

20 April 2010

To
Shri Vijai Sharma
Secretary, Government of India
Ministry of Environment & Forests
Paryavaran Bhavan
CGO Complex, Lodhi Road
New Delhi 110 003
INDIA
envisect@nic.in

Sub: Objections against the proposed 'Expansion Project' at the Sponge Iron Plant of Rashmi Ispat Limited Works, Village: Gajasimul. PS: Jhargram, District: West Midnapore, West Bengal.

Respected Sir

We would like to bring to your kind notice that M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited Works, Village: Gajasimul. PS: Jhargram, District: West Midnapore, West Bengal, has been, since inception, showing flagrant disregard for the law causing devastating effects on the environment and on the life and livelihood of the nearby residential inhabitants.

Despite complaints no effective measures have been taken against them and paradoxically the Rashmi Ispat Limited has applied for expansion of its Works, and on 6 April 2010 the public hearing related to EIA was held by the WBPCB at the Midnapore Collectorate premise.

On 7 April 2010 representatives from Nagarik Mancha along with the aggrieved villagers from Gajasimul and adjoining villages were invited to the WBPCB Office for a discussion on the above matter at which the Chairman, Member Secretary, Senior Environmental Engineer, Senior Law Officer and many other senior officials of WBPCB were present. Nagarik Mancha (an independent autonomous citizens' initiative, also acting as a social action and solidarity group) categorically specified its objections which we now submit below for your kind perusal:

1. SITING GUIDELINE

It has been specifically mentioned in the 'Siting Guideline for Sponge Iron Plants' (section 7.11) of the 'Comprehensive Industry Document on Sponge Iron Industry' [Comprehensive Industry Documents Series: COI N DS/66/2007] published by Central Pollution Control Board that –

“Siting of new sponge iron plants shall be as per respective State Pollution Control Board guidelines. However the following aspects shall also be considered:”

“(a) Residential habitation (residential localities / village) and ecologically and/or otherwise sensitive areas: A minimum distance of at least 1000m (1.0 km) to be maintained.”

Violation 1: The densely populated main Gajasimul village is within 800m from M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited Works, while small clusters of huts are located much nearer. Gajasimul Junior Basic School is situated about 350m away while the KCM School about 250m away from this sponge iron unit. A large water body used as the village commons is not even a 100m away. A huge mango orchard, with a few hundred trees is located within 100-200m from the polluting unit. Similarly some of the massive bamboo orchards is within 500m.

(c) The location of Sponge Iron Plant should be at least 500 m away from National Highway and State Highway.

Violation 2: The National Highway 6, commonly referred to as NH 6 or the G E Road (Great Eastern Road), is a busy 1949km long national highway running from Kolkata and passing through Jharkhand, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The NH 6 is within 150-200m from this Sponge Iron Unit, contrary to the CPCB guideline.

(d) Radial distance between two Sponge Iron Plants should be 5 km for plants having capacity 1000 TPD or more.

Violation 3: The distances between sponge iron units at Gajasimul, Mohunpur and Jitushole located at the three corners of a triangle are less than 5 km from each other aerially.

It is evident from above that on three counts M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited has violated the 'Siting Guideline for Sponge Iron Plants' as laid down by the Central Pollution Control Board.

2. WATER EXTRACTION

Gajasimul is located in a drought prone area. There is no river in the vicinity and M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited already pumps out millions of tonnes of groundwater everyday. This is having a disastrous effect on the ground water level which is receding fast. Excavated wells in adjoining villages are running dry for larger number of months and the small ponds/water bodies are similarly dry and parched for longer periods. Water scarcity has hit the villagers hard.

The expansion project at M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited states that an additional 2508 kilolitres of water per day (KLD) will be required which they propose to draw from existing bore wells.

It is strongly felt that without systematic hydro-geological surveys followed by impact assessment by the Central Ground Water Board, EZ (or Central Ground Water Authority) further withdrawal of ground water from a drought prone region should not be allowed.

