

'POLICE AND PEOPLE'

Asghar Ali Engineer, being one of the most vocal champions of human rights and secularism does not need any introduction. Frontier readers too are familiar with his prolific writings. But his short piece—'Police and People' [*Frontier*, Vol 39, No 51, July 8-14, 2007] is shocking to this reader though it started with a fine note. The state itself being repressive, the police cannot be people-friendly anywhere in the world. The state retaliates with police brutalities whenever vested interests are threatened. To dub police barbarism as only minority community specific does hardly deliver justice to the majority of secular-minded people of the majority community. The policemen act with equal notoreity in dealing with the majority community people as well as they recently did in Kalinganagar and Nandigram. To substantiate his case Mr Engineer mentioned Mecca Masjid police firing in which six persons died. But the men in uniform resort to barbaric action everywhere without bothering about religious identity. For a person like Mr Engineer it is too naive to expect anything concrete from Mulayam Singh Yadav, otherwise a self-proclaimed votary of minority cause, in doing justice to the victims of Hashimpura killings in which notorious PAC [Provincial Armed Contabulary] was involved in butchering innocent muslims. After all Mr Yadav too depended on PAC to run his writ in the most sensitive state—Uttar Pradesh.

The undercurrent of the Mr Engineer's piece implies his bias towards minority community. Everyone expects a non-biased account from Mr Engineer who has been fighting for secular polity and democratic values for so long.

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CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

In the past few months, the Government of West Bengal has been engaged in acquiring large tracts of land from peasants to hand over the same to investors. This has resulted in widespread popular resistance. The Government has reacted with unprecedented brutality and arrogance, which ultimately ended with the mass killings and violence in Nandigram. These events are of immense public importance and hence as citizens it is very urgent to address them with all the seriousness they deserve. Of course, there are several political parties, citizens' groups and civil society organizations that have been addressing several of these issues.

In truth more such efforts should be made and an independent citizens' platform or network should be formed to address some of the larger issues of West Bengal and the country on a continuous basis.

What is of crucial importance today is to rebuild the culture of public debate and public intervention in Bengal. For this the citizens have to autonomously participate in these activities and fight to preserve the autonomy of public institutions, the public sphere and civil society, which have all been under attack.

There has to be space for different voices and perspectives.

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