

*We shall give our life but not our land ,our mother: A Study of the  
farmers resistance against Reliance maha Mumbai SEZ in Raigad  
Maharastra*

There are numerous peasant resistance movements taking place across India. Several of these movements are anti displacement movements such as in Kakinada, Nandigram, Kalinganagar, POSCO (Jagatsingpur), Dadri, Goa, Mangalore, Snagrur and many others. Keeping in mind these growing pockets of peasants resistance, a study was undertaken in the Raigad district of Maharastra (MMSEZ) where also the peasantry are protesting against the proposed Reliance Industries Maha Mumbai SEZ. The proposed SEZ is spread over three Talukas of Pen, Uran and Panvel.

The main purpose of the study was to find out why the farmers are opposing the Reliance MMSEZ and for this a qualitative method of interviewing different farmers was done. The condensed form of the interviews is given for the sake of brevity and to avoid unnecessary repetitions. Apart from the affected villagers, informal discussions were held with different activists of NAPM, political party workers, NGO's etc. Four group interviews were also conducted in the villages to get the opinions from people of various age groups and economic classes; the gist of those discussions is given in the text

#### THE BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

What are SEZ's?

SEZs are free trade zones, having completely different set of administrative and taxation laws outside the purview of customs authorities. In their earlier avatar they were Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and also had similar privileges including a five year tax holiday which is now coming to an end in 2009. On the surface it does appear that the Indian political rulers have chosen to jump into setting up of SEZs, primarily to grab huge tracts of property and also extend the tax holiday for industry through the SEZ Act 2005. It is in this context that we must look finding out the reasons as to why, since the last many years has Raigad become the battleground

for an anti- displacement struggle? We can see that for the past one and half year there has been several protests against Maha Mumbai SEZ led by people of Raigad, in the 45 project affected village under the banners of MMSEZ Virodhi Sangarsh Samiti , Jagtikikaran Virodhi Kruti Samit, Peasants and Workers Party, National Alliance for People's Movement, Left Progressive and Workers Unions, Chaubis Gaon Sez Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti , Lok Sashan Andolan, Panchkosi Khar Bhumi Kheti Bachao Samiti and other concerned individuals from all over Maharashtra and the country.

#### THE RELIANCE MMSEZ PROJECT:

The project 'Maha Mumbai Special Economic Zone' (MMSEZ) is proposed to be setup in Navi Mumbai area, as an international standard business centre. The Reliance Company is to acquire about 10,000 ha of land for the MMSEZ in three phases, over a period of ten years, affecting directly 45 villages (in Uran and Pen Tehsils of Raigad district of Maharashtra), approximately about 15000 households and 1,00,000 persons.

MMSEZ would involve development of various infrastructures ranging from roads, power and water distribution networks, Industrial & commercial parks, social leisure and recreational facilities, etc. Out of the total about 10,000 ha of required lands, the project would need approximately 2126 ha of the land along the Karanja Creek, adjoining Dronagiri Node, in Navi Mumbai. The project is to affect about 45 villages and the number of people likely to be physically displaced from their houses (as their gaathan/settlement sites fall within the proposed project area) is about 1,00,000. The location of MMSEZ is approximately 6 to 8 kms from the Dronagiri Node of Navi Mumbai and about 40 kms from South Mumbai. It falls within Uran and Pen Talukas of Raigad district of Maharashtra.

A majority of the villagers are fully aware about the nature and character of the proposed project and many (including the Panchayat Members) have already written and submitted various memorandums to the government and political leaders opposing the forthcoming project at all. Except 500 acres all Further Acquisition of land has been stalled due to people's fierce resistance. There are only a handful among the affected people who are willing to negotiate and sell their land.

## SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE AREA AND AFFECTED VILLAGES:

These villages are dominated by the Agri Community (classified as the OBCs). However, some of these villages have other castes such as Koproli, Punade, Jui, Sarde, and Sangpalekhar, also have Koli and Katkari tribe population and few Scheduled Castes (SCs) population. There are people in these villages belonging to some indigenous tribal communities like the Katkari and Koli. These communities generally do not own any land. They are dependent for their livelihoods on the Sea or the forest in that area. They catch fish from the sea or collect forest produce like fuel-wood, wildfruits, honey, medicinal plants, etc., and generally exchange/barter with villagers these things for food grains. Upsetting the existing socio-economic milieu in the area/village would also affect these indigenous communities adversely.

Almost all major villages are presently connected with pucca road and telephone facilities, and all the villages have electric supply. Most villages, primary and secondary schools. For higher education villagers are dependent on nearby towns Funde, Uran, Panvel, and Pen. Due to availability of schooling facilities, literacy rate in these villages is higher than the average literacy rate for the state (Maharashtra), and most of the youth are educated upto secondary and higher secondary levels. However, due to lack of technical education facilities, their skill levels are of general nature, which may not be very suitable for jobs in the Project. Most villages have health care sub-centres and almost all the villages have private doctors but they, in general, are quacks with the primary health centre at the Taluka head quarters. Except the villages immediately on the sea shore, all villages are connected with piped water supply. Ponds are generally used for fishing and washing of cloth or for other religious rituals.

As a part of rich community life, almost all the villages have Mahila Mandals, youth clubs, and Natya Mandals. However, scope of activities of Mahila Mandals and youth clubs are limited only to organizing a few religious festivals or games. In a few villages Mahila Mandals own tempo, auto-rickshaw, and utensils which they let out to the villagers for some income.

There are many real-estate touts and agents operating in the area, and most of them are buying land with the hope of selling it back to the Project at higher rates. Other than that, Reliance has

been recruiting some people to work as promoters in convincing people to sell their land, it has also been using muscle power and extra constitutional means such as filing of false registry cases to forcibly evict the people from their land holdings. The large number of sharecroppers and landless peasantry, fisherfolk will naturally exclude a large number of the affected people from any form of compensation or traditional rights to their traditional livelihood. Those above 40 years, especially the women, will be most vulnerable due to the loss of their traditional occupation. These are the people who generally carry out traditional occupations and may face problems in learning and adopting new occupations in the changed scenario.

The villages and surrounding townships are reasonably well developed with wide and diversified self-employment opportunities. Many of the self-employed already have easy term credit facilities for poultry farm, dairy development, horticulture, transportation, communication, food and beverages, machine-works and repairs, computer typing, photocopying, etc. There are a large number of families in these villages who are involved in fishing and sand raising from the sea. Despite salinity and lack of development of irrigation, agriculture is an economic and profitable occupation in the area. These villages, supply fish to Mumbai and other nearby towns, other than export of several exotic varieties. The average earning from fishing ranges from Rs.300-400 per person per day. Where fishing in the area is generally done for self consumption, sand raising brings some cash to the families. On an average, the per capita earning from sand raising ranges between Rs.150 to 200 per day. The villagers are, afraid that even if the project comes and development of the area takes place, they may be bypassed of the benefits of the development because of the lack of technical knowledge and the PAPs which the newly emerging economy would need. That is why they refuse the demand for compensation for land and other assets, and are skeptical that any permanent employment will be provided to the PAPs. Therefore, they know that since training for the new kind of jobs has not been started they will be disqualified for the jobs on the basis of lacked skills.

The area already has a high potential for enhancing people's livelihoods and income, as it is located on the periphery of Navi Mumbai and the JNPT. But despite many industrial and commercial establishments which have come up over the years, no real advantage has percolated

to the people in the surrounding vicinity. These areas have the sea, a high density of ponds, good agricultural land and mangrove forests for fuel wood all of which weigh the argument in favour of the general mood of the people to resist their forced

### The History of the Resistance

Raigad in Maharashtra is probably one of the few districts in India that is being flooded by companies for setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). In Raigad district itself about eleven SEZ projects have been proposed, spread over almost 50,000 acres of land. This has been without taking into account that most of this land is being used by local communities for farming, salt production, grazing and many other purposes. Villages in the Pen and Uran Taluka have been opposing this project since last year, when the land acquisition notices were served. Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) was proposing to acquire about 14,000 hectares of land for the project. Most of this land is currently under agriculture or other uses by residents, mostly belonging to the Agri and Katkari tribes and Koli community. While the government's estimate of directly affected persons is 50,000 farmers, one can surely estimate that at least more than 4 lakh people will be directly or indirectly affected. We can trace the history of the movement through this summary of events that have taken place since the time the affected villagers came to know about the proposed MMSEZ.

People have organised themselves in the 45 project affected village under various banners such as MMSEZ Virodhi Sangarsh Samiti , Jagtikikaran Virodhi Kruti Samit, Peasants and Workers Party, National Alliance for People's Movement, Left Progressive and Workers Unions, Chaubis Gaon Sez Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti,, Lok Sashan Andolan, Panchkosi Khar Bhumi Kheti Bachao Samiti with support from other concerned individuals from all over Maharashtra and the country.

According to Vilas Sonewane: After hearing about the proposed MMSEZ the Lok Sashan Andolan with Justice Sawant and various revolutionary left parties activists went and conducted meetings in the entire 45 vilages of Uran, Pen and Panvel Taluka. Seeing the anger and

resentment of the people against the proposed MMSEZ these groups decided to organise under the banner of the Maha Mumbai SEZ Virodhi Shetkari Sangharsh Samiti.

Kiran Mhatre (Malegarhvadi) used to run self help groups in 12 villages, when they first heard about the MMSEZ, on Feb 20, 2006 they held a meeting in one of the villages. Three hundred people gathered and formed Panchkosi Khar Bhumi Kheti Bachao Samiti. They had an all party meeting on April 15, 2006 where Mohan Patil of Peasants and Workers Party gave his support to the struggle and they decided to oppose the MMSEZ. A memorandum was prepared and presented to the Collector and Thesildar. The Peasants and Workers Party fought the Zilla Parishad elections in 2006 and won 42 out of the 61 seats, Nilima Patil was elected as the Chairperson of the Zilla Parishad. After elections the ZP passed a resolution totally opposing the MMSEZ. Some NGOs also participated in the struggle against the MMSEZ.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006 in a rasta roko at Raigad the leader of the Peasants Workers' Party and Jagtikikaran Virodhi Kruti Samiti was promised that the matter would be discussed at the Cabinet Meeting.

On 9th June 2006 the Maharashtra government issued section 4 (1) land acquisition notices to farmers of 45 villages of Pen, Uran and Penvel taluks of Raigad district government was supposed to issue the next notice within a year otherwise notice period will lapse, but government could not issue notices within that time. This year government issued notification on 19th, i.e., offer the period of one year was over it seems that 'government is playing a game against the farmers,' the farmers said.

The Maha Mumbai SEZ Virodhi Shetkari Sangharsh Samiti burnt the land acquisition notification on 21st June 2007, in front of the Special Land Acquisition Office at Pen in Raigad district. Approximately one thousand farmers participated in the agitation. The protest programme was supported by Peasants and Workers Party, Anti Special Economic Zone Committee of 24 Villages, Anti- Globalisation Forum, Maharashtra and other people's organisations. They expressed their strong opposition and feelings during this agitation. Aim of

this agitation was to reject and express disapproval of government resolution, to make an appeal to the state government for stopping land acquisition process at the earliest. it also appealed farmers to strengthen local struggle non-violently. The protesters submitted their demands to government officer during the programme.

