

LETTER

## POLITICAL PRISONERS

The Kashmiris, Nagas, Kamtapuris, people of Manipur, Assam, the Bodos and other communities who are demanding their right to self-determination have been dubbed as terrorists 'waging war' against the sovereignty and integrity of the Indian nation. These people are put behind bars. Many remain in the prison without even proper charge sheets for years. There are several cases of inmates belonging to a certain community, political group, nationality or region who have served their term in prison are not being released, instead, framed in other cases and lodged back in the prison.

Along with this are the arrests of thousands of Maoists from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Uttara-khand, Haryana, and other places. It is in the same regions that the people-the tribals, dalits, landless agricultural labourers, slum dwellers, small peasants, middle peasants and even the rich peasants are fighting against the violent displacement from their lives and livelihoods; against a conscious intervention of the state that would reduce them to sub humans. These people who are fighting against displacement from their land and forests, against the loot and plunder of their valuable resources are also being put behind bars. Many of them face even charges of sedition! Worse, those who come forward to defend the democratic rights of the detained and the imprisoned are also arrested and incarcerated in prisons.

It is high time that all who cherish the principles and values of a democratic society-where the right to express ones' political opinion without fear or favour, to lead a dignified existence without being mistreated, deprived, oppressed or exploited is fundamental-should raise their voice in defence of the people who are incarcerated. All these people are put behind bars due to their conviction that a better society for the greater common good is still possible in this dog eating dog world. Not only were they convinced about the need for a better world but were deeply involved in making it a possibility. One might disagree with their ideology. Yet some might have reservations about the means they resort to for the betterment of a world of miseries and wretchedness. Those who are in power might strongly disagree with their socio-political aspirations. These people, who are denied the light of the day, condemned to live a life that is lifeless within the dark walls of the prison by the powers that be, belong to a wide spectrum of political beliefs through which they dream and aspire for a better tomorrow for one and all. Yet, the fact remains that they are all working for a social cause, fighting for supreme values that would ultimately restore the human being to his/her humane self. It is this vital aspect that the authoritarian state turns a blind eye to and for which people have to stand up.

Yes, Political Prisoners are prisoners. They are the measure of the possibilities of Indian society not to say its limitations. How they are treated is the measure of humanity.

Political Prisoners are those whom the state does not want to live in a society due to their political beliefs; not because of any 'deviance' attributed to them. They should be given their rights as political prisoners irrespective of the fact that their political conviction may or may not defy the legitimacy of the status quo that the state promotes.

**Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners,**  
New Delhi