

MADHYANNA'S MAY DAY

This year it was May 27, not the usual May 31. And the venue was also not the familiar Tripura Hitsadhani Hall—it was Theosophical Society Hall. Last year too it was Theosophical Hall because of non-availability Tripura Hitsadhani Hall. In truth these halls in College Street area come to the rescue of organisers who are to depend on low-budget performances. As it was the occasion of marking Sailendranath Basu's 43rd May Day from the platform of his magazine *Madhyanna* (now defunct), all his well-wishers and admirers gathered at the Theosophical Hall in the evening defying seasonal nor-wester.

At the start everybody present paid homage to the recently departed Madhyanna associates Naranarayan Patitundu, Bidhan Majumdar among others.

Sailendranath Basu, the editor of *Madhyanna* and the main motivator of this unique May Day celebration, inaugurated the function through his classical song.

Prof Nityananda Ghosh discussed elaborately about the significance and relevance of May Day with special reference to India while Dr Dilip Mitra delivered a very interesting speech on the contemporary Santhal Drama. Saumen Guha, Amlan Chawdhury and Achinta Basu recited poems penned by Sailendranath Basu at different junctures of critical times. Surprisingly Timir Basu, editor, *Frontier*, Prof Sudheshna Chakravorty and popular mass singer Pratul Mukherjee were the notable absentees. Anyway, the meeting ended with Anupam Kanjilal's short discourse on May Day.

N G, Kolkata

SILENCING DISSENT

The Verdict on Seema Azad and Vishwa Vijay! A blatant arbitrariness of the state in dealing with political dissent. If a police officer can take exception to the possession of a book on Shaheed Bhagat Singh as part of the several books shown in the seizure list of Seema Azad and Vishwa Vijay, questioning the motive of the two to read on the life of the great martyr, well that sums up the growing climate of an undeclared emergency being enforced with impunity on any form of political dissent that fundamentally articulate the interests of the vast sections of the masses of the people. In 2010, when Seema and Vishwa Vijay were arrested from Khuldabad, Allahabad, several PUCL members had opposed their arrest pointing out that they had been framed as they were working extensively against land mafias and anti-people policies of the government. Though the arrests were made by the special task force, the case was later handed over to the anti-terrorism squad of UP so as to primarily deal it as an act of 'terrorism' a much abused word by the powers that be. For more than two and a half years the case is being tried in the Court of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrates in Allahabad. It is not an accident

that the judge who had heard the entire proceedings of the case was transferred just before the verdict was supposed to be given. So while sentencing Seema and Vishwa Vijay for life on charges of criminal conspiracy, waging war and under several provisions of the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) the Additional District Judge Sunil Kumar Singh, further slapped a fine of about Rs 70,000 on the couple. As the Organising Secretary of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in Uttar Pradesh and editor of the magazine *Dastak* Seema had consistently reported and gave voice to the growing dissent of the people against the anti-people policies of the government in the form of Ganga Expressway which brought forth the nexus of the politicians, bureaucrats and the land mafia. As one may recall the Ganga Expressway can result in the displacement of thousands of peasantry. It was her initiative to expose the increasing arbitrary arrests, torture and incarceration of Muslim youth in Azamgarh. The magazine *Dastak* became a vehicle for expressing the voice of the voiceless. And this is precisely what the government would want people to believe as 'waging war against the state'! And this is why the police officer would find fault with both of them, for 'waging war' with the state, for reading Bhagat Singh at a time when the country is growing and growing, but the condition of the people are going from bad to worse! At a time when the governments at the state and the centre have been spending heavily on the way people perceive the changes that occur before them as part of the strategy of 'winning the hearts and minds' to generate a consensus towards a policy of displacement, destruction, destitution and death in the name of development, it becomes inevitable that voices like that of Seema Azad and Vishwa Vijay are silenced. Already the state has sensed that there is a mounting public opinion and discontentment among the vast sections of the democratic and freedom people of the country against the continuing incarceration of Seema and Vishwa Vijay. Little wonder that the perception managers have already started planting 'horror' stories of 'mass unrest' being hatched out under the garb of protesting against the unjust verdict of the sessions court. This is further evidence to show how the state is not leaving any stone unturned towards criminalising any form of dissent against the denial of fundamental rights to the people to express their views without fear or favour. The verdict against Seema Azad and Vishwa Vijay is against the grain of fundamental rights of the people of the subcontinent as it goes a long way in criminally profiling any political dissent or opinion or even spreading that as 'waging war' against the state. The state would tell us how we should think and express ourselves. Dissenters should be only part of the state in 'managing' the perception of the people. They cannot say a word against the growth stories that abound the press-electronic as well as print. As capital is development and development is capital-the presence or absence of it, capital is ready to satiate the perception of development too. The state and the government of Uttar Pradesh should release Seema Azad and Vishwa Vijay Unconditionally.

Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners