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HEADLINE: THE UGLY' SIDE OF DEVELOPMENT

BYLINE: Our Staff Reporter

BODY:

The callous and ugly side of the so called development has been brought into sharp focus by testimonies of common people from toxic hotspots of various states.

They were speaking at the seminar Environment and health, a people's campaign' organised by NGOs Greenpeace, Community Health Cell, Bangalore, and CHESS, as part of the ongoing Asian Social Forum(ASF) representing anti-globalisation voices, here on Friday.

While Pramamma's two sons with twisted limbs had to be carried to the venue, she narrated how the contaminated groundwater with the effluents from bulk drug companies in Patancheru had left her sons crippled while one son had died. Neither the Government nor the factory managements responded to their pleas for justice. V.J. Jose from Eloor from Kerala gave a vivid account of contamination of River Periyar by the nearby industrial estate which polluted the air, water and land. As many as 120 persons had died and various others were suffering from heart ailments, asthma, cancer, renal failure and nervous system abnormalities due to gas leaks. "We feel helpless".

Anjana Murthy from Dudhallapur, located in the Mysore-Bangalore industrial corridor, said environmental degradation had been rampant in the last 10 years, with the onslaught of globalisation. When people protested, a dye-making company diverted its effluents into borewells which in turn contaminated the groundwater. "We will continue our protests. Only people's movements would bring relief".

Gopal from Vellore said chemical effluents let out by hundreds of tanneries had done extensive damage to environment and health of people. Prior to 1972, the few local tanneries catering to domestic market practised herbal processing of leather. But later with the ban of tanneries in Europe, units were shifted to India. The effluents of chemical processing of leather let into the fields had rendered them barren while people suffered from skin diseases. Similar were the accounts of misery and denial of justice by Shiva from Cuddalore, Raj Mohammad from Kodaikanal. The speakers, however, said they continued the struggle with support of NGOs for justice.

Champa Devi of Bhopal, in her spirited narration of their struggle for justice for the Bhopal gas leak victims, said they had managed to keep the Bhopal tragedy alive even after 18 years to prevent many such Bhopals. "We staged protests in various places within and outside the country and achieved small victories".

Freedom fighter and eminent environmentalist, L.C. Jain, said the moving testimonies made one realise that the Mother India' was being butchered piece by piece. "It is sad to realise after 50 years of independence that leadership had turned callous criminals". The Government opened the doors for export market, killing in the process its own people, their livelihood and children. The democratically elected Governments wouldn't respond to people's woes. He said the movement for environment and health should also make electoral reforms and Information Act its agenda to get a Government that would be accountable to its people.

The global coordinator for People's Health Movement, Kasim Choudhary of Bangladesh, said the testimonies exposed the exploitative business practices. The health problems were not biomedical any longer linked as they were to social, economical and political policies of the Government. The growth-oriented development and the GDP did not take into account the negative impact on health and environment.

Noted social activist Parashuraman said ironically, state governments were competing with one another to attract investment for facilitating economic development but ignored the environment safeguards.

The NGOs, activists and the people vowed to strive to forge wider alliances to make the voices of the unheard heard at the national, regional and international level for sustainable and unexploitative development.

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