

COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)

TWENTY SEVENTH REPORT

(Presented to Lok Sabha on 22.07.2003)

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

May, 2003/Vaisakha, 1925 (Saka)

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- (iv) Action taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Fifth Report on the petition regarding protecting Powai Lake Mumbai from encroachment and maintaining the environmental balance in the area.

**TWENTY SEVENTH REPORT OF THE
COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS
(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)**

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman, Committee on Petitions, having been authorised by the Committee to present the Report on their behalf, present this Twenty-Seventh Report of the Committee on the following matters to the House:-

- (i) Representation requesting to impose ban on polluting coal mines of Western Coalfields Ltd. in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra.
- (ii) Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Seventeenth Report on representation requesting for permission to reside on Railway Land Plot No. 296, Madhabpur, Diamond Harbour, Kolkata.
- (iii) Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Seventeenth Report on representation regarding non-payment of legitimate dues of enhanced Industrial Dearness Allowance and Interim Relief to the workers of Refractory and Ceramic Units of Burn Standard Co. Ltd.
- (iv) Action Taken by the Government on the recommendations made by the Committee on Petitions (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) in their Fifth Report on petition regarding protecting Powai Lake, Mumbai from encroachment and maintaining the environmental balance in the area.

2. The Committee considered and adopted the draft Twenty-Seventh Report at their sitting held on 19th May, 2003.

3. The observations/recommendations of the Committee on the above matters have been included in the Report.

NEW DELHI;

19 May, 2003
29 Vaisakha, 1925(Saka)

BASUDEB ACHARIA
Chairman,
Committee on Petitions.

CHAPTER-I

REPRESENTATION REQUESTING TO IMPOSE BAN ON POLLUTING COAL MINES OF WESTERN COALFIELDS LTD. IN CHANDRAPUR DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA.

Shri Sudhir Mungantivar, MLA, and others of Chandrapur (Maharashtra) submitted a representation requesting to impose ban on polluting coal mines of Western Coalfields Ltd. in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra.

2. In the representation, the petitioners inter - alia submitted as follows-
“There are several coal mines of Western Coalfields Ltd. in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra including Chandrapur, Ballarpur and Vani areas. Due to these coal mines, the residents of Chandrapur District are facing very serious air pollution as well as water pollution problems and as a result of blasting the mines of Western Coalfields Ltd., the houses and articles of residents living in this area are being damaged. It creates even an earthquake like situation. Due to pollution, the residents of this district are becoming victims of various respiratory ailments and skin diseases.

Local representatives have requested the Union Coal Ministry and Environment Ministry of State Government to take action to stop the pollution but no action has been taken in this regard till date by them.’

3. The petitioners, therefore, requested to combat the pollution in Chandrapur area in order to protect the residents from the ill-effects of pollution.
4. The representation was forwarded to the Ministry of Environment and Forests for furnishing their factual comments on the points raised in the representation. In response, the Ministry of Environment and Forests. (IA

Division) vide their O.M. dated 3rd April, 2002 submitted their comments as follows:-

(i) Impact of Air and Water Pollution due to coal mining in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra

There are 29 coal mines in the area (15 – opencast and 14 – underground). Parameters for air and water are regularly monitored and reports submitted to the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board. Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM) levels in the vicinity of Chandrapur are more during winter and summer seasons. Air pollution is also felt due to

increased vehicular traffic, domestic consumption of coal and thermal power station in the area.

Water consumption of Chandrapur city is 46000 m/day. Approximately 38745 m/d of domestic effluent is generated, which flows through open gutter. No sewage treatment facility is available. The city also generates 150 MT/day of solid waste. Facilities for solid waste treatment also do not exist.

Report of the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board on environmental degradation and pollution in Chandrapur District due to coal mines indicates that an action plan has been prepared to combat environmental degradation in the region.

(ii) Blasting in coal mines causes damage to houses

Vibrations due to blasting are regularly monitored. A study on blasting vibration was conducted by the Chandrapur Engineering College. The study report indicates that vibrations were within the limits. The peak particle velocity recorded was 1.5 mm/second, which is very safe. The report suggests that if maximum charge per delay is kept within 200 kg, the ground vibration will be within the limits even for mud houses and no damage should result to property.

Further, it was observed by the Chandrapur Engineering College that cracks developed in some of the houses were due to defect in construction and not due to blasting operation. It has also been reported that the buildings and other structures belonging to the coal company lying close to the blasting site did not show any crack.

(iii) Pollution has increased the cases of respiratory and skin diseases among local people

On the direction of the Petitions Committee of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, a clinical and health survey of 3000 persons was conducted covering 6 villages on effect of pollution from the mines on their health. Findings of the survey indicate that there is no evidence to indicate that pollution from coal mines is affecting health of the people in the surrounding villages.