On July 21<sup>st</sup> 2006 PKBKBS held a rally in front of the Pen Thesil and submitted a memorandum to the Thesildar, meanwhile objections were collected under Sec 4 of the Land Acquisition Act from each household and given to the Tehsildar, Pen. From August 10 to 15 2006 Sarvahara Jan Andolan held street plays in the Panchkosi and Pen areas creating awareness about the MMSEZ.

On September 21, 2006, Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M) went for a rally in Belapur (Navi Mumbai) where around 50,000 people gathered. Yechury gave an assurance that they would oppose the MMSEZ tooth and nail and if necessary also withdraw support from the UPA government. Jayant Patil and Vivek Patil also spoke at the rally.

On October 6, 2006, activists from the Peasants and Workers Party spoke in the rally against the MMSEZ.

Later in October, 2006 NAPM activists and Medha Patkar also toured the area and held a rally in front of the Pune Collector's office. Leaders from Peasants and Workers Party, CPI(M) also spoke at the rally.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006 a day long dharna was held at Jantar Mantar by the All India Kisan Sabha on the Raigarh issue. They went in delegations to meet Somnath Chatterjee and Sitaram Yechury to discuss the MMSEZ issue.

On December 2006 two thousand people came to Delhi and had a dharna at Jantar Mantar and also met the left party leaders.

On 12<sup>th</sup>, December in Nagpur a people's delegation representing the Jagtikarn Virodhi Kruti Samiti met to Mr.Vilasrao Deshmukh-Chief Minister and Mr. Patangrao Kadam- Rehabilitatin

Minister during the Winter Session of the Assembly and they had promised that irrigated and agricultural lands will not be acquired for the SEZ projects, government will not acquire lands for the companies and will stop the land acquisition process immediately. Despite that announcement no actions were taken to withdraw the project or acquisition notices. Subsequently the 24 Village SEZ Virodhi Sangarsh Samiti organised a relay hunger strike from February 14, to March 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 at the Pen tahsil headquarters.

On Jan 3, 2007, under the leadership of Prof. N.D.Patil (Gen Secy. of the Peasants and Workers Party) a jail bhara andolan was launched at Pen and around 2000 people courted arrest.

From February 5 to March 2007 there was a relay hunger strike in front of the Thesil office at Pen. During the hunger strike the local Cong (I) MLA celebrated the birthday of A.R.Antulay, (Ex CM of Maharashtra) with crores of rupees. Antulay flew in from Delhi only to celebrate his birthday and this really angered the people on March 22<sup>nd</sup> night huge posters of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Stalin were put up by the Maha Mumbai Sez Virodhi Sangram Samiti all over the Pen Thesil challenging the government and Reliance. The police tore down most of the posters. On March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007, the day of Bhagat Singh's martyrdom a massive road block was organised at Valkhal on the NH 17 (Mumbai – Goa) around 10,000 people were present. During this road blockade the budget session of the assembly was on and Jayant Patil (MLA P& WP) raised the issue about the MMSEZ. The CM assured the assembly that the land will not be forcibly acquired from the farmers. This boosted the morale of the movement and on March 30<sup>th</sup> a massive gherao of the Distt Collectorate took place at Alibagh.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 at the call of Anti Globalisation Front a massive rally was organised in Azad Maidan, Mumbai. About 50,000 people came for the rally.

During this period the Select Committee of the Parliament on SEZs, Chairman Kashi Ram Rana came to visit Raigarh SEZ area. But instead of meeting the affected people, at the MIDC office he met the Reliance officials and the Maharashtra bureaucracy. Outside the MIDC office more

than 1000 farmers were waiting to meet him but he refused. This angered the people and they forced their way inside. In the tussle the police framed criminal charges and arrested 5 people. When Kashi Ram Rana insisted on visiting the SEZ area, the government instead of taking him to the SEZ area, took him to a non SEZ village, Khalapur in Raigarh. This really angered the people and they gheraoed the panchayat samiti office where he was having the meeting and so he was forced to meet Prof. N.D.Patil and other activists. They submitted their written objections to the MMSEZ to Kashi Ram Rana and in their memorandum they wrote that they want the entire project to be completely scrapped.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 the CM had given a written appointment to Prof. N.D.Patil and other activists, but when they went to the secretariat he refused to meet them. Then the government issued the Sec 6 of The Land Acquisition Act, despite earlier assurances that no land will be forcibly acquired. This created large scale resentment in the affected villages.

On Jun 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 Chaubis Gaon Sez Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti took a decision to create a mass awareness on this issue. On June 20<sup>th</sup> more than 3000 people sat in silent protest in front of the Land Acquisition Office. Since the admionstration did not respond to this dharna, in the evening the activists met again and decided to have a rally the next day itself. On 21<sup>st</sup> June more than 10,000 people gathered in front of Pen Anti-land acquisition office and the Anti-SEZ committee burnt the land acquisition notification. The protest was organized under the leadership of Mr. N.D Patil, Mr. Mohan Patil, Mr. Manav Kamble, Ms. Ulka Mahajan, Ms. Vaishali Patil, Ms. Surekha Dalvi, Mr. Ganesh Thakur, Mr. Dhariyasheel Patil and local anti land acquisition committee members.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 the Chaubis Gaon Sez Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti activists met and decided to have a fast unto death for withdrawal of the Sec 6 notice. They conducted meetings in the villages for names of people who would sit on the fast. 17 people sat on the hunger strike from July 17 to 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in front of the Thesil office at Pen. Their demands were that the land acquisition notices served in the case of the Maha Mumbai case be immediately withdrawn and 22 villages of the Pen region falling in the Hetavne Kal Prakalp Pariyojana be given irrigation schemes from the Hetavne dam as promised to them to improve the agriculture economy. The

