

LETTERS

R E L E A S E N E P A L E S E M A O I S T S

Srimati Sushma Baidhya, wife of arrested Maoist leader of Nepal Shri Mohan Baidhya and their two daughters Chetana and Srijana met Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) and Bandimukti Committee (BMC) on 18.6.06 and 20.6.06 respectively at their offices. They requested the two organisations to help secure the release of Shri Mohan Baidhya and other political activists from Nepal who are now detained in various Indian Jails. Though exact figures are not available, it has been learnt that at least 250 political activists from Nepal were arrested during the last 3/4 years. They came to India for medical treatment or to visit relatives and friends. Though about 100 of them were subsequently released on bail, about 150 are languishing in different Jails of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Apart from Mohan Baidhya, at least fourteen other Maoist political activists from Nepal, including Rekha Subba, Baburam Rai are now detained in Siliguri Jail. Mohan Baidhya was arrested from a Siliguri Nursing Home on 28.3.2004, when he was still recuperating after an ophthalmic surgery. Earlier, APDR, BMC and other democratic voices protested against detention of Maoist and other political activists from Nepal in India, which goes against international norms. The continued detentions are more unethical and illegal because of

- (i) the current changed political situation in Nepal with the installation of the new government,
- (ii)
- (iii) understanding reached between Nepal Maoists and the present government
- (iv)
- (iii) withdrawal of cases against Maoist political activists in Nepal and their release, and also because,

- (iv) there is no real allegation of criminal activity against them in India.

In the above context, we demand :

1. Withdrawal of all the false cases against Mohan Baidhya, Rekha Subba, Baburam Rai and other Maoist political activists from Nepal, who are now detained in jails of West Bengal and other Indian states and their immediate release.
2. West Bengal Government and the Union Government immediately release a list and other details of Maoist and other political activists from Nepal detained/arrested in India.

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P U N I S H I N G T H E P A L E S T I N I A N S

Israel's illegal attacks, siege of the Gaza Strip as also continuing military operations are nothing less than the collective punishment of an entire civilian population. As such they blatantly contravene Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits 'collective penalties' and all likewise measures of intimidation.

During the period 20th May 2006 and 21st June 2006 Israel's Occupation Forces killed 30 Palestinians, including 7 children, in the Gaza Strip. Among them were 7 members of the Ghalia family who were decimated in an Israeli gun-boat attack on a Gaza beach. All the others were killed by helicopter missile and artillery fire.

The frantic international efforts to secure the release of a single Israeli soldier captured in combat in the Occupied Territories is utter hypocrisy and disgraceful double-standards. There are at least 9,800 Palestinians currently being held by the Occupation Forces in Israeli prisons. Of that number, Israel is holding 126 Palestinian women and 450 minors. The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem has confirmed that 85% of Palestinian detainees have been tortured during interrogation.

We the undersigned call for an immediate end to the degrading and inhuman treatment of Palestinian prisoners. We demand their immediate release and an end to the extrajudicial killings of civilians.

We urge the British government to honour its treaty obligation to respect and 'ensure respect' for the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

*The Palestinian Return Centre
The Muslim Association of Britain
Frinds of Al-Aqsa
Palestinian Forum in Britain
British Muslim Initiative
Islamic Human Rights Commission
Palestine Soliditary Campaign
Arab Media Watch
National Black Students' Alliance*

S I N G U R A N D T A T A C A R

The CPM-led Left Front Government is to acquire about 1,000 acres of agricultural land in village Singur for the establishment of Tata's car project. The fanners of Singur village stand to lose their livelihood even though they may get cash compensation. Some may be employed as peon or guards by the Tatas. This decision of the Government runs contrary to its pro-poor farmer stance till now. Hitherto the Government had seized lands from the rich landlords and distributed to the poor. Now, however, it plans to acquire land of the poor and hand it to the rich industrialists.

Mr D Bandopadhyaya, Former Secretary in the Ministry of Rural Development and other sensitive intellectuals have opposed this policy of the Government. They hold that 'development' should be a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. The present

policy is a 'win' for the rich industrialists only. The same question had been raised by Medha Patkar in relation to Sardar Sarovar Dam. She asked: Should the poor tribal of Narmada Valley be asked to suffer poverty and dislocation for the gains to be reaped by the rich farmers of the plains of Gujarat?

The main issue is whether a section of the people can be deprived for common good? The response of Indian tradition is loud and clear on this issue. Chanakya advises the king to "Give up one for the family, a family for the village and a village for the country." Nehru applied the same principle in depriving the Zamindars of their lands. The rights of the Zamindars were sacrificed for the common good. Their land was seized and distributed to the tillers. The Zamindar could say, "I do not want compensation. I want my land." They were deprived of this option. They got such compensation as determined by the government. The prevailing inequality will never be reduced if the rich are not forcibly deprived of their wealth.

This is precisely the principle applied by the CPI (M) Government in acquiring land for the farmers of Singur. The poor farmers have been deprived of their rights much like the rich Zamindars were deprived of their rights. It is unjust to deprive the poor for providing benefit to the rich; but not to deprive the poor for common good, including that of the poor. It must be emphasized that if the poor farmers of Singur cannot be deprived of their land for the common good, then the rich Zamindars cannot be deprived either. In both cases it is not a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

What about human rights of the affected farmers? The Human Rights dialogue asserts that rights of the individual are sacrosanct. It is claimed that protecting the individual spontaneously leads to social good. The farmers, it is contended, are deprived of their human right to livelihood and security by forcible acquisition of their land.

BJ, Tehri Garhwal, Uttaranchal