(iv) No action has been taken on the pollution problem complained by the local representative of the people

Mitigation measures like mobile water sprinklers, farming of roads, manual sweeping of the roads, tarpaulins covered trucks carrying coal, cladding of Coal Handling Plant (CHP), providing dust extractors to drills, green belt development etc. have been taken from time to time. An amount of Rs.2.0 crore to the State Government for widening and strengthening of the roads where traffic density is quite high was released by Western Coalfields Ltd. (WCL). An additional sum of Rs.2.0 crore is also being processed for release.”

5. After perusal of the comments furnished by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Committee took the oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministry on 9th September, 2002.

6. The Committee pointed out to the witnesses during evidence that the blasting activities conducted by the Western Coalfields Ltd. (WCL) had created vibrations which resulted in destruction of the houses of the residents of Chandrapur district in Maharashtra. To this, the representative of the Ministry of Environment and Forests clarified that:-

“The peak particle velocity recorded is 1.5 mm as against 5 mm per second which also is for Kutchha buildings, like mud huts. So, it is even less than that. The maximum charge per delay is 200 kilos. But there have been some cases where we have found it to be 960 or even 1,000 kilos. Some cracks are there but, as per the studies, they have gone into wherever the cracks may have occurred due to structural defects.. There are a lot of other buildings closer to the mine which have remained undamaged.”

7. Subsequently, in a written note the Ministry of Environment and Forests stated that there are four coalmines (all underground) within the municipal limits of Chandrapur. These are: (i) Hindustan Lalpeth, (ii) Mahakali, (iii) Chandrapur-Rayawati and (iv) Durgapur-Rayawati. According to the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB), an estimated 1,02,880 people are residing in and around Chandrapur, nearby the coalmines. The average number of blastings carried out in the mines of Chandrapur area is about 95 per month in the Opencast Mines. On an average, there is one blasting per day in each mine. On some days, no blasting is required or done. Controlled blasting techniques prescribed by the Director General Mines Safety (DGMS) are used to control vibrations caused by blasting operations. In addition, regular monitoring of blasting is undertaken and records maintained thereof, wherever blasting is done within 300 metres of the stipulated danger zone. Blasting in opencast mines is carried out with requisite delay detonators. Attempt is made that vibrations are within norms. Buildings of WCL located in the vicinity of the Coalmines have not shown any cracks. The management of WCL had been advised to restrict the charge per hole to not more than 200 kg/delay to protect Kutchha houses.

8. On the question of prevention of water and air pollution in the area, the Ministry of Environment and Forests informed in their written note that the following provisions had been made in this regard:-

- (i) Provision of mobile water sprinklers;
- (ii) Providing static water sprinklers;
- (iii) Tarring of roads;
- (iv) Manual sweeping of roads;
- (v) Covering of trucks carrying coal with tarpaulins;
- (vi) Cladding of Coal Handling Plants (CHPs);
- (vii) Providing dust extractors to drilling equipment;
- (viii) Massive plantation in and around mining complexes; and
- (ix) Construction of treatment plants for wastewater from workshop, mines, colonies, etc.

The Ministry also informed that the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) had stressed the necessity of joint efforts to be taken by the Government of Maharashtra and Western Coalfields Limited (WCL) to curb the environmental degradation and pollution in Chandrapur district, on a number of issues. These included:-

- (i) Preliminary study conducted by the Central Ground Water Board has recommended that there is a need for a comprehensive study on depletion of ground water not only adjacent to the mines but in the entire Chandrapur district;
- (ii) Based on the Interim Report submitted by Chandrapur Engineering College, WCL had been asked to adopt controlled blasting and delayed detonator technology to control the adverse impacts of blasting;
- (iii) WCL had been asked to prepare and submit a comprehensive health study;
- (iv) The Interim Report of the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur has recommended that a comprehensive study is required to be carried out on the effects of dust pollution from coal mines on crop;
- (v) It is recommended to restrict the burning of coal for domestic use; and
- (vi) In order to mitigate the air pollution from transportation of coal on roads, identification of damaged roads is being carried out by WCL and Public Works Department (PWD)

for tarring them. Provision of water sprinklers on roads and reconstruction of damaged roads is being done.

9. On the question of health hazards caused to the residents of Chandrapur area due to the polluting coalmines, the Ministry of Environment and Forests in the written note stated that a pilot health study had been conducted in two urban centers, namely Babupeth and Tukum, which were identified as critical in terms of coal mine pollution. The pilot study was carried out under the guidance of the Government Medical College, Nagpur. Sample population was selected and studied as per the statistical norms using the National Sample Survey Organisation. In Babupeth, 610 persons were examined through random sampling and in Tukum 432 were similarly examined. The percentage of population suffering from respiratory diseases/ailments as per this pilot study is given below:-

Respiratory Problems Observed under Pilot Project (Urban Area)
(Figures in %age)

Sl. No.	Type of Respiratory Problem	Brahmapuri (Control area)	Tukum	Babupeth
1.	Nasal Obstruction	2.3	3.01	2.71
2.	Rhinorrhoea	2.88	2.78	2.95
3.	Sneezing	3.45	9.26	17.87
4.	Chest Pain	20.73	23.15	26.89
5.	Cough	11.71	1.85	3.44
6.	Breathlessness	19.58	21.53	23.28

Another pilot study had been conducted in five villages adjoining the coalmines in Chandrapur area. The preliminary report of this pilot study submitted by the District Health Officer, Chandrapur, indicated that about 133 people were suffering from T.B., 82 from bronchitis and pneumonia, 387 were afflicted by skin diseases and 1016 by eye diseases. According to the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB), the District Health Officer had informed that these cases may not be attributed to pollution alone and that the effects of pollution on health need to be ascertained.