3. 'SYMPTOMS' OF POLLUTION

Scientists and engineers from government bodies can very well 'inspect' inside the factory and find everything in order! However the the end products of industrial pollution are plainly evident in the adjoining areas and in the life and livelihood of the inhabitants. It is a common practise of polluters to take 'necessary' steps when they get advance news about any fact finding team. Conversely it is also the common practice of some fact finding teams to look for other 'symptoms' even when the plant has been shut down temporarily.

Such 'symptoms' of pollution is evident all around the sponge iron factory. Untreated liquid waste from Rashmi Ispat at Gajashimul can be found coming out from a point under the boundary wall. The nauseating black discharge flows freely on to the adjoining fields and then into the large adjacent water body on which thousands of villagers depend.

Owing to pollution caused by sponge iron unit, the vegetation, water bodies, homestead, agricultural fields, human population, birds, animals of the locality are being devastated and it is evident to those who want to see. In Gajashimul, smoke, gas, stone / coal dust and liquid effluent from the sponge iron unit is spreading pollutants like nickel, chromium, cadmium, arsenic and manganese etc.

We reiterate that instead of protecting the land, water, air and the lives and livelihood of thousands of inhabitants from the clutches of pollution of an evil kind, it is a paradox that the polluter is being allowed to legitimise its misdeeds by allowing them to move a 'expansion project' which is bound to create greater misery and environmental degradation.

4. SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE AFFECTED INHABITANTS

M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited with its sponge iron unit located at Gajasimul is wreaking havoc with the life and livelihood of nearly fifteen thousand villagers in adjoining villages including indigenous population who are scheduled as 'primitive tribe group'. There are three 'Lodha-shabar' villages in

the vicinity whose inhabitants have been economically affected.

This area was renowned for its strong bamboos. About 8-10 truckload of bamboos travelled to the coal mine areas in West Bengal and Bihar everyday. These days barely 1-2 trucks roll out. The Gajasimul Ambagan (mango orchard) with hundreds of trees was a popular picnic spot besides being a source of seasonal earning. The fruits have vanished when the factory came up right next to it. Villagers don't even allow their domestic animals to graze near it. The tree trunks resemble charcoal blocks and the leaves are black. The rice mill owners are refusing to accept paddy from this area since black spots have appeared on the rice grains.

A two hundred acre water body justifies the presence of traditional fisher folks in the adjoining villages. The rewards were significant but the markets for fresh fish from this area have shrunk significantly over the last few years. The buyers know that the 'poison' from the factory is emptied into the water body. Moreover they find the fish darker in colour and different in taste. One out of ten fish have ulcers on their skin. Scores of families dependent on the daily fish crop have had their earning capacity slashed. Making things worse the villagers unable to sell the fish consume them locally paying little heed to the possible long term consequences.

We strongly believe that no one has the right to jeopardise the life and livelihood of the poor villagers and it is the onus of the government bodies to act as per the laws of the land.

In view of the above we urge you to prevent M/s Rashmi Ispat Limited from undertaking their proposed expansion project and also urge you to take suitable action against them for the devastation they are causing.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely

Naba Dutta

General Secretary

Nagarik Mancha

134 Raja Rajendra Lal Mitra Road

Room 7; Block B; First Floor

Kolkata 700085 India

Phone&Fax: +913323731921

Email: nagarikmancha@gmail.com

Copy to:

1. Prof S P Gautam, Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board, Parivesh Bhawan, CBD-cum-Office Complex, East Arjun Nagar, Delhi 110 032, INDIA ccb.cpcb@nic.in
2. Sh J S Kamyotra, Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, Parivesh Bhawan, CBD-cum-Office Complex, East Arjun Nagar, Delhi 110 032, INDIA skamyotra.cpcb@nic.in
3. Prof P N Roy, Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB), Paribesh Bhawan 10A, Block LA, Sector-III Salt Lake Kolkata 700 098 [wbpcbnnet@wbpcb.gov.in](mailto:wbpccbnnet@wbpcb.gov.in)