SEZ Act 2005 has to be scrapped to protect the interests of farmers and poor people losing their resources at the hands of the elites. Up to the five days government had not paid attention towards the people then collector of Raigad visited to the people and asked to stop the strike. During her visit she promised that their demands will be conveyed to the government. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July More than four thousand people and their organizations did a huge protest at Aazad Maidan in Mumbai. They pressurized and negotiated with government on the issues of withdrawal of 22 villages from Maha Mumbai SEZ. Eventually on 24<sup>th</sup> July Mr. R.R. Patil and Mr. Patangrao Kadam gave promises to exclude these villages, then protesters stopped indefinite hunger strike on 24<sup>th</sup> evening.

Meanwhile on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2007 at the call of Maha Mumbai SEZ Virodhi Shetkari Sangharsh Samiti organised a massive rally at Konkan Bhawan, Navi Mumbai. Around 40,000 angry farmers participated despite heavy rains.

## Voices of the People and their Perspective:

### Interviews in Pen Taluka

#### Narwelbedi vill (pop 3000)

Ravinder Tukaram Patil an agricultural labourer, does not believe in the government promises for rehabilitation, he makes enough from his land and fishing and he is contented with what he has.

#### Benavili vill (pop 800)

Dr. Ashirwad Mukul, he is a practicing doctor in the village and he makes roughly Rs.2000 per day, the SEZ will completely distort the local culture and no one will get employment because the people are not trained enough to get jobs in high tech industry – whereas the village is fairly self sufficient.

Group meeting on Aug 7, 2006 of almost 65 persons; the basic points discussed were that they felt none of them had any stake in the SEZ since none of them have any technical qualification to do any permanent job, most of us are sharecroppers, artisans and fisherfolk, so they are also outside the scope for any compensation. This is a big insecurity for them and neither has Ambani nor the government given any assurance on this matter. They are also worried about the fact that if they are forcibly evicted where will go, and how they will be resettled. They have seen what happened to those from the neighbouring 95 villages for creation of Navi Mumbai; people could not handle the compensation money and more than 95% of these farmers are homeless and stay in slums, while all the flats and apartments are owned by others. There is also no regular employment. Most of the evictees are street vendors.

According to the group they are almost self sufficient because of the fishing and rice cultivation and mangrove forests, they do not want to undergo the same travails as those from Navi Mumbai.

#### Kalsre vill (pop 2000)

Suryakant is a farmer and he owns one and a half acre of land. He says that the Reliance company trapped him and took about  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre of land while paying him only three lakhs. Much

later he learnt that that after that particular land which he sold is developed, it will sell for even up to Rs. 4 crore per acre.

Desh Mhatre owns six acres of land and he is not willing to give up the land or take cash compensation. He is willing to resist to the end. He mentioned that till August, 2007 about 38 agitation programmes have been done against the SEZ.

Vashi vill (pop 5000)

Almost 92% are farmers. Agri (OBC) 90% and Kohli (10%) it has two rice mills which employ about 400 regular workers and about 500 bullock carts who take the rice to the mill every. Most of the rice is grown locally. It has a goldsmith, barbers, blacksmith, 12 tailor shops, 20 shops, 8 family of butchers, 167 fishing ponds of which 16 are large ponds. Local transport: there are 7 six seater tempos. Around 40 people work in the salt pan.

Prakash Mhatre is a farmer; according to him, the government did not inform or consult with the Gram Panchayat before signing the MOU for the MMSEZ. When the villagers got to know about the MOU they went to the gram sabha and convened a corum of the villagers and the Gram Sabha even passed a formal resolution rejecting the SEZ. When this resolution was taken to the Collector, he/she refused to acknowledge the resolution. Till date no formal notice as per the Land Acquisition Act has been served before that Gram Panchayat.

Shri Viraj Madhukar: We are totally self sufficient and this project is anti national which will drive them into destitution and unemployment. The government has not given them any concrete rehabilitation plans.

Burze (pop 2000)

100% are land owners and 90% literate people involved in fishing 25% earning about Rs. 300 per day and 10% in salt pan Industry earning a minimum of Rs.125 per day, there are about 100 government servants of which 50 are teachers and 35 are in the police.

Gyandev Mhatre is a teacher and his claim is that since SEZ's are high tech industries there will be no employment for the villagers, ironically there is also a dam coming up called Hetwane which will irrigate 24 villages which are going in to the MMSEZ. He opposes cash compensation because it will have a very bad impact on the youth since he has seen the adverse effects where young people have wasted all their compensation money on dance bars etc.

According to him only the Mumbai elites and the politicians will benefit from this SEZ. His village produces vegetables, milk, poultry and the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and the Nippon Steel Co. is within 10 km. Both these provide a good market for the village produce whereas neither have been important sources of employment for the villagers.

The Nippon Steel Factory has 2000 regular workers but not even 10% are local people. The Johnson Tiles factory has 500 workers but less than 10% from the local area. The remaining people employed are casual unskilled labor. The Rashtriya Chemical Fertilizers factory at Alibaug has 7000 employees but virtually no employment for the local people.

Vadav vill (pop 1200)

It has 20 grocery shops, one restaurant, one medical shop and around 60 six seater tempos. Balaji Hiravan Mhatre goes for fishing, he owns one small boat and goes fishing earning Rs 500 per day. Prawns fetch international prices Rs 200 to 300 while the local price is Rs 150, he is afraid that if the SEZ comes up they will lose their livelihood. In the same village Jayant Mhatre owns 3 boats employs 4 people while each takes a share of Rs 400 per day. Malegarhwadi is a hamlet and Bharat Mhatre is a tailor and he opposes the SEZ. Parvin Mhatre owns a six seater tempo and supports 8 people in the family, earning about Rs. 250 per day. He also opposes the SEZ.

