**Ponnaveli Villagers Persist in 100-Day Protest against Cement Factory and Mining Project**

Kilinochchi, November 10, 2023 - Villagers from Ponnaveli, Veravil, Valaippadu, Kiranchi, and Palavi in the Kilinochchi District marked their 100th day of protest on November 10, 2023. Over 500 individuals, including youth, women, children, farmers, and fishermen, participated in a march to vehemently oppose the construction of a cement factory and limestone mining project in Ponnaveli.

The protestors stand united against the alleged land grabbing for the construction of a massive cement factory, which is set to occupy 3000 acres of land, including vital paddy fields, pasture lands, and housing areas. Disturbingly, private companies have reportedly conducted research without consulting the villagers, resulting in the arrest of some protesters during the early stages of opposition.

The Geological Survey and Mines Bureau have come under criticism for their failure to intervene effectively. Approximately 40 deep holes have been dug for research purposes, raising concerns about the environmental impact on the region. The protesters fear that the ongoing limestone extraction could lead to increased salinity in the water, jeopardizing the livelihoods of the 1600 families dependent on the area's resources. If the project proceeds, villagers believe they may be forced to abandon their homes.

Ponnaveli serves as a critical resource hub for neighboring villages, hosting over 20,000 cows and 1000 goats that graze in the area. The region contributes significantly to the national economy through the export of coconuts, sea cucumbers, and seaweed/marine algae, earning millions of dollars. Despite their self-sufficiency, the villagers only request the reconstruction of their damaged road.

Minister Daglus Devananda had initiated road construction in July 2023, but the project was halted abruptly following protests against the cement factory. Villagers claim this action is a form of revenge, as those engaged in seaweed and sea cucumber farming now face a threat to their livelihoods, unable to obtain licenses for their activities.

Allegations point towards Tokyo Cement as the driving force behind the controversial project, driven by the abundance of limestone (calcium carbonate) in Ponnaveli. Despite persistent efforts to communicate their grievances to officials, including Minister Devananda, who oversees Kilinochchi's development, and other government representatives, the villagers have yet to receive a satisfactory response.

Determined to protect their basic needs and livelihoods, the villagers declare their commitment to continuing the protest indefinitely until their demands are acknowledged and addressed by the authorities. Their singular demand remains: Stop the mining and construction of the cement factory in Ponnaveli.

By Francis Raajan

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