

Report from Odisha

Mass Protest Demonstration in Puri against anti-people and anti-environment Shamuka Hotel project

Capitalist industrialization has led to a surge in global temperatures and natural disasters, where unexpected cyclones, floods and droughts have increased throughout the world. This has made coastal Odisha prone to cyclones, with a major cyclone every couple of years inflicting heavy damage on life and property. The Fani cyclone that struck on May 3rd this year led to much devastation in Puri district. Coastal forests that slowed down the cyclones got destroyed.

It is important to note that all government Committee reports say that it is only coastal forests that can slow down cyclones. Yet, the Odisha government, instead of creating more coastal forests, is planning to destroy even the existing ones for projects like Shamuka Resort and coastal high ways. These projects if implemented will destroy all the coastal forests and will result in more cyclone devastations from cyclones in the region. Since last 10 years Upakulia Jami-o' Jangal Suraksha Samiti (UJJSS) has been fighting for the protection of coastal forests. The casuarinas jungles and sand dunes of Sipasarubali are being vigilantly guarded by the people of 20 villages. Because of which they have had to face the brunt of govt. and land mafia, who have been unsuccessfully trying to break this movement. On 19th Aug 2019 Manoj Bhoi, a leading activist of UJJSS, was attacked. The Puri police have also filed a false case against UJJSS Convener Batakrishna Swain to weaken the movement. Earlier many such cases were filed against the activists and leaders of the movement. In spite of all this, UJJSS has been fighting to protect the coastal land, forests and sand dunes. It held a massive rally and protest demonstration on 17th oct'2019 and submitted the following demands to the Odisha Government and Puri District Collector. The rally and demonstration was participated by a large number of women and people of all ages with banners and placards and the people's demands reverberated all along the way.

- Immediately arrest those who attacked Manoj Bhoi and who threaten and beat our people;
- Withdraw the false cases against Batakrishna Swain and other activists. (FIR No 177/19)
- Stop Shamuka Beach project. Create more coastal forests with the help of local residents and give them rights over land and forests.
- Since Odisha coasts are more susceptible to cyclones, provide all families with concrete houses;
- Immediately arrest those engaged in illegal sand mining in the coast and nab their trucks and dozers.