Rajan Jhemse is one of the main activists in the village and he filed a RTI and managed to get the information that this area has been shown as non-irrigated area while in actual fact the entire 24 villages of Pen Taluka comes under the Hetwane command area. But the Block Agriculture Officer and the Patwari have filed false reports with the government stating that the land is infertile and non irrigated. In fact the Hetwane dam Authorities had objected to the District Collector that this area comes under the command area of the dam and should not be acquired for industrial or commercial purposes. Also this area has been declared as a “Green Area” of the Western Ghats, by the Maharashtra government and therefore should be excluded from industrial development. Most of the affected villages in Uran and Pen Taluka are near the sea shore and also come under the Coastal Regulatory Zone.

He also opposes the SEZ and feels that if the villages are uprooted they will lose his livelihood and social network. He is also very angry with the SEZ project and he insists that guns cannot stop the agitation and he is willing to give up his life for this cause. He has been to jail and has also protested in Delhi, he has met Somnath Chatterjee, Sitaram Yechury and twice he has met

Vilas Rao Deshmukh. However, according to him all these leaders do a lot of double talk causing him to lose faith in the established political parties and in turn rest his trust only on people's resistance which can be the sole means of stopping the SEZ.

Kasu Tai she has gone to all the anti SEZ rallies and has also been arrested in September 2006. She knows that it is the women and children who face the harsh brunt of forced displacement. She feels that land provides a livelihood for generations while cash is easily frittered away in a short period. She is also determined to fight against the SEZ to the bitter end.

Vasant Thakur owns 50 acres and most of his land has been given to sharecroppers, which is also the case with most landowners. Almost all Sharecroppers are semi literate- their only livelihood is through sharecropping and once the SEZ comes there is no possibility of getting any employment and since they are not landowners they will also not get any compensation- losing both ways.

Lakole village (pop 1000)

Around 400 house holds own agriculture land around within 150 hectares of total land.

Tura Mhatre owns 2 acres but supports 11 members of his family from this land and additional income comes from fishing which also provides fish for his home and surplus for cash. He opposes this SEZ because he knows that there is no alternative which can provide him such a secure means of livelihood such as land and fishing.

Bhal village (pop 1600)

Almost everyone in the village is a farmer with fishing as a secondary occupation. The village has 10 shops.

Arun Mhatre he has one acre of land and also does fishing. He maintains a 6 member family and does not want to give up his land, neither does he want to be employed in the SEZ. He is an active member in the movement and has also been jailed several times in the movement.


Bitthalvadi, is a hamlet of Bhal. Prabhakar Mhatre owns only half acre of land but goes for fishing and earns up to Rs.500 per day and he says he is very comfortable with that. The amount of rice he gets from his half acre land, sees him through 8 months. There is also a lot of mangrove forest which also provides them fuel wood, so his need to buy things from the market

are very limited. Once he is uprooted he will be completely dependent on the market, but with no secure means of livelihood.


Kanoba village (pop 700)

Tulsidas Mhatre he owns only half acre land but that gives him 10 qt of rice and he is also a share cropper just as half the other villagers. He earns extra cash from fishing and he has courted arrest several times and is an active member in the anti SEZ movement.

Vadav Village (pop 5000)

Savitri Mhatre works as a farm labourer and share cropper. Even though she is landless, but as a share cropper she has a high stake in the village community. She also does occasional fishing (fifty percent of the villagers are involved in fishing) and she has attended all the protest programmes and is willing to give a tough fight even willing to die. She went for the gherao of the tehsildar at Pen on 21<sup>st</sup> where around 6000 thousand people were there they were arrested and sent to jail for ten days a year ago police was sent to every village to terrorize but they n't cowed down

Chandras Mhatre owns half an acre of land six members in family with one brother working as a government servant. His mother goes for fishing and he came to know about the SEZ when Justice Sawant and Vilas Sonwane came to the village and held a meeting explaining the proposed SEZ.

A group meeting of about fifteen men and women discussed various issues such as the experiences of those who were compensated for the CIDCO acquisition and how all their money was wasted in useless expenditure. They also talked about the agents employed by Reliance to buy land at 10% commission. Not one among them believes that there will be any manufacturing in these SEZs but only real estate development for the Mumbai elite and NRIs. They see no future in the SEZ. They also discussed the situation in Vidharba where there is so much land and yet farmers are committing suicide  while the government does nothing for the affected people. Conversely the same government while making all the right noises about Vidharbha and protecting the rights and livelihoods of the farmers there is forcing an SEZ on this extremely

fertile area of Konkan. They mentioned that this regions has never never experienced even a drought in living memory.


Deev (pop 2000)


Anant Gaikwad is a barber in the village, according to him the SEZ will create a hell and make them loose their livelihood, the community will get dispersed causing insecurity and loss of cultural moorings

Ramkrishna Mhatre a farmer, owns two and half acres of land which supports a family of ten. He totally opposes cash compensation and knows that money will not last long while the land will feed generations. Taking from the past experiences of industrialization in that area, he knows how compensation money was largely spent in the dance bars

Deev also has two large gram panchayat fishing ponds each of which are auctioned for around one lakh rupees and they also know that the person who takes in the auction makes three times the amount.

Avinash Mhatre, the Panchayat has made a resolution opposing the SEZ and they have written to the Tehsildar about this. But the Tehsildar has made a false report that this entire region is barren and not a blade of grass grows there, whereas the village is rich with rice fields, salt pans and aqua culture.

