

Interviews with Phulbari people Dec 9-11

ADI
ABUL BASHAR
Elected Commissioner
Phulbari Pourashava (Municipality)
ward no. 4

Abul Bashar, Elected Commissioner, Ward no.4, Phulbari Pourashava (municipality) (No photo)

(From my note)

Asia Energy did conduct some consultation regarding a coal-mining project. However, the level of information provided by Asia Energy was not too much. Asia Energy did not explain what open pit mining is, and they did not explain negative consequences caused by the open pit mining and how to mitigate them. They did not provide us adequate information about the project and only told that the project will benefit community and country. We didn't understand what the project was all about, so, in the beginning, we didn't support the project nor were we against the project.

Gradually, concerned local people formed a discussion group, and then realized that there are questions of environmental pollution, such as ground water contamination, health hazard, water and soil pollution. Open pit mining will force us to move from our land. Land is like mother to us. We are living as a community. If we are forced to move, we will lose our memories, culture, and family relationship.

The Bangladesh government is supporting this project, so government does not listen to us, and Asia Energy does not listen to us. Local people are resisting to the project, but construction continues. Then people realized that when government and Asia Energy had no response to local people's voice, people really needed to fight against Asia Energy. Asia Energy is trying to buy local people's opinion and agreement by money and expensive goods, such as TV. Some people respond to Asia Energy because of those money and gifts, but many people became very suspicious to Asia Energy. Whatever Asia Energy did, it went against Asia Energy. That

was why we had a demonstration to show that people of Phulbari are against this project. It was a peaceful rally, but BDR (Bangladesh Rifles, border security force) provoke fire on us. That is why people of Phulbari are angry with Asia Energy. Asia Energy never contacted us after August 26 killing. There is no way Asia Energy will come in and work in Phulbari without people's agreement.



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DR. ABUL HASAN
Community Elder
West Gouripara, Phulbari

Abul Hasan Community Elder, West Gouripara, Phulbari

(From my note)

Most of the communities were not consulted. Brokers, local people hired by Asia Energy, were communicated with local people on behalf of Asia Energy. Asia Energy said that this project is good for whole country; it will increase employment, and provide us other benefits. We are worried about resettlement as well as environmental harm. We are very much worried about ground water system, since Bangladesh is a country with a diverse ground water system and we think the project will pollute ground water.



Missing since August 26, 2006

Absar Ali, 14
his dead body is missing.
There were media reports
the Absar ~~being~~ getting
treatment in hospital -

Boy missing since August 26, 2006.

Absar Ali (14), his dead body is missing. There are media reports that people saw Absar receiving treatment in hospital. (Photos are of his parents).

(From my note)

Absar Ali went to the protest with friends of his own age, since everyone went to the protest. People were just organizing a meeting and it was a peaceful rally. Absar Ali was with his friend during the rally, but when they were shot by BDR, injured Absar Ali and other injured people were taken to different hospitals by different ambulance. Since then, Absar Ali is missing. It was very chaotic situation and many people were rushed into several hospitals due to the shooting by BDR. Many injured people were in hospital and it was really difficult to find who is in which hospital. There are some witnesses that Absar Ali is seen in the Dinajpur hospital and was given an injection. Many people saw on NTV (a private TV channel) that someone was carrying his dead body. Also, there are some witnesses that who saw police taking his dead body into the Dinajpur police station. There are doubt that police hide Absar Ali's dead body. Absar Ali's parents has filed general diary (GD) in local police station in preparation of case and local administration has formed a committee to investigate missing people after August 26 killing. However, these officials who formed committee were the local government officials who are resisting the Phulbari coal mining. After a while, these local officials were replaced to some other district and investigation for missing boy has not been conducted yet.



Shayema Begum, 47 blue clothes
our children gave blood,
next time we will give
blood, whatever it costs -
we will resist Asia Energy

Shayema Begum 47

“Our children gave blood, next time we will give blood, whatever it costs, we will resist Asia Energy.”



Fatima Khutun, ✓
Mother of Osman Ali Chutnu
Injured & survived to firings on
August 26, 2006
→ we have chased away
Asia Energy once, if they
come again - we will
chase them again -

Fatima Khutun, Mother of Osman Ali Chutnu, injured and survived of killing on August 26, 2006.

"We have chased away Asia Energy once, if they come again, we will chase them again"



Md. Moklesur Rahman
Father of
(18) Tariqul Islam (shot
years killed on August 26)
current elected
Ward (2) Commissioner
at Phulbari Pourashava
South Sujapura Ward

(From my note)

Md. Moklesur Rahman, Father of Tariqul Islam (18), shot and killed on August 26, 2006.

Elected commissioner, Ward no. 2, South Sujapura, Phulbari Pourashava.

