

LETTERS

DEEPANKAR GHOSE

Veteran journalist Deepankar Ghose who was one of the old guards of Kolkata-based print journalism passed away on 3 January in his late seventies. After leaving *The Statesman*, he used to contribute to *The Tribune*, Chandigarh. Also he ran a paper of his own for some time. Then he had long association with *Frontier* where he used to write, somewhat irregularly, a regular column—'Frankly Speaking'. He was very hopeful of his book 'Presidential System' but his close political circles—he had contacts with almost all veteran politicians of all shades of Bengal—were not very enthusiastic about the success of presidential system in India. Also, he was a regular visitor to India Coffee House (Central Avenue) and his friends will certainly miss him.

A Reader, Kolkata

"CONGRESS DEMOCRATS"

Hiren Gohain's letter, captioned 'Congress Democrats' (December 5-11, 2010) is too brief to make any sense. His one-sentence comment on my two-part article, 'The god that is failing in West Bengal' is similarly cryptic. Does he mean that while exposing the CPI (M), one should not 'denounce' communism? The CPI (M) was born in Kolkata in 1964, following a split in the Communist Party of India, launched in Tashkent in erstwhile USSR in 1920. An 'exposure' of the CPI (M) has to be necessarily an exposure of communism, which before me so many writers across the world have done. Is it possible, as a Bengali saying goes, to 'catch fish without touching water' (*dhari machh na chhuin pani*)? Mr Gohain asks, is *Frontier* becoming a mouthpiece of 'Congress democrats'? As far as I know, *Frontier* was never a mouthpiece of Communists either. If it had any political hue in founder-editor Samar Sen's time, it was an unconcealed sympathy for the causes of Naxalites—CPI(ML). It is more broad-spectrum these days under Timir Basu, as it should be. It has carried many articles and comments on communism before mine. Mr Gohain mistakes this broad base to dub it a mouthpiece of 'Congress democrats'. Is democracy pet of the Congress only? West Bengal's leftists swear practicing it everyday. It's time, a renowned English literature scholar like Mr Gohain comes out of the cocoon of his love for communism to be refreshed by light and air blowing all over the non-communist world.

Bibekananda Ray,
Kalyani, West Bengal

ANTI-POSCO MOVEMENT

On 17th of January 2011, more than 1200 villagers belonging to the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) undertook a day-long 25 km padayatra (foot-march). They were protesting the ongoing indiscriminate police arrest of villagers. The padayatra started from Dhinkia and culminated at Tahasil headquarters at Erasama. Cases have been lodged against more than 1200 people. Villagers from the Anti-POSCO movement area are unable to come out to avail of basic necessary services like health treatment for fear of arrest. Warrant orders have been issued by the police against these peaceful protesters. Last week the persons were brought before the Joint Magistrate First Class to consider bail on the order of the State High Court. These persons were chased by the local Superintendent of Police and his force thus dishonoring the High Court order. Sahyam Jena of Dhinkia was arrested by Police. The police have been terrorizing the people with flag-marches. There is a police force deployed at the main entry-point.

In a memorandum to the Governor of Odisha through Erasama Tahasildar the PPSS demanded that the villagers seeking health treatment and attending government officials should not be arrested by the police in and around the proposed POSCO project area. They also asked for a withdrawal of all false cases against the peaceful protesters.. In accordance with the Committee's recommendations, PPSS also demanded prosecution of the authorities who violated the provisions of the Forest Right Act (FRA) and other environmental laws. Additionally, all those who have colluded in these violations or have been negligent in the implementation of the legal code must be held responsible. PPSS demand that the Odisha Government immediately implement the FRA in the affected area using transparent and democratic methods to ensure individual and community rights under the law.

Prasant Paikray, Spokesperson,
Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Nearly 150 political prisoners—mostly under trial, incarcerated in the Medinipur Central Jail in the state of West Bengal which the Indian government calls 'Correctional Home'—started hunger strike from 10th December 2010 on the Human Rights Day for an indefinite period, true to the long tradition of hunger strikes organized by political prisoners in Medinipur as also other jails of West Bengal and outside.