Kusum Bai Thakur retired teacher village Deev owns 4 acres of land which supports ten members. In her family three of his sons are employed while two are government servants. One son is in  CL even though her sons are employed, yet she opposes the SEZ, saying that the experience of the nearby Nippon steel factory where no local youth is employed, whereas local people are only hired as contract laborers who get about fifty rupees as wages. She is also totally opposed to cash compensation and says how people had earlier spent money on dance bars

She is convinced  that Reliance is not going to build any industries, this entire SEZ is a big land scam where luxury villas and related infrastructure will be built for Bombay elites and the NRIs she feels this is a sell out the foreign MNCs who will take over the country and the sovereignty of the country will be lost she calls it re-colonization. For her the land gives permanent employment and safe guards the country's food security and sovereignty. The land of their village is very fertile and gives 20 quintals of rice per acre, once the farmers are ousted they cannot compete in the modern industrial sector for employment. Even earlier the RCF near

Alibag and Nippon steel in Vadkhal (Pen Taluka) show that people don't get employment and blow up the compensation money. She said women feel the pain of displacement and that is why the participation of women in these movements is high. She has been to all the rallies and feels women are militant and will give a stiff resistance. She also talked about how Reliance has agents in every village who are pressuring the youth in villages to give up their land. The local MLA Ramdas Patil (Cong I) is completely corrupt and he supports the SEZ and has been threatening them to give up the land. Whenever there is a peaceful agitation by the villagers the Reliance agents throw stones at the police to incite and provoke the police to use repressive measures. But she says that the villagers are ready for any kind of repression. From Feb 5 to March 5<sup>th</sup> when a hunger strike was going on in that area A.R. Antulay (Ex CM and current MP) his birthday was celebrated by the local MLA Ramdas Patil, Antulay went from Delhi to Pen but did not meet the hunger strikers.

Group meeting of Six women of different caste and age groups. All of them were strongly opposed to cash compensation because they have seen how men have wasted their compensation money from Nippon Steel etc. They have also seen the conditions of the oustees from the Koyna Dam. They don't believe the CM or Mukesh Ambani's promise for rehabilitation, the nearby Nippon Steel has not given employment to local people, especially the women; they are only given contract labor for unskilled work. In the nearby Panvel and Uran Taluka CIDCO had acquired land in the 70s and 1980s and the men had wasted all their compensation money in liquor.

#### Malegarhvadi

Dhanajay Mhatre is a retired teacher and his son Anant Mhatre is one of activists. They have 2 acres of land and get 40 qt of rice and gets Rs.5500 as pension. According to him he has seen the industrialization of that area such as the JNPT, RCF, Nippon Steel; they came people spent all their compensation money in the dance bars, it has corrupted the youth and they are no more willing to do any physical labor, they have fine houses but the Reliance SEZ will destroy the landscape and culture. This SEZ is not for any manufacturing industry but is actually a real estate scam. Luxury villas will be built for the Mumbai elite (since it is only 20 km by sea and 35 km

by road) and for NRI's, whereas the local people will become just wage slaves and domestic workers. Right now the village people have a lot of independence and self reliance which will be destroyed. This is a very prosperous area with lots of fish farms and aqua culture with exotic varieties such as Jitadas (Tiger Prawns), Pomfret, Chivana, Bangra, Mrugal, all of which fetch a rate of about Rs. 200 to 300 per kg.

#### Ghora Bandar

One of the most famous fishing villages of Maharashtra and they earn millions of rupees. 90% of the people are engaged in fishing. Ghoda Bandar has a 70 houses

Narain Patil, Sambhaji Patil, Ramesh Mhatre, Ganesh Mahtre all of them have motorized fishing boats each of which employ 7-8 people. They go out to around 40 km in the sea for seven to eight days and their weekend earnings can be up to one lakh. They catch Tiger Lobsters (up to Rs.600 per kg) , Shevri, Singhada and Simboda. The entire village is completely opposed to the SEZ since they will never get such a comfortable livelihood elsewhere. They are confident that they will win the struggle and they have no faith in mainstream political parties. The villagers have made groups so that at one time only half the villagers will go out to sea for fishing while the other half will stay back to continue the agitation.

#### Bairamkotak (pop 1000)

The whole village goes for fishing and they all own land.

N.G. Patil owns about 6 acres of land lives with a joint family of 24 members. They do rice cultivation and fishing but are comfortable with what they earn. Even if he is given 60 lakh per acre he is not going to give up the land. He has seen the cash compensation given by Nippon Steel and IPCL how this money was wasted. He is not afraid of the government and its means of oppression.

Ravindra Patil owns 4.75 acres of land his elder brother goes for fishing and earns around 400 rupees per day, that is why he is unwilling to give up his land and says that he doesn't mind spending his time in jail but will put up a fight to finish, he will not give his land for any price.

Damaji Gopal Mhatre is landless and with three other members of the family works as an agricultural labourer. The rest of the time he works as mason and also does some fishing. He opposes the SEZ and willing to put up a stiff resistance

Mantrivadi hamlet (pop around 25 house holds)

Ramdas Patil

Owns 2.25 acres of land does fishing earning around 300 to 400 rupees per day. Doesn't want to give up his land wants to fight

Shankar Vittal Mhatre is a farmer, he owns two acres and makes around Rs. 300 to 400 rupees per day from fishing has a comfortable living doesn't want to give up his land and he opposes the SEZ, since he knows that land will feed generations.

