

## Breaking the Siege

People now can conceive of a world without CPM—without everything CPM stands for and everything it does in the name of people and ‘development’. Singur cried for change and the CPM-led left front hit back with vengeance—massive repression, misery, rape and death. Nandigram cried for change and social fascists as they are under the garb of a marxist signboard hit back with more dastardly acts and gruesome murders, forcing the rural poor to avenge the state sponsored terror in their own way. And now Lalgarh is crying for change only to get flak from the so-called people’s representatives in both houses of parliament. Lalgarh, a part of junglemahal, may be called India’s largest outdoor prison—thousands of tribal families inhabiting this hostile terrain at the moment, are virtually under a lockdown enforced by notorious joint forces. It’s a criminal siege and the CPM-led left front government wants to continue this siege through imposition of Section 144 indefinitely, making it practically impossible to organise even a road-side meeting. It’s a horrendous crime—the continuing siege, carried out in the service of vested interests. More they try to gag the voice of dissent, more they alienate themselves from broad masses and the situation is more like a concentration camp.

Ms Mamata Banerjee’s rally at Lalgarh on August 9, symbolising the historic ‘Quit India’ movement, aimed at breaking the siege and fighting the fear-psychosis that has gripped the tribal community of junglemahal, was a success by any standards. For obvious reasons it added woes to the sagging morale of the marxist establishment. And for Ms Banerjee it was an occasion to answer the questions posed by the maoists in their open letter circulated a few weeks back and demand that this siege must come to an immediate end. Defying police surveillance and overt threat by CPM-backed goons tribals turned at the rally in thousands with their traditional flags of white and green. In other words the support base of the people’s committee against police atrocities [PCPA] is not really on the wane, notwithstanding the opposite picture regularly portrayed by the mainstream media.

It was not a Trinamul organised meeting. It was organised by Santras Birodhi Ganatantrik Manch, encompassing progressives, intellectuals, writers, theatre personalities, mass singers, to restore peace in the region and helping the poor in re-asserting their rights. Lalgarh has been witnessing a kind of collective punishment, for long, of an entire population which has, in essence, meant even more extreme poverty, malnutrition, health problems and separation from the rest of the country. The demand for a tribunal like the war criminals tribunal of Bangladesh was raised from the rostrum as 55,408 political killings reportedly took place during the left tenure. No doubt non-partisan appearance of the meeting was strengthened by the presence of Swami Agnivesh who was entrusted not very long ago by the Union Home Ministry to open dialogue with the maoists at the national level. Agnivesh made it clear how Azad, the chief negotiator of the maoists, was eliminated in a fake encounter and he demanded, quite justifiably, a judicial enquiry into the ghastly-cold-blooded murder of Azad. So Ms Banerjee had to admit in the open that the killing of Azad was wrong, much to the embarrassment of her cabinet colleagues in the Congress-led coalition culture. Not quite

unexpectedly the 'progressive' left and saffron BJP were on the same wave length making their anti-maoist noises while grilling the government on the maoist issue vis-a-vis the Lalgarh rally in parliament. They are the hawks but doves somehow managed to win the day.

For one thing, the battle of Lalgarh has yet another dimension of no less importance. It may turn out be the principal bone of contention. After all junglemahal, unlike its adjoining counterpart in Jharkhand is not rich in mineral wealth that could attract domestic and foreign multinationals in droves. It's a semi-arid zone with chronic water shortage. It's no ideal place for SEZ either. But junglemahal has 18 assembly segments that are currently under the sway of CPM-led left. Not for nothing CPM-goons are terrorising the poor who traditionally used to vote for the left. An anti-left swing is all too apparent and the poor tribals poured into the rally ground in outrage over the systematic dispossession they have been facing over the years. As for the Trinamul Congress, the government waiting in the wings, they could make their journey smooth to the next assembly, only by recognising the importance of the maoists, not by negating them, at least in junglemahal area. □