Tariqul, college student of New Degree Government College, left his house around 3:30pm on August 26th. First, he was reluctant to attend the protest, but he realized that the project would influence whole community and community is united to fight against the project. Then, he changed his mind and decided to attend the protest. First, people started rally from center of the Phulbari town and approached to Asia Energy Office. It was a peaceful protest, but once protesters reached to the bridge, then BDR started shooting people. Everything was happening on the bridge, but Tariqul was in the residential area. BDR was firing to people who are running away and people who escaped to residential areas. Since BDR did not stop shooting, people had to take shelter in the buildings in order to escape from BDR's shootings. Police are local in Phulbari, so they did not shoot people, but BDR is not local. So that is why they shoot people.

In early 2005, Asia Energy came. They communicated with local elders, elected leaders etc and conducted consultations. They didn't elaborate about environmental problems that can be caused by the project. They told us that it will be an "open pit mining", but we didn't understand what open-pit mining was. We had no idea

what kind of negative consequences this project would bring to local communities, since we don't have many mining in Bangladesh. We didn't agree nor against the project, since our knowledge was so small, but we realized that the project is coming. Then, concerned people of Phulbari formed a study group, and then they realized how destructive open pit mining could be, and also neighboring community has a coal project run by Chinese company, and people who were forced to resettle never received any compensation. Then, people realized that there is a need to fight against this project and created a movement. Asia Energy open their Information Center only after local people started to campaign against the project. Initially there was information centre. During the campaign, **in one meeting with Asia Energy, Md. Shahajahan Ali Sarkar, Chairman, Phulbari Poursava, (Mayor)** asked Asia Energy if they have permission for the project and why they are not sharing any document. He never got any reply from Asia Energy. Moreover, as an elected Commissioner of Phulbari Poursava, I was never shared any official project documents, such as environmental impact assessment, not even in English language, let alone in Bangla language.

Moham MD, Shahajahan Ali Sarkar
Phulbari Poursava
Chairman

My son is gone, but I am not blaming. The government decided if Asia Energy can conduct this project or not, so the government should take responsibilities. If Asia Energy comes again, we will say no to Asia Energy again.



Philip Murmu, one of the indigenous leaders of Bukchi Village

(From my note)

We've been living here for more than 100 years. This is our ancestor's land and we don't want to move. New place is alien to us and this coal mining does not do any good for communities or us. This project is only a capital business. Asia Energy comes to our village. When they first came, they conducted a census and came up with a resettlement plan. Then, they came to our village to talk about resettlement and employment opportunities, but not environmental impacts or project. They never asked us any consent; we never saw EIA or

any important documents never saw executive level of compensation plan. Asia Energy staff and consultants tell us what to do, what they want to ask us, but those people who come don't listen our views. We are obligated to answer question of consultants, brokers, and Asia Energy staff, but we are not allow to ask any kind of questions to them. Asia Energy did promise us that they will disseminate information, but only thing they provided us is a brochure.

On August 26, 2006, when the killing happened, we were there to protest against the project. There were many people from indigenous community as well. If Asia Energy is saying that the demonstration of August 26 was conducted by outsiders, they are not telling the truth.

We've been contacting other indigenous communities, who were evicted from their ancestral land due to the Barapukuria Coal Mine (just north of the Project area). We learned that in the project, the project owner never paid compensation. So, the way Asia Energy treating us, not hearing our story and forcing us to answer consultants' question without providing us adequate information, we think that Asia Energy would behave in same manner as the Barapukuria Coal Mine.

This issue is still sensitive issue and people are watching who is coming to our community. People always ask outsider, "Which side are you on? Us or Asia Energy?" Unless those outsiders are with the National Committee members, we are not willing to open our honest opinion and information. There is a strong hatred toward Asia Energy. I want to tell you two stories how much people hate Asia Energy. When people saw some outsider came into Phulbari, he was wearing a T-shirts said "Asia Film Festival" or something close to that. People thought that person belongs to Asia Energy, so they were furious. People surrounded him and accuse him for working with Asia Energy and almost beat him up. Then, someone realized that he is not with Asia Energy, so he was safe. There is another story that market near our community, there were two men wearing Asia Energy Uniform. Two men from indigenous community saw that uniform and beat them up. Police arrested those indigenous men, but after 2days, they were released. So, we are very much confident to fight against Asia Energy and keep watching who is coming into our community.



Syed Raihan-ur-Rashid Zami
Chemist-Pharmacist
Madhyama Pharmacy

Syed Raihan-ur-Rashid Zami, Chemist-Pharmacist

Madhyama Pharmacy, Phulbari

(from my note)

I am ordinary pharmacist and I usually do not attend political meetings. But I realized that whatever Asia Energy was doing, it is not good for Phulbari. Since then, I never missed meetings regarding Asia Energy issue. I am opposing to this project for two reasons. 1) This project will make too many refugees and 2) Asia Energy is making too much profit out of our grievance.

