

Assam Peoples Struggle against Forcible Evictions and for Radical Land reforms

Eversince BJP came to power in Assam in May 2016 it is using repression as well as communal division as two weapons to trample the rights of the common people and enable the MNCs and Indian Corporate houses to grab and control large tracks of lands and valuable natural resources in Assam. The developments in the last one year provide a mirror for this.

In Raha, the people are protesting against the transfer of the site for a proposed AIIMS in the State. On 15th July 2016, the govt. opened fire and killed a 25 year old man Mintu Dueri during a protest in Raha. The people of Banderdubi village near Kaziranga National Park were demanding resettlement and adequate compensation for the lands seized from them. The police shot dead two persons Anjuma Khatun and Fakhruddin on Sept 19,2016 when they were in a protest demonstration led by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti and All Assam Minority Students Union.

It must be noted that of the 198 displaced families in Banderdubi village, around 40 families were forced to take shelter in the houses of their relatives. The rest are living under the open in Baghmari, village. These people are mainly Muslims of earstwhile East Bengal origin settled in Banderdubi villagemore than half a century back. The Govt. had shifted 7 Hindu families to a safe place, but did not bother about the rest of the families. A clear show of communal discrimination!

After the eviction drive, an influential Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in an official face book page that the Govt. would never compromise on Jati, Mati, and Bheti (Nationality, Land and Home). Here is an attempt on the part of BJP Govt. to divide the Assam people as “Assamese” and “outsiders” and push the Muslim Community into an uncertain, insecure and pathetically dependent state and make them easy targets of repression.

A year back, the BJP Govt. in Assam started a drive to evict the people from the government lands calling them as ‘illegal encroachers’. It began with Kaziranga and very soon extended to the entire state. After almost a year, it carried on this eviction drive in Sipajhar on 24th Nov 2017. Here one person called Ananda Das, a native of Kuruva village was mysteriously kidnapped (Nov 21st) and murdered (Nov 23rd). But a violent mob went on rampaging alleging that the Gandhia Pather villagers are illegal immigrants and they are responsible for the murder of Ananda Das. They even ravaged and torched some homes. Dramatically, the District administration has immediately moved into action on 24th Nov 2017 and forcibly evicted almost 60 families from their lands.

The evictions did not stop with Sipajhar. On 27th November, 2017, they were carried out in the Amchang reserve forest around Guwahati. 700 families were evicted from the forest land alleging them as illegal encroachers. While Sipajhar evictions were carried in the name of an order from the High court, the Amchang evictions were carried out on the demand of Bhajrang Dal activists. The Amchang eviction received much flak from every section of Assamese society as the evicted people were largely from Mishing and Bodo communities who lost their lands in Majuli, Lakshimpur, Dhemaji due to river erosion. These evicted people were left with no rehabilitation, no roof over their head.

The Sipajhar evictions were sought to be justified by portraying the villagers as illegal immigrants. But the fact is, almost all of them are legitimate citizens of Assam having voter ID cards. Their earlier generations moved from places like Jonia in Barpeta to escape poverty and river erosion. The people were further tricked into buying the Govt. lands from the locals of Kuruwa. The ruling party got them voted in the 2016 elections but when it came to their right over the lands they branded the same people as illegal immigrants and illegally and forcibly evicted them from their own lands.

Coming to Amchang evictions, here, the tribal people are coexisting with nature and sustaining it for ages. But they are accused of ruining the forest resources. The Govt. has evicted these people on the allegation that they are destroying the ecology. As per the May 2017 notification of the Central govt. some of the evicted villages are revenue villages. They are marked as the eco-sensitive villages, but they are not a part of reserved forest. According to the govt.’s own admittance, encroachment had taken place in some parts of Amchang much before they were notified as a Reserve Forest in 2004. But , in violation of laws, the

commercial resorts, cement industries and the army firing range are allowed to continue in the reserved forest area.

The government is engaged in this massive displacement of people only as part its policy to hand over lands to the foreign companies and Indian Corporate Houses. It is removing the people from in and around Guwahati. The rulers consider Guwahati as an emerging a geo-strategic industrial and logistical hub through which goods and services will be funnelled to the neighbouring states. It is also said that the areas like Sipajhar, Morigaon, Boko, Chaygaon etc. are important to sustain Guwahati as an industrial hub. All this is only a part of govt.'s larger policy of privatisation. It is acting like an enabler. Providing easy access to large tracks of land to the MNCs and Indian Corporate Houses is a first step in this. Land acquisition continues to be difficult. So branding a part of the people as illegal immigrants, illegal encroachers, inciting the communal forces and tensions against them have become a part of the game for the BJP rulers in Assam to divide the people, set one section of people agents another, weaken their struggle, use brutal repression and push through their eviction drive more easily and even absolve themselves from the responsibility of proving proper compensation and rehabilitation to the people.

The rulers in Assam are talking much about saving ecological resources. But they almost destroyed the Patkai hills by allowing open mining in different parts of the state. They allowed the extraction of large amount of industrial wood from areas falling under Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils and Chirang in BTAD. Huge tracts of land in the tribal belt were already handed over to the outfits like Patanjali and Dabur, etc. Clearly, the rulers are feasting a handful of fatty big business concerns by looting and starving the poor millions all in the name of development. On one side, the MNCs and Indian big business are allowed tomassively and endlessly gobble the lands and other means of people's livelihood. On the other side, every year a large part of State's land is lost because of erosions turning a large number of people home-less and landless. Hence, fight against the invasion into their lands and means of livelihood by the imperialists and Indian big business; for radical land reforms and a democratic, national and pro-people development policy has become most essential and urgent task of our people.
