LETTER

MURDER IN JAIL

The conditions inside the prisons of West Bengal are fast moving towards those under the hated Siddhartha Sankar Ray regime of the 70s. In the recent period, a number of incidents involving attacks on Under Trial prisoners by convicts in the payroll of the jail authorities have taken place. In the year 2009, two such cases were reported one each from Howrah and Presidency jails, and one in 2010 in Dum Dum Central Jail where an under-trial prisoner was beaten to death. The year 2010 also witnessed brutal, sadistic torture being meted out to a Kashmiri under-trial prisoner in Presidency jail. The latest incident is what took place on 21st and 22nd March 2011 in the Medinipur Central Jail which the authorities call "correctional home".

As per reports after a preliminary enquiry, on 21st March 2011, Kailash Das, an under-trial prisoner was beaten to death inside Medinipur Central Jail by the convict goons serving the jail authorities. This fatal attack was led by Nabi Bakro, Babulal and Ashok along with 3-4 others. Kailash was picked up by the police on the peculiar charge of 'illegally entering' Medinipur Railway Station. Unable to pay a fine of Rs 200, he was given four days' sentence. He was due to be released from prison on that very day when he was beaten to death. Along with him, four political prisoners were also assaulted and grievously hurt. Two of them are Dilip Mahato and Sitaram Soren. When the news of the attack and death spread, the political prisoners along with other inmates started demonstrating inside the jail compound raising the following demands: (I) Judicial enquiry into the incident, (2) Punish the culprits who indulged in this criminal act of murder and (3) Compensation to the members of the bereaved family.

On 22nd March 2011, political and other prisoners started a day's token hunger strike against the murder and attacks on prisoners, corruption inside the prison, negligence in medical treatment etc. This decision of a hunger strike was declared earlier. On that day, when nearly 300 prisoners were on hunger strike, the jail warders along with the convicts attacked the fasting prisoners, searched the wards and cells and under the pretext of search operations, looted the personal belongings of many prisoners. At least 18 prisoners were injured in the process, some of whose wounds are serious. Among the injured prisoners were Ainul Khan, Buddheswar Mahato and Buddhadev Mahato-arrested on the charge of having Maoist/PCAPA links. On that day, the prisoners were not given newspapers, not allowed to see the TV, and were kept confined within the cells even during daytime.

It is clear that this attack on the fasting prisoners on 22nd was organized by the jail authorities in a planned manner in order to suppress the incidence of murder the previous day. This murderous operation was reportedly led by Kalyan Pramanik, AIG, Prison and Shobhon Deen, DIG, Prison.

Further, Prasun Chatterjee and Raja Sarkhel, two of the undertrial political prisoners who were supposed to attend the court on 24 March 2011 as part of the hearings were not produced by the authorities. It is gathered from their kith and kin who were not allowed a mulaqaat (audience) with them that they are confined in their cells. Maybe they are vulnerable targets for further torture by the prison authorities.

It is crystal clear that these dastardly attacks on the people inside the prison are supplementary to the attacks the joint forces have been doing in the name of 'Operation Green Hunt' in the vast countryside of Jungle Mahal under the close scrutiny of the CPM rulers. All democratic people and organizations must raise their voice against these brutal

murderous attacks on the prisoners ostensibly under the garb maintain 'order and discipline' that reminds one of the fascist repression of the notorious Siddhartha Sankar Ray regime.

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