO, 'is heavily biased in favour of MIDC'.

- ii. The gazette was issued the very next day after the meeting at which this decision regarding change of land use pattern took place, namely on Oct 28 2006 – [see copy of the relevant Gazette].
- iii. The Gazette was forwarded under the signature of a Desk Officer with a letter addressed to the collector Raigad in Alibag, dated 28 Oct 2006 that gave away the game plan – namely that the 22 villages – an area comprising some 5,000 acres of fertile agricultural land, was to be handed over urgently, to Messrs India Bulls Infrastructure Development Ltd, for a "multi-product special economic zone" (or SEZ), to be made effective under section 6 of the MIDC ACT of 1961,
- iv. The letter, while stressing the urgency to issue acquisition letters to farmers in these 22 villages, also did point out that due processes must be followed – including public hearings and opportunities for farmers to testify and state their objections to the takeover.
- v. **The District Collector and other officials till date – namely Jan 5 2007, have neither promulgated the Gazette itself, nor have they followed the due processes laid down.**
- vi. Change of Land Use from Agriculture to industry – What is the public purpose and the urgency – and what is the nature of the planned INDUSTRIALISATION which would be in the "public interest"? There is no mention in the Gazette.
- vii. A Google search of the Internet for information about INDIA BULLS was also revealing. The parent body is a Financial Services Company which has since diversified into the India Bulls Infrastructure Development Ltd and India Bulls Real Estate Pvt Ltd. ***Their primary expertise and focus appears to be in REAL ESTATE transactions – and related infrastructure development –and this can only be done by evicting existing residents from their land!***
- viii. The Corporate Announcement as evident from the Internet, indicates clearly that 'In-principle approval' was granted to India Bulls Infrastructure Development Limited for development of a 'multi-product' SEZ in the State of Maharashtra on Nov 3 2006, that is soon after the decision was taken by the department of Industry, Energy and Labour the Govt of Maharashtra .

- ix. This has been done with the apparent approval of the Chief Minister. **However, there does not appear to have** been a Cabinet Meeting or approval so far.
- x. A statement made by Mr Sameer Gehlaut, CEO of INDIA BULLS, (available on the net), on Nov 5 2006 – assures the investors of huge opportunities since they already have ***received prior permission from the authorities and land acquisition had begun.***
- xi. The stated intentions of the State that this land is to be acquired for purposes of industrial development are clearly malafide. The Government of Maharashtra is playing broker to real estate speculators; it has frozen all transactions on this land using the MIDC Act; and it will sell/hand over the 5,000 acres at a relatively lower price in order to enable INDIA BULLS INFRASTRUCTURE to make a killing at the expense of 50,000 residents, farmers, a beautifully developed land rich in mango, paddy, tondli and all forms of vegetables flora and fauna.
- xii. **We hope that the media which has exposed so many scams and fought for justice and truth, will likewise investigate and expose this totally unjustified action by the State and its dalals.**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- It is a fact that the real estate prices in the Mandwa-Alibag belt have skyrocketed in the past twelve months - and today there is little land available. Our stretch of 22 villages is sandwiched between that belt and the proposed [Reliance led] SEZ area in Pen Taluka.
- This stretch from Karlekhind to the sea - at Rewas and the Dharamtar Creek does not have homes of the rich, powerful, famous. The honourable exception is the presence in one of the 22 villages earmarked for acquisition, of a former Navy Chief who has spent his time in public causes for Peace, Education and in horticulture/agriculture as per the conditions laid down when the land on which he has lived for the past 13 years since retirement. {He was allotted the land in 1973 for having been awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry in the 1971 war with Pakistan.} This land has been was allotted to him and his heirs in perpetuity, and from a barren scrub area, he and his wife have transformed it into a green and sylvan paradise through their continued efforts.
- **It is the case of the village communities, that if any industrialist wants to acquire these lands, they should deal directly with the owners and negotiate the price as per the prevailing market rates.**

