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## CHILD LABOUR RAMPANT IN ILLEGAL MICA MINES OF JHARKHAND

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Though there are many laws that prohibit children working in hazardous works the worst exploitation of child labour continues unchecked throughout our country. Exploitation of child labour has become a thriving source of earning super profits for the business community. Neither the laws nor the 'ache Din' promised by the NDA rules of BJP could stop the ruthless inhuman exploitation of child labour in India.

According to the law mining is considered to be the hazardous occupation. Particularly mica mining is considered to be the most hazardous occupation.

In the 1980's itself the government had shut down mica mines in Jharkhand state since they lay in forests and the mica mining endangering the environment and being violative of environmental laws.

But since there is a demand for mica from all corners of the world, mica mines are being operated in Jharkhand illegally by mining syndicates. Mica mined illegally from koderma and other regions of Jharkhand is supplying mica to markets through a clandestine supply chain involving local people, politicians, busi-nessmen, authorities and multinational companies.

Hundreds of children (child labours) are engaged in this illegal mining of mica. since better quality of mica - ruby mica- is found deeper underground, the children are used to send underground for mica mining. These underground mines are risky, some are no bigger than foxholes. The children are squeezed through these foxholes into underground. The children risk their lives descending without any hareness down rickety ladders in to pits 100 ft deep to find quality mica ore. Children godown tiny shafts without any safety equipment and spend over eight hours chipping mica with hammers and chisels. Deaths of children is a common phenomenon in these illegal mica mines of Jharkhand. But these deaths are scarcely reported to police and a meagre compensation is paid to parents by contractors and companies to keep it secret.

Besides deaths these children labouring in mica mines are vulnerable to skin infections, respiratory illness and damage to lungs due to inhalation of dust. This illness of lungs has been long backrecognised as silicosis - the killer illness under workmen's compensation act. It is also found that Silicosis is incurable.

According to Bachpan BachavoAndolan (BBA) of Kailash Satyardhi 20 child deaths have occured in June; and the organisations claims that at least 10 child deaths occur in every month.

An International Labour Organisation estimates that at least 20,000 children are working in these illegal mica mines in Jharkhand and Bihar.

But the administration willfully shuts its eye against this illegal mica mining and engagement of child labour in these illegal mines. Despite a ban on mica mining and prohibition of child labour. It vehemently denies the very existence of illegal mica mining and rampant child labourers in the mica mining.

Direst Poverty of the people in these regions is the cause for vulnerability of children to be engaged in illegal risky mining of mica and for the inhuman exploitation of these children by greedy mining syndicates in connivance with the authorities. Poverty presses the children in to this vocation at age five to add the family income.

The prevalence of child labour in mica mines exposes the hollowness of poverty eradication schemes and the hypocrisy played by our rulers for all these 70 years of independence of India!

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