

NEWS WRAP

AGD

ANNA HAZARE AND HIS allies have been trying to mobilize a National Movement to exercise pressure on the Indian government for creating an independent anti-corruption agency, known as Lokpal. Even though the Indian economy is growing roughly at 8% a year, official corruption has become a widespread problem, and a source of public disgust, Hazare stands out as a simple, principled man in a new, materialistic age in India, even as theatrical demonstrations and hunger strikes undermine democratic values. After Hazare's Eleven-day long fast, parliament agreed to a Citizen's Charter, lower bureaucracy under Lokpal through an appropriate mechanism, and establishment of Lokayukta in the states. Hazare's 'Jan Lok Pal' (People's Ombudsman) alone will not bring benefit to the average citizen in India. The ombudsman is likely to face intense pressure from businessmen and bureaucrats to continue business licenses, which create artificial rents. Politicians will continue welfare schemes, which are notorious for corrupt middlemen.

JUNGLEMAHAL UNEASE

Since the Third week of Aug 2011, the peace process in West Midnapore's Junglemahal area has rapidly broken down. Maoists are raiding villages in Jhargram, and killing CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress workers, after trials by kangaroo courts. The maoists are upset that the Mamata Banerjee's state government has not released maoist prisoners as promised. The left radicals are regrouping and have issued diktats that flags of no political party, including the Trinamool, can be hoisted in villages; and that food rations are to be distributed only through outlets designated by the maoists. Pre-May 2011 State Assembly elections, wanton murders by the maoists were a daily feature. Since the elections, the maoists have regrouped and consolidated their bases in many areas.

After being restrained by the West Bengal Chief Minister, security forces have resumed operations against the maoists. Identifying maoist strongholds, joint security forces are raiding villages in Junglemahal. The Trinamool Congress party has commenced raising an armed, local force to combat the maoists. There are frequent exchanges of fire between the Trinamool Congress Party's armed unit and maoists at Saptadhara area of Jhargram sub-division. The People's Committee Against Police Atrocities has been calling 24-hour bandhs in West Midnapore district, in protest against "Trinamool Congress Terror". Armed camps of Trinamool's "Bhairav Vahini" have been set up in Jhargram, Nayagram and Jamboni in West Midnapore. The ruling party's armed camps have been directed to resist maoist attempts in entering Lalgarh-Junglemahal villages, as part of Trinamool's green terror. The state government has announced compensation packages for victims of maoist violence. But central security forces have not been withdrawn, and political prisoners not yet released.

CHINESE DAMS IN MYANMAR

Myanmar military has a disputed strategy of erecting about forty eight dams across Myanmar. The constructions are wrecking the environment and leading to conflict. The generals are profiting from oil and gas sales at the cost of dangerous unregulated mining, the assault on Myanmar's forests, murky land deals, and a huge business in endangered wild life. China and Myanmar are building nine mega dams in Kachin state with the aim of selling electricity to power starved Chinese provinces. The Chinese started construction of the dams after paying about 2 million pound to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a rebel group that had observed a ceasefire with Rangoon, for *seventeen years*. In return for the "environmental protection tax", the KIA runs its own fiefdom and controls a stretch of the border around the valley town of Laiza, its "capital", while thousands of Chinese merchants and migrants prosper in the area.

However, since July 2011, soldiers from the rebel Kachin Independence Army have been angered by Chinese and Myanmar plans to build nine dams in their territory for supplying electricity to Chinese provinces. Controversies over the dam being built by a Chinese firm, China Datang Corporation (CDT), a power company controlled by the Chinese state, have led to a brutal conflict in northern Myanmar. The local Kachin people are fleeing and there are accounts of women being gang raped and villages burnt down. With the eruption of fighting between the Myanmar army and Kachin rebels reports of murder and sexual violence are emerging from the remote Kachin state, a mainly Christian area. Myanmar troops have driven about 18,000 people from their homes. Local clergy claim that hundreds of Christians have sought refuge in churches, in the border town of Myitkyina. □□□