Public hearing on oil exploration in Hmar Hills meets cold reception

The Refinery News, 22 November 2012

http://refinerynews.com/public-hearing-on-oil-exploration-in-hmar-hills-meets-cold-reception/

Special Report by Lalramsan Hmar

After an incident at Nungba where a Public Hearing was boycotted by the villagers, the state government has taken measures so as to check any repeated incident by deploying huge numbers of army personnel, police and IRB.

One of the journalists who attended the hearing said that the way uniform personnel roamed around and asked the identity of people is like we are in the midst of military show down. Answering why there was so much security, T.T Zuola, OC of Tipaimukh Sub-Division said that they were informed that some group have planned to dismantle the bridges and tried to create disturbance they were told to be presented with his men.

Henii Paul, an IRB officer at Jiribam had said that he came to the place with 20 IRB, 15-20 Assam Rifles, 21 police and DC's security 12-15 in numbers were present at the village

today. Before the hearing, a group of journalists and activists met chairman of the Joint Action Committee, Lalawilien Hmar who is also the president of Hmar Inpui (Hmar Supreme House). During the interaction, the chairman said: "The aim of Jubilant Oil Gas Pvt. Ltd trying to explore our land that too without informing the inhabitants is unwelcome and we will fight for our rights to safeguard our land and forest from deforestation.'

The biggest question raised by Lalawilien Hmar is that the centre, government of Manipur and Jubilant Company had already signed the MoU on exploration, is there any provision so that the displaced/affected people be compensate, given place, home or even a district? JAC is planning to hold talks with Manipur government as well as the Jubilant company in this regard. The JAC also demanded the MoU signed between Manipur and Jubilant Oil Gas Pvt. Ltd be made public.

The hearing began at the stipulated time and was presided by Churanchandpur DC Ms Jacintha Lazarius. Ajay Bisen on behalf of Jubilant Oil and Gas Pvt. Ltd., Noida, made a powerpoint presentation in English about the salient features of the proposed project which was explained in Hmar language by Joseph L. Infimate. Just after the presentation, chairman of All Vangai Chief Association Enga complained that the people were not consulted for this project and objected the drilling activity and said that the people of the drilling site will consult with expert so that they can give their ideas and decision to the company.

Huoplien, Chief of Ankhasuo village said that the land belongs to the local people and they should decide the future of their land. Companies should sign MoU with each village before oil exploration and the company and state government has made contract to share revenue but without any mentioning of the share of the local people, one local villager said after the hearing.

As has stated above, only few village head attended the hearing as a sign of opposing the oil exploratory works. On asking about the company signing MOU with Govt. of Manipur without consulting the local people regarding the sharing of royalty, DC Jacintha said that the Autonomous District Council and Hill Areas Committee of the state are being communicated from the administration side about people's apprehensions regarding MOU for Production Sharing but she did not disclose to what is the sharing of the local people.

The oil company has taken all precautions to prevent any accident as per stringent norms and oil industry practices is the answer when journalist ask who will bear liability in case of accident during the drilling as there was not any mentioning in the agreement with the govt as to who will bear the liability. A Barak valley based Society of Activists for Forest Environment (SAFE) had made a statement that they are against the exploration of oil in Manipur stating that drilling may cause contamination of water bodies such as river Barak and most of the drilling site is a seismic zone.

Secretary of the society also stated that the aim of Jubilant is to drain all the wealth and resources from our land. He also asked why Jubilant was given not ONGC? He went on to add that as Jubilant is international based they will use foreign money to fuel the foreign nation by draining our wealth. It may be mentioned here that a declaration was made by 250 people of different villages of Vangai region at Ankhasuo on Nov 16 during a consultation meet.

The ongoing "oil and gas exploration undertaken by Jubilant Oil Gas Pvt. Ltd. in Hmar inhabited areas is without the knowledge and consent of the Hmar peoples and the entire secretive practice is a negation of India's own Right to Information Act, it is Declared. The declaration further stated that the MoUs signed to fragment the land and the peoples with blind adventurism and unrealistically optimistic assumptions of 'profit' and 'development' by ignoring the imposed devastation and injustice that would cause to the threatened communities and their peaceful and stable livelihood system and life-giving forest and rivers shall not be allowed to be justified.

The consultation meet also demanded immediate declaration shall be made by the Govt of India, Govt of Manipur and Jubilant oil company that the several MoUs as null, invalid and void. The Manipur govt should declare a moratorium with the ongoing exploration.

Related articles:

Public hearing for oil drill 'fails' again

Public hearing fails to resolve oil project impasse

People voice out against oil exploration in Manipur

Extinction fears haunt Manipur Hmars

ZHRF (Zomi Human Rights Foundation) opposes