10. The Committee desired to know as to whether appropriate health authorities had been asked to examine the diseases caused due to water and air pollution. The Ministry of Environment and Forests in the written note stated that there were complaints of respiratory and skin diseases caused due to pollution from coal mines from cases referred to local hospitals and dispensaries and individual cases. A clinical and health survey of 3000 persons was carried out in order to study the effect of pollution from the mines on their health. This survey was conducted in seven villages (including two control villages), which were identified as having maximum complaints of health effects. The study by the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, Vidarbha as per orders of Collector, Chandrapur,

and funded by WCL was conducted in July, 2001. The findings were deliberated by the Government Medical College, Chandrapur, along with doctors from Government Medical College, Nagpur. According to the health study, there was no significant variation between control and target population. The Department of Environment, Government of Maharashtra also opined that the Pilot Health Study could not find any significant difference in the cases of pneumoconiosis/respiratory disorders in control and target villages. However, both the Department of Environment, Government of Maharashtra and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board have suggested that this be followed up with a comprehensive study.

11. When the Committee suggested to the witnesses during evidence that a Committee of local people should be appointed to deal with the problems created by the environmental pollution in the Chandrapur area; the representative of the Ministry of Environment and Forests stated as follows:-

“My suggestion would be, we set up one Committee at the local level, involving the public representatives, the NGOs, the technical people, the social representatives and everyone who is interested, and they should keep a watch on this. That is the only long-term solution and the permanent arrangement. Since they are the affected people, they are bound to remain alert.”

Observations/Recommendations

12. The main contentions of the petitioners are that the residents of the Chandrapur district have been facing destruction of their houses due to an earthquake like situation caused in the vicinity of the coalmines by the blasting activities of the Western Coalfields Ltd. (WCL) and that they succumb to certain health hazards due to the polluting agents emitted by the coalmines in the Chandrapur area in Maharashtra. The petitioners have, therefore, requested to protect the residents of the area from the ill-effects of the environmental pollution.

13. The Committee note that there are 29 coalmines in the Chandrapur area. Out of these, fifteen are opencast mines and fourteen are underground mines. There are four underground coalmines within the municipal limits of Chandrapur, namely, Hindustan Lalpeth; Mahakali; Chandrapur– Rayawati; and Durgapur–Rayawati. Around 1,02,880 people are residing in and around Chandrapur. The Committee also note that a pilot study was conducted under the guidance of the Government Medical College, Nagpur, which revealed that respiratory diseases and ailments had been existing among the population residing in the area. Since the Pilot Health study could not find any significant difference in the cases of pneumoconiosis/respiratory disorders in control and target villages; the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) suggested to undertake a comprehensive study in this regard. The Committee therefore, recommend that appropriate comprehensive health study should be carried out in the Chandrapur district to ascertain any possibility of health hazards caused due to pollution from the coalmines. The Committee would also like to be apprised of the outcome of such a study within two months from the presentation of the Report.

14. In regard to blasting activities in the coalmines of Western Coalfields Limited, the Committee note that controlled blasting techniques prescribed by the Director General Mines Safety are used to control vibrations caused by blasting operations. While the Committee do not doubt that efforts are being made to ensure that vibrations caused due to blasting activities are within norms, the Committee are of the firm view that the state-of-the-art blasting techniques should be used for the blasting process so as to safeguard the constructions, houses, buildings, etc. in the nearby areas of these mines.

15. The Committee have been informed that the measures taken to prevent and control air and water pollutions from the coalmines include provisions of mobile water sprinklers, static water sprinklers

and dust extractors to drilling equipment, tarring of roads, manual sweeping of roads, covering of trucks carrying coal with tarpaulins, cladding of Coal Handling Plants, massive plantation in and around mining complexes and construction of treatment plants for waste water from mines, colonies etc. The Committee have also been informed that the MPCB has stressed the necessity of joint efforts to be taken by the Government of Maharashtra and Western Coalfields Ltd., to curb the environmental degradation and pollution in the Chandrapur district. The Committee recommend that the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Government of Maharashtra, MPCB and WCL should take up a time-bound action plan to combat environmental degradation and pollution in the Chandrapur area and ensure that the area is pollution free and there are no ill effects on the health of residents of the area.

16. The Committee also recommend that local people and the NGOs should be involved in various schemes/programmes meant for pollution control in the area so as to ensure their better implementation. The Committee would like to be apprised of the steps taken in this regard within 3 months of the presentation of the Report to Parliament.