

An Open Appeal

To
The Chief Minister
Government of West Bengal
Madam

FOR SEVERAL YEARS AT A stretch the people of Jungle Mahal in West Bengal have been suffering persecution, humiliation and indignities in the hands of the state forces and armed bullies financed by the ruling parties. There have been brutalities perpetrated by the police, joint forces and the CPM-sponsored goons against the people as a result of which many adivasis have died, many have been killed in fake encounters, even while they were asleep, many have been injured, hundreds of houses have been raided, looted and destroyed by the marauders, women have been raped and killed and hundreds of people have been put behind bars on cooked-up charges and forced to languish in different prisons in abysmal conditions. Many have been booked under the draconian UAPA. There are cases of disappearances also.

In the election campaigns made by you and your party, promises were made of the withdrawal of joint forces from the Jungle Mahal region, and you made the pledge to release all political prisoners unconditionally. To our dismay, we see that under your government also, state terror has been let loose on the people, people are being detained illegally, tortured, women have been humiliated and a large number of the sons of the soil have been incarcerated. In your election manifesto, you also made the pledge to 'suppress state terror' (p.39). However, to our surprise, we find that instead of suppressing 'state terror' your police, the central joint forces and 'Bhairab Bahinis' are only perpetuating it. Chhatradhar Mahato's house has been raided, his family members have been intimidated and humiliated, Manoj Mahato has been arrested on a 2009 case, civil rights activists, scholars and even physicians who went to Jungle Mahal for on-the-spot investigation and for treating patients voluntarily were arrested by your police forces. Only recently, Bhagwat Hansda, an election agent of Chhatradhar Mahato has been arrested from Jungle Mahal. Intellectuals and civil rights activists are being debarred entry into many areas. Your administration is not allowing public meetings organized by local organizations to take place, while your party is being allowed to do so. We were witness to the same thing under the hated Buddhadev-led previous regime. Democracy for the ruling party and autocracy towards all dissident voices! Is this democracy, Madam Chief Minister? Surely that was not your declared objective!

We have come to know from media reports that an agreement was signed on 30 September 2011 by your team of interlocutors and the Maoist state leadership of West Bengal regarding the unilateral cessation of armed action on the part of the Maoists for a period of one month on condition that the WB government also would maintain peace by cessation of armed action by the joint forces and the police both in letter and in spirit by keeping them within their camps. We welcome this move as a preliminary step to initiate a dialogue between the two sides.

We do hold that the Maoist movement in our country is rooted in socio-economic deprivation, and is never a law-and-order issue contrary to what the central powers-that-be would try to project, and hence needs to be addressed and dealt with in a totally different manner. The people who have been resisting state repression in the field whom unfortunately the government treats as their enemies, are actually sons and daughters of our soil-much exploited and deprived for decades together. Dialogue should be opened with them without any further delay and a proper conducive atmosphere should be created to facilitate the process. A conducive atmosphere can be created only when arbitrary and indiscriminate arrests and illegal detention of the sons and daughters of the soil by the joint forces are stopped, joint forces are withdrawn from the Jungle Mahal area and all political prisoners are released by withdrawing all cases registered against them. Such steps, we feel, would instill confidence in the minds of the people. We would wish you to personally take the initiative and talk to them.

We do hope that you will give our voice a fair measure of consideration and take a political stand to this effect.

Regards.

Signatories:

Mahasweta Devi, Tarun Sanyal, Bibhas Chakraborty, Varavara Rao, Gautam Navlakha, G N Saibaba, Subhendu Dasgupta, Arup Dasgupta, Dipankar Chakraborty, Amitdyuti Kumar, Manas Joardar, Meher Engineer, Debabrata Panda, Partha Sarathi Roy, Ranesh Ray, Himadri Sankar Banerjee, Guru Prasad Kar, Rajesh Datta, Kanchan Kumar, Pranab Nayak, Saroj Giri, Swati Ghosh, Muktesh Ghosh, Suman Kalyan Moulik, Amit Bhattacharyya, Amit Bhaduri, Sanmatha Nath Ghosh

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