- No farmer should be forced to part with valuable, fertile, developed agricultural land by any Government of the day, for an under-valued compensation under the veil of 'industrial development'.
- Citizens of these villages have come together to form an association for the protection of their land and property - and have decided to embark on a struggle to prevent this unjust take over. They have also decided to wage this struggle without the help of any political party.
- The Citizens Formation is known as 22 Gaon Bachao Sangharsh Samiti - it will soon be registered and will then undertake a variety of actions - through legal petitions, RTI related petitions, and mobilizing media, political and other leadership.
- Meanwhile - recently it has come to light that four more villages have also been notified in end Dec in a contiguous area. The Shetkari Kamgar Paksha - the Peasants and Workers Party, has also publicly stated that they will oppose this move to set up an SEZ.

OTHER ACTIONS -

- APPEALS TO POLITICAL LEADERS - TOP BUREAUCRATS
- Meetings, phone calls, faxes, appeals to the Prime Minister - Dr Man Mohan Singh; the Home Minister - Shri Shivraj Patil; National Security Advisor - M.K. Narayanan ; the Commissioner Information- Mr Wajahat Habibullah ; Shri Sunil Thatkare - Palak Mantri GOM, responsible for Raigad; Shri Kadam - Minister for Rehabilitation, GOM ; have met with little concrete outcome so far.
- Meetings have been sought with Mrs Sonia Gondhi and the President of India - Dr Abdul Kalam by Admiral Ramdas
- Personal fax messages have been sent to all of the above, as also Shri Vilas Rao Deshmukh - CM Maharashtra and Shri Sharad Pawar - Min of Agriculture - central Govt.
- Attempts to meet with with Mr Vilas Rao Deshmukh by Adm Ramdas and reps of the Sangharsh Samiti have not met with success so far.

MEDIA

Personal conversations, emails and phone calls with a range of senior editors and journalists in the Hindustan Times, the Indian Express, OUTLOOK, CNN-IBN; NDTV-24x7; Lok Satta; the Hindu; as well as local papers in Alibag have met with little success.

THERE IS URGENCY TO CARRY AND SPLASH THIS STORY WIDELY SINCE IT SETS A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRECEDENT – AND IS NOT QUITE THE SAME AS SINGUR OR OTHER SEZ Cases – where at least some kind of Industry/factory has been identified.

They have deliberately used the MIDC-SEZ route where even the law is heavily loaded against possible appeal. Here the Govt is resorting to a tricky subterfuge – using an existing legal and executive mechanism such as the MIDC act – to freeze land values; evict the residents; and then handover / sell to a Private Party – in this case INDIA BULLS – for real estate transactions with NO benefit whatsoever to the original owners. The internet tells us that Mr LN Mittal and Farralon Industry of California are major investors into INDIA BULLS Infrastructure Ltd. It is not clear about Reliance interests.

The grape vine has it that a particular area in Dhulia, in Maharashtra has been designated for KONKAN OUSTEES – part of the resettlement and rehabilitation plan? This makes a mockery of the idea of so-called ‘servants of the people and the state’ since today the functionaries of the state apparatus at all levels have become servants of the biggest corporations in our land. Why doesn’t the GOM hand over the lands in Dhulia for India Bulls to develop?

Basic environmental considerations appear to have been thrown out of the window – with the Government of Maharashtra apparently ready to adopt policies which will destroy the remaining areas rich in agriculture and willfully destroy all remaining flora and fauna by their reckless pushing through of SEZs whose environmental and social costs are only too well known from around the world.

By the same token, questions need to be asked about the setting up of two coal fired thermal power plants (Reliance and Tata) – the promise of using gas seems to have been jettisoned.

- **Our demand is the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of this totally unacceptable Gazette notification and revert to status quo by issuing a fresh Gazette notification.**

Admiral L Ramdas and Lalita Ramdas, on behalf of all members of the 22 Gaon Bachao Sangharsh Samiti.