

NOTE

## Targeting KMSS

DAC writes :

ON 22ND JUNE 2011, AT around noon, the Assam police opened fire, killing four, on a demonstration led by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS)—a peasant organization of Assam. The protesters were demanding a halt to a massive ongoing eviction drive for more than a week around the hills in the city of Guwahati. Different tribal communities and labouring poor of the city have been living on these hills for over many decades and many of them are clearly entitled to pieces of land based on the 'Forest Regulation (Rights) Act' and other provisions of law. KMSS has been demanding a thorough survey to be undertaken by concerned Government agencies, of not just hills but of the entire city and 'notify' all lands according to law, and also hold mass consultations and public hearings before any eviction is undertaken by the State agencies.

However, the Government of Assam has ignored all legal rules and procedures. And over the last few days the city has witnessed an unprecedented 'emergency' like situation with thousands of people being rendered homeless due to the frenzied eviction drive.

It is worth mentioning here that in recent times the hills of the city are also becoming sites for huge land-grabbing by construction lobby and their Mafia associates. There are enough indications to suggest that the recent eviction drive was perhaps meant to clear the land of the poor so that it can be handed over to these Mafiosi. It is very clear that talks about 'illegal encroachment of land by the labouring poor in the hills and its effect on ecology' is nothing but a sham.

Rather than addressing the demands of adhering to proper regulations, procedures and the rights of the people; on 22nd June when more than 10,000 people gathered near the State Secretariat to press for their demands, Deputy Commissioner refused to meet the protesters. Soon the police started lobbing Tear-Gas shells and resorted to a baton charge. In the milieu, many people got injured and started running for cover. Police then resorted to firing which killed four people, including one minor. More than 50 people were seriously injured.

This unprovoked aggression, agitated a section of the protesters who retaliated by pelting stones, and grabbing whatsoever they could lay their hands on, including twigs and branches of tree. And in the ensuing scuffle some policemen were also injured and hospitalized; a few Government vehicles were also set on fire.

However, a section of the mainstream media in Assam has been trying to harp on the singular fact that few policemen were injured and few government vehicles were burnt down, to present a distorted picture that the State Police forces are holier than thou and that the protesters are to be blamed for the casualties, as if the protesters pre-planned the pitched battles that were fought between the Government Forces and the protesters.

Instead of demanding accountability from the administration for consciously creating such a tense and murderous situation; certain influential and affluent section in Assam and their 'brethrens' in rest of India blame the protesters for all blood that tainted the streets.

What did the Government do? It went on a witch-hunt. Shamelessly, the Chief Minister-cum-Home Minister of Assam, Mr Tarun Gogoi, went on to give a 'George Bush kind of

dictum' on news channels; he said in a - "Whoever stands with Akhil Gogoi and KMSS have invited their own death ". On 24th June the Assam police arrested Akhil Gogoi, the general secretary of KMSS for inciting riot, arsoning, culpable homicide etc. In the coming days more and more people are going to be arrested, and given the "good records" of Assam Police, all of them will certainly be tortured under Police Custody. □□□