Amar Chand Mhatre is part of seven family member household and he owns two and a half acres of fish pond, he hires 13 acres of ponds earns more than seven lakh rupees per year from fish farming and he does not want the SEZ.

Kane Village

Kane has 17 boats and 4 tractors for sand mining. More than 100 families are dependant on sand mining and there are two boats for ferry service supporting two families. There are around 50 masons earning about Rs. 200 rupees per day.

Dilip Bandakar owns three acres of land, he has studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> class. He supplies sand from the Bhogawati river has taken a tractor on loan ten years ago for supplying sand. He has repaid the loan and earns around Rs 300 at the least and up to Rs. 1500 depending on the season. He buys sand for Rs. 1200 per tractor trolley and sells for Rs. 1600 per trolley inside the village and Rs. 2000 outside the village depending on the distance. He opposes the SEZ.

Prabhakar Bhoir also works as a labourer collecting sand from the Bhogawati river. he earns Rs 70 in filling one tractor trolley. He fills around five to six trolleys per day. He talked about the people in boats who dig the sand from the riverbed; the boat owner gets Rs 1200 per day the labourers digging sand make Rs 150 to 200 per day. He also opposes the SEZ

Raghnath Mhatre own one acre of land and it gives him rice for eight months then he works as a mason and earns around 80 rupees per day. He has 8 family members and gets around 15 days of work in month as mason, the other days he goes for fishing.

Narain Bhoir four family members collect rice from the village and supply to the rice mills there are five people more in the village who do the same work they make a comfortable living don't want to be displaced and the SEZ will force them out from their livelihood willing to fight until last.

Rave Village (pop 1200)

Around 80% who work as labourers, sharecroppers and fisherfolk. The fishermen make around Rs.250 per day. 100% literate village with many engineers and doctors, but no one wants the SEZ.

Pramod Patil According to him the biggest problem will be that their culture will be destroyed and the community will get dispersed. Despite being well educated the youth do not want the SEZ. There is no public interest in this project only luxury villas, five star hotels and golf courses will be built. There is no chance of local people benefiting, even for the women, at the most they will turn into domestic help for these villas. He thinks the government is insisting on this MMSEZ because it has been bought over by Reliance money- a lot of money has changed hands and greased the palms of all political parties.

Vashi Village (1000 house holds)

70% landed and 30% landless, some are government teachers, many are salt pan workers, 7 shops in the village, 10% are Kolis who make around Rs.250-400 per day since the fishing bay is nearby which is rich in fish resources. Many have shops in Pen or are doing business running small scale industries.

Janardhan Mukund Mhatre According to him the basic problem lies in the opening up of the Indian economy where the central and state government, irrespective of the political parties are working as agents of MNCs and Indian monopoly houses. There is no real development in this process of economic growth, this entire MMSEZ is a real estate scam where the government will acquire land from farmers at a very cheap price and then offer it to developers at a much higher rate. i.e The government is offering @ Rs. 10 lakh per acre, but once developed this land will be sold at Rs.35-40 crore per acre. He said that villagers read in the newspapers about the land

market in Mumbai, barely 30 km away, where the mill lands are auctions at more than Rs.100 crore per acre. This Reliance MMSEZ is one of the biggest land scams in Asia.

#### Panvel Taluka Interviews

##### Kelwane Village (pop 1100 households)

Is a fishing village and the main castes are Koli and Agri, around 30% are landless and around 70% do fishing. On an average each member makes at least Rs.300-400 per day from fishing. From the sand mining, around Rs.200-300 per day as wages.

In 1984 CIDCO had tried to acquire land in their village and in the adjoining Uran Taluka where the police had opened fire on the protestors, killing nine. Since then the mood of the people had been strongly against land acquisition.

Vishwanath Mhatre (Local NCP leader) Though the NCP is a partner in the state government he opposed the MMSEZ because it is grossly anti-people and the fact that the government has sold out to Reliance, because of this he has taken an anti party stand. According to him the argument that the SEZ will generate industry and employment is rubbish since this area is already heavily industrialized and there has been very little employment generated. When land was taken for CIDCO, no one was employed from his village. This MMSEZ will be a luxury housing colony for the super rich of Mumbai, with golf courses, airports etc, while destroying the already largely self sufficient village economy. He owns only 2 acres of land, but through farming and fishing he owns two trawlers, which generates enough livelihood for several people.

The local panchayat rejected the offer of the SEZ through a resolution passed in the gram sabha, so the company started tempting the villagers. Reliance themselves offered him Rs.10 lakh per acre for his land. His two daughters who are graduates, was offered a job of Rs. 5000 per month to motivate people to give up their land, which she refused to do.

##### Pandive Village (pop 12000)

All of the villagers own only small bits of land since their land was acquired by the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and CIDCO. From this village almost 25% are government servants and some are employed in and around factories.

Dilip Patil owns only half acre of land. Given the experience of JNPT and CIDCO no one will be given employment in the MMSEZ. The compensation from JNPT and CIDCO was wasted on dance bars and other such things. Now even if they get cash from Reliance, it would be of not much use since there is not much scope for developing a business or any such enterprise in this area. Since 20% are landless they will be excluded from this compensation in anyway.

Jui Village (pop 1500)

Mostly Agri, Karadi and Koli castes.

Around 150 people work in salt pans, 200 are fisherfolk and 20% are landless.

Dr. Subash Geerat (Monthly income about Rs.20,000) . The villagers grow chillies and other vegetables in the nearby hills and they earn a good income from this sale. He opposes the MMSEZ.

#### CONCLUSION:

Why are SEZ's being implemented despite People's Resistance?

