

NOTE

## Save Democracy, Repeal AFSPA

W A Laskar writes :

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE gathered in front of the district headquarters at Silchar, Assam on 5 November, 2011 and demonstrated peacefully while observing symbolic fast for the day from 9am to 5pm in solidarity with the nationwide Save Democracy, Repeal AFSPA Campaign and to mark 11th year of epic fast by Irom Sharmila Chanu in demand of repeal of the draconian law called the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958. The event was organised by Barak Human Rights Protection Committee (BHRPC), Human Rights Organisation, Cachar, (HRO). Apart from the members of some other social organisations such as Kishan Bikash Samiti, Banskandi, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, Assam Majuri Shramik Union, COPE and others many lawyers, journalists, teachers, artists and cultural activists also participated.

Many community leaders, social workers, journalists, teachers and lawyers addressed the gathering and explained what is AFSPA, how it has affected their lives and why it needs to be immediately repealed. Everyone who talked expressed his/her profound respect to Sharmila, her determination and sacrifice and urged the people to rally behind her until the bad law goes. Some of the speakers narrated some cases of indiscriminate killing, barbaric torture, inhuman treatment of the civilians by the members of the armed forces of India in Barak valley, other parts of North East India and Jammu and Kashmir.

Sadique Mohammed Laskar, joint secretary, BHRPC, opened the talk by welcoming the hunger strikers. He informed the gathering that this movement has become a worldwide phenomenon now and protesters are part of a larger agitation against state repression and corporate loots. Women's rights activists and poet Snigdha Nath recited a Bengali version of the poem titled *Imprisoned in Democracy* by Musab Iqbal. Reputed lawyer and activist Mr Imad Uddin Bulbul talked at length about the violence in North East, its reasons and particularly its impact on the day to day lives of common people. He also condemned violence by non-state actors. BHRPC secretary general Neharul Ahmed Mazumder discussed how the AFSPA takes away fundamental rights to life, liberty and human dignity enshrined in the constitution. Waliullah Ahmed Laskar, a prominent human rights defender in North East India, talked about politics of the AFSPA and other draconian laws and said such laws and policies are based on racism and fascism. He also brought the lack of legality in the law by showing procedural and substantial deficiencies in the AFSPA. Thirthankar Chanda said laws are actually used to repress the voices of activists who protest against corruption, exploitation and corporate loot of natural resources jeopardizing environment and livelihood of the masses. President of Cachar Human Rights Organisation Mr Irabat Shingh showed how AFSPA is misused and abused by narrating many cases of human rights violations. □□□