

LETTER

### **Targeting Nagarik Mancha**

PUDR is outraged at the arrest of Naba Dutta of Nagarik Mancha, an organization that has been working for over two decades, devoted to environmental and labour issues. The trumped up charges against him is yet another instance of the West Bengal state government deliberately targeting social activists, civil liberties groups, media representatives in order that truth about the actual happenings on the ground in Lalgarh area remain suppressed.

Naba Dutta along with his 3 companions; Progna Paromita Dutta Roy Chowdhury, Gautam Ghosh and Dipankar Mazumdar attended a sit in, in front of the Block Development Officer's office at Narayangarh block of West Midnapur. The programme was organized by *Lodha Shabar Vumij Kalyan Samiti*, whose patron is Mahashweta Devi. After the programme when they were returning to Kolkata they were all detained by the police.

While the driver of the vehicle and Naba Dutta's three colleagues were later released the police proceeded to arrest Naba Datta and charge him among other things under Arms Act, S 307 (attempt to murder) 120 B of IPC, pretending that he was the mastermind of the incident in Jhargram where vehicles belonging to an illegal sponge iron mill were burnt on December 18, 2009. Significantly, in the past eight months, since the incident occurred, not once did the Jhargram police summon Naba Dutta, if they indeed have evidence in their possession to link him to the crime. Naba Dutta was not in Jhargram when the incident took place. And it is the CPI(Maoist) which carried out the act of arson, which they publicly declared to be a result of state government's failure to take action against the owners of the illegal plant and its contractors. Nagarik Mancha had filed a PIL in Kolkata high court against the illegal operations of the plant.

Although the magistrate has given him bail and also implied that the case looked implausible, concerned citizens are alarmed that for West Bengal authorities filing a PIL against an illegal plant is akin to commission of a crime.

**Asish Gupta and Moushumi Basu**, Secretaries, PUDR New Delhi, 18 August, 2010