While there have been several arguments being given for the creation of SEZs, ranging from the pressing needs of the developed nations for cheaper labour and resources to the need to increase employment, increase the GDP etc, what is often missed out is the fact that none of this can happen unless there is a political willingness to execute these SEZs. This is not to say that MNCs, the implementation of the New Economic Policies, the opening up of India to the free flow of foreign capital, and the so called regime of "liberalisation" are not the contributory factors to this ever increasing number of SEZs mushrooming all over India. There is an ever increasing crisis in the developed nations, faced with depleting natural resources, high costs of labour, increased spending on state welfare, over production and various other reasons are compelling these nations to seek captive markets and captive cheap resources in the developing nations such as India. Our political leaders have traditionally been more aligned to serving the interests of the powerful ever since the British colonial period and this is yet another extension of foreign rule done through the Indian parliament to benefit the developed nations and save their countries from the vagaries of wrong economic policies.

However, the critical point of the “willingness” to develop SEZs can be found in a large section of the large Indian landowners who have a vested interest in setting up of these SEZ’s. The fact that the bulk of India’s MPs and MLAs belong to the landed gentry and it is this section in whose hands rests the controls over the reigns of political power in India With the huge tax and duty sops, effectively subsidies, being provided to industry under the SEZ rules, the scramble for setting up SEZs is bound to increase. This mad scramble, has lead to a spiralling increase in the premium over those lands earmarked for SEZ projects. The very fact that in the future, industry will not have to pay any taxes or custom duties means that it is willing to invest in a one time higher cost in acquiring land, keeping in mind that in the long run this cost will be more than offset by the subsidies it will gain through no taxes and no custom duties. It is exactly this section of the Indian ruling elite which is greedily eying a huge windfall in marked up costs and premiums over land sale and are desperate to set up SEZs and also sell their land. It is this landed ruling elite which is using the armed might of the Indian state to force the other unwilling and not so greedy members of the peasantry to forcibly part with their land for up coming SEZ projects.

On the other side, the larger majority of the middle and marginal peasantry see this one time payment as a threat to their single, most secure form of livelihood, which is farming. Neither are they enamoured by the cash compensation being offered. These farmers know that their skills are in farming and fishing - not in managing loose cash. Numerous interviews by the affected people in Raigarh have clearly put this point across that they have seen the disastrous consequences within those families who have wasted their entire compensation money in conspicuous consumption. For the landless and the sharecroppers the issue becomes even more threatening since they will be completely excluded from the process of both compensation and also employment, while loosing their sole means of livelihood. It is the open fact of the reality of their lives which has compelled these peasants to take up resistance against these SEZ projects. It is also their determination which is forcing party workers of the ruling political parties to take a stand which is often antagonistic to the over all policies of the party itself.

With 140,000 hectares of mostly agricultural land forcibly acquired to set up only 50 of the 300 approved SEZs and with the average Indian land holding of about 1 hectare, a minimum displacement of 140,000 families –with lakhs of other agriculture dependent labourers and artisans losing their livelihoods is imminent. To boot, the landless will get no compensation. This forced mass displacement will collapse Indian agriculture already under attack by the developed nations through GM seeds and rising input costs, forcing India to become dependent for food imports from the US and Australia and Europe.

It is also ironical that industry as advocates of “liberalisation and free market economy” does not want to acquire land for its SEZs directly through the “open market”, but instead forces the state to use antiquated colonial laws such as the Land Acquisition Act coupled with brute force to compel farmers to part from their highly productive land; all in the name of "public purpose". This has turned the Indian ruling elite into mere middle men/ brokers/ property dealers.

If we record the violence and oppression that has gone into land acquisition for industry, we can clearly see that this is just the beginning. There have been brutal state excesses while attempting to forcibly acquire land at Nandigram, POSCO (Jagatsingpur) Dadri, Raigarh. In Raigad, Maharashtra, police firing was supplemented by violent and intimidating activities by local criminals appointed by Reliance to do so. Reliance, which has official control of 60,000 out of the 1,40,000 acres of land sanctioned till date in the name of SEZs, is going to emerge as the largest landlord in the country, and leaves the implications open for consideration.

Of the minimum 1000 hectare land required for developing an SEZ, only a small part will be used for “core activities” whereas the bulk is being acquired for “non productive purposes” reserved for services and residential complexes etc. to solely benefit the construction and builder lobby. It is hardly surprising that the biggest builders in the country are queuing up before the government with SEZ proposals.

Considering the mammoth sops that industry will be getting in terms of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment, 100 percent exemption from stamp duty and registration charges, customs,

service tax, income tax for five years, substantial subsidies on electricity and water, it is obvious that SEZ are a little more than another tax-dodge. Sundry tax exemptions already cost us Rs.1,58,000 crores. If the primary attraction of an SEZ are tax benefits, the investments there are definitely going to be a diversion from the domestic tariff areas. The Fiscal loss will be of about Rs.115,00 crores, without taking into account the tax loss from the profits of the developers of SEZs. Recently Posco steel plant in Orissa has been given the approval to classify itself as an SEZ despite the promoters only wanting land to set up their plant and a captive iron ore mine. When the SEZ scheme got unfurled, Posco decided there was no harm if it also got some additional tax benefits, and so applied for a SEZ, which will provide it an effective subsidy of more than 98,000 crores in the next 15 years!!

These kinds of “development goals” will render lakhs of farmers landless, destroying the livelihoods of many lakhs more; will allow the free and open exploitation of labour and cause huge chunks of resources, private and otherwise, to pass on into private hands? The continuation of this trajectory of development has already compelled people to rename SEZs to “Special Exploitation Zones”.

**Asit Das**

Research Fellow

SADED/CSDS

DA-9A,DDA Flats Munirka

New Delhi-110067

Ph-91+11+26177813