It is very arrogant of this company that they could buy our opinion by providing winter clothes, TV and donating many books to library. They also gave so much money to people who agreed to support Asia Energy and work for them. Since Asia Energy has thrown a lot of money around, consumption of liquor increased and many young generation of Phulbari are influenced in bad manner. There is no way that energy division officials agree to have this project, unless Asia Energy bribes them out. This project is not profiting our nation. The royalty that Bangladesh government would get from this project is only 6%, which is less than half of average royalty for international standard. I never saw one company corrupting so many officials as well as local people by spreading so much money to communities and the government.

Asia Energy gave so much money to some local people to transform them into “collaborator” or “broker” and used them for gain people’s support, but it was impossible. During the World Cup 2006, Asia Energy offered 21

inch color TVs to people. Even though few teenagers took TVs, many people of Phulbari did not take free TV. When people burned down collaborators house on August 27 (?), we saw so much money in their houses. But we didn't take that money, since Asia Energy's money is dirty money, which corrupts people's mind and unity. Asia Energy's tactic is to break community moral by giving expensive gift and corrupt people's mind. Asia Energy is trying to corrupt local people by giving out many gifts and divide community by money. For that, we do not trust Asia Energy and fight against Asia Energy.



MD. MANIK SARKER
General Secretary, Phulbari Town
Business Association

Md. Manik Sarker

General Secretary, Phulbari Town Business Association


(From my note)

What happened during August 26 and onward was an outburst of people of Phulbari not wanting to move. Middleclass people were also there, but it was poor people's uprising that they don't want to have this project for a well being of the community. Whomever saying that "August 26 demonstration was generated by outsider of Phulbari and due to confusion before the election" is a lie and they should be ashamed. This movement is not single party's movement. This is an issue-based movement. People gathered to demonstrate against the project and that is the truth.

All we want to do is to live in our own home. Even when people go out of Phulbari for bussiness, they will

come back to their own town. We have memories in our land, house, and communities. Asia Energy prepared a modern building for our resettlement place, but it is a building without our memories. We will be refugees in our expensive house.

After August 26th killing, we feel that everyday we live is an extra day in our life. Our neighbors died, it could have been one of us. We feel that we are already dead, so we have nothing to lose and we will fight a battle against Asia Energy. Asia Energy should be warned that they have nothing except for people's opposition to get from Phulbari. We will not tolerate Asia Energy's behavior in our town. Everyone should be aware that this project should be stopped.



অমর চাঁদ শুভ্র অপু
সংবাদদাতা

দৈনিক
ইত্তেফাক

প্রধান কার্যালয়
১, রানকুশ লিশন রোড, ঢাকা-১২০৩
ফোন: (সিএকিএস) ৭১২২৩৬০, ফ্যাক্স: ৭১২২৬৫১-৩
মোবাইল : ০১৭১-৪০০৯৫১, ০১১৮১২৮২০
ই-মেইল : ittefaq@bangla.net

প্রভাষক, কম্পিউটার শিক্ষা বিভাগ
শহীদ স্মৃতি আদর্শ ডিগ্রী কলেজ, ফুলবাড়ী, দিনাজপুর।
বাসা : ফুলবাড়ী বাজার, ফুলবাড়ী, দিনাজপুর।
মোবাইল : ০১৭২-৫৬৫৩২০



Amar Chand Gupta Apu, Local Reporter, The Daily Ittefaq (a leading national newspaper)

I guess you already know what happened in August 26 killing. After the incident, people were scared and they were confined in their houses. In August 27, people started to come outside of their houses, especially women.

Many women received violence from BDR, but people became very courageous that they got support from neighboring community as well.

The history between Asia Energy and people are the history of deception. Asia Energy conspires just to get coal from Phulbari in cheapest way. The company was trying to buy out many people's agreement by money, but they were not managed to buy most of people's agreement. They could not corrupt most of the poor people. But a few people with money became corrupt and supported Asia Energy. Asia Energy also tried to buy local media, but they could not buy out media as well. So, they brought in media people from outside to project better image of Asia Energy. We have a confidence in our leadership in this movement. People here has proven that people makes decision, not the government, not the political parties, nor the company.



সাইফুল ইসলাম জেবেল
১৯৭২

Saiful Islam Zewel

Convener

Tel-Gas-Khonij Sampad o

Biduyt-Bondor Rokkha Committee
Phulbari

Saiful Islam Zewel, Local Convener, Tel-Gas-Khonij Sampad o Biduyt-Bondor Rokkha Committee (Committee to protect oil, gas and other mineral resources, power sector and ports)

Demonstration of August 26 was people's expression that they don't agree the project and it was an expression of people's uprising. Local people are depending on agriculture in this region. About 70-80% of people are depending agriculture for their incomes. If the project happens in the region, many people will lose their job

and land. Land is our mother and if it is to exploit, it should profit local people, not a foreign company.