The prisoners include those arrested on the charge of having Maoist links, or becoming members of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA) that spearheaded the Lalgarh (Jangalmahal) movement in the state of West Bengal from November 2008, or common villagers standing by the cause. Many of these prisoners have been languishing in jail for years together in abysmal conditions virtually without trial. Some other prisoners arrested in Maoist connections will also join the hunger strike in Krishnagar Jail, Nadia, Alipur Central Jail and Presidency Jail in Kolkata. Among the prisoners spearheading the hunger strike are Chhatradhar Mahato, Sukhshanti Baskey, Prasun Chatterjee and Raja Sarkhel in Medinipur Central Jail, Chandi Sarkar, Sabyasachi Goswami, Zakir Hosen and Pradip Chatterjee in Krishnagar Jail, Gour Chakrabarti in Presidency Jail and Telugu Dipak in Alipur Central Jail.

Ever since its inception it has been a constant demand of the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners [CRPP] for the unconditional release of all political prisoners in the Indian Subcontinent. It had in this regard also stressed the need to completely do away with all draconian laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Public Safety Act (PSA) and all similar acts meant to suppress and stifle political dissent and hence the most oppressed and exploited people of the subcontinent.

The present call for the indefinite hunger strike by the political prisoners in various prisons in the state of West Bengal in India is a growing sign of the worsening conditions in prisons all over the subcontinent. It once again is a call to all democratic minded and freedom loving people of the subcontinent and the world at large to take note of the nature of incarceration of political dissent and the cold manipulation of ensuring the withering away of political dissent within the four walls of the prison through innumerable cases which will take several lives to finish as well as inhuman conditions of stay which negate all norms of the declared jail manual.

The demands placed by the political prisoners in various prisons in the state of West Bengal in India before the authorities are as follows:

The joint forces should be withdrawn and the 'Operation Green Hunt' stopped immediately and the government should sit for a dialogue with the PCAPA without delay.

Section 144 should be immediately withdrawn, and there should be unrestricted entry of all newsmen, intellectuals and other people in the Jungle Mahal area.

Legal proceedings should be initiated against the criminal gangs of the CPI (Marxist) known as the *harmads*.

Judicial enquiry should be initiated for the murder of all leaders, members and supporters of the People's Committee including Lalmohan Tudu, Sidhu and Umakanto Mahato, and offenders should be brought to book.

The cooked up charges against all the prisoners incarcerated in the jails of West Bengal on political grounds, including those arrested from Jungle Mahal should be withdrawn and the prisoners released unconditionally.

Repeal all draconian acts including the UAPA and the AFSPA.

Prisoners imprisoned on political grounds should be given the status of political prisoners and the government should have to bear the cost of maintaining their families.

Prisoners should be given opportunity to meet the members of their families and receive necessary articles from them in Medinipur court.

After arrest, no participant in a movement should be made to "disappear" illegally. Everyone should be produced in court within 24 hours.

Nobody should be 'shown arrested' by tagging in one false case after another.

Judicial enquiry should be initiated in all cases of rape including those in Sonamukhi and the offenders brought to book.

Old men and women in the Jungle Mahal should be given adequate old-age pension and widows given widow-pension, and all in this connection should be paid off immediately.

Political prisoners should be allowed to contact media persons outside and they should be allowed the right to have their political writings published in different newspapers.

Intellectuals coming to meet political prisoners should be allowed to have table interview with them.

The newly-proposed system of payment of daily wage @ Rs.100.00 to convicts should be implemented immediately; wages should not be kept due.

Prisoners seeking a copy each of West Bengal Correctional Services Act and the Jail Code should be provided one copy each.

Canteens should be introduced inside Medinipur Jail.

Political prisoners should be provided with all the daily newspapers at government expense.

Proper infrastructure for treatment in Medinipur Jail Hospital should be made and necessary machines installed.

Gurusharan Singh, President,
Amit Bhattacharyya, Secretary General,
SAR Geelani, Working President,
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Public Relations,
The Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners