

42 MAYS

It is more idealistic than ritualistic for MADHYANNA, a Bengali little magazine that has long ceased publication, to observe May Day not on 1st, but on 31st May every year. This year too witnessed no exception. Sailendranath Basu, the founder editor of the magazine never says 'No' to observing May Day despite financial hardships he has been in since his retirement from school job more than a decade ago. At the beginning homage was paid to the departed souls who in many ways influenced Sri Basu's literary and personal attachment. The 'Theosophical Hall' where the meeting was organised paid rich tributes to Suchitra Mitra, Badal Sircar and Amal Roy, Swapan Kr Das, Guria and Buna. Then Basu himself thrilled the audience through his classical songs. It was an attempt to break the tradition and he was successful. Then Prof Nityananda Ghosh explained the significance of May Day even in an era of rampant neo-liberalism and an all-out onslaught against labour while Dilip Mitra gave a lovely talk on punjabi drama. In the absence of other guest speakers, namely Frontier's Timir Basu and Prof Sudeshna Chakravarty, Prof Ghosh also dwelt at length on the burning issue of our time—danger of Nuclear energy, particularly against the backdrop of March accident at Japan's Fukushima-Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Ghosh and Mitra apart Baren Ghosh, S Guha and others participated in deliberations. Finally Pratul Mukherjee, popular mass singer enthralled the audience through his mass songs and Sailen Basu called it a day by offering thanks to the participants.

Saumen Guha, Kolkata

REPEAL THE SEDITION LAW

Colonial era sedition law contained in section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code, makes creating hatred or contempt for or disaffection towards the government established by Law in India, an act of sedition punishable with imprisonment for life, whether such disaffection, hatred or contempt is created by words spoken or written or by signs or visible representation. This section forms part of chapter VI of the Indian penal Code that deals with "offences against the State", a passage that deals with serious offences including waging war against the State.

Section 124 A was introduced by the British Government in 1870 when the colonial government felt that such a draconian law was needed to suppress the freedom struggle. Some of the most famous sedition trails of 19th and early 20th centuries were those of Indian nationalist leaders including Tilak, Gandhi and Maulana Azad. All the repressive laws used by the British against the freedom struggle have been retained in Independent India, despite constitutional provisions mandating scrutiny.

Jawaharlal Nehru's views were totally against this provision when he said in 1951, "Take again Section 124 (A) of the Indian Penal Code. Now so far as I am concerned that particular Section is highly objectionable and obnoxious and it should have no place both for practical and historical reasons, in any body of laws that one might pass. The sooner we get rid of it the better."

In fact, it is the constitutional right of every citizen to expose the misdeeds of the government he/she disapproves of and create disaffection and disloyalty among the people and work for throwing it out of power through democratic means - of course without resorting to violence. Hence, the law is incompatible with democracy in which anybody who is dissatisfied with the government has the right to create disaffection against it and seek its removal at the next election. In fact, it is the legitimate right of every citizen to expose the misdeeds of the government it disapproves of, create disaffection and disloyalty among the people and work for throwing it out of power. Disloyalty to a government is different from disloyalty to the State. Of late this provision is being used by the State to suppress the peaceful people's movements and Human Rights activists. Using sedition law to silence

peaceful criticism is the hallmark of an oppressive government. The Indian parliament should immediately repeal this Colonial Era Sedition Law.

A recent Convention organized by People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) and participated in by other Human Rights organizations heard accounts of widespread and systematic misuse of the sedition law across India. All forms of democratic struggles—from farmers' agitations to citizens protesting against state policies have been criminalized and prosecuted under sedition laws. Consequently, thousands of ordinary citizens have not only suffered violation of fundamental freedoms and liberties but also forced to undergo major personal, emotional and financial hardships due to imprisonment and in the process of seeking legal remedies. The Convention, therefore, resolved to launch a nation-wide signature campaign to collect at least a million signatures to present it to Parliament demanding the immediate repeal of Sedition Law, i.e. Sec. 124 (A) IPC.

Pushkar Raj, General Secretary, PUCL

GAGGING AKHIL GOGOI

As was expected, Akhil Gogoi, General Secretary along with Mukut, Office Secretary, KMSS have been arrested by the Assam police from the Guwahati Press Club on the charges of arson, rioting and burning of government vehicles. It is ironical that there has been no action taken on Debasish Borah DSP, Dispur and other police officials responsible for day light murder of a nine-year-old child, Shiv Chauhan (40), and Viren Kolita (62) a rickshaw puller. Is this the rule of law? It is nothing but vindictiveness on part of the Congress Government in Assam against whom KMSS has been actively campaigning and exposing their corruption.

Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) has a history of non-violent agitations and exposing the corruption of the district officials and some of the key Ministers of Mr Tarun Gogoi's Cabinet. KMSS has been a victim of state terror in past as well and many of their cadres have been arrested on various charges for opposing anti-people development, mega dams in the North East and unearthing massive corruption in the PDS in Golaghat district. If in all these years KMSS has never indulged in violence or damaging government property then how can they do this ?

It is completely ironical that Akhil was addressing a press conference on the same issue and explaining that how some unruly elements in the crowd and members of Youth Congress were responsible for the burning of the vehicles. Given the complicity of the state and KMSS occupying the key oppositional democratic space in the State, it is very likely that violence was instigated to bring bad name to the movement.

Akhil Gogoi might be booked under the National Security Act which is completely undemocratic and against all the constitutional norms. NAPM strongly condemns any such devious endeavour on the Assam government part. The government must immediately withdraw false charges and release Akhil and take action against the erring police officials responsible for the cold blooded murder of three people.

Any attempt at muzzling the democratic dissent and voices of the people will not be tolerated by the people's movements. The onus for safety of Akhil Gogoi and Mukut lies completely on the Chief Minister Shri Tarun Gogoi, who is constitutionally bound to defend the democratic rights of the social movements and activists.

**Medha Patkar, Sandeep Pandey, Roma, Prafulla Samantara, Suniti S R, Rajendra Ravi,
Bhupendra Singh Rawat, Madhuresh Kumar**
National Alliance of People's Movements

'SAVE SHARMILA CAMPAIGN'

Around 300 people gathered around the park opposite RAJGHAT, Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi to show their support to Irom Sharmila, also known as the "Iron Lady of Manipur" or "Menghaobi" ("the fair one") who has been fasting since 2 November 2000. Her demand is that the Indian government repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), which she blames and everybody knows stands for violence in Manipur and other parts of

India's northeast including Kashmir. She is "the world's longest hunger striker"having refused food and water for more than ten years.

India which got her Independence through Gandhi's non-violence now respects less of the so-called non-violence. Faisal Khan said, "The Manipuris had been trying hard to publicize Irom Sharmila's fight, every week, something or the other events Create PDF files without this message by purchasing nova PDF printer (<http://www.novapdf.com>) happen in Delhi but no media gives their attention towards them. It's time we show support to our fellow Indians".

Slogans like, "Manipuris keep walking forward, we are behind you", "Justice to Irom Sharmila", "Non-Violence should not be ignored" etc were shouted together. Akhu Chingangbam from Imphal Talkies, sang "India I see Blood in Your hands" a song which decries the injustice of Indian Government in the name of democracy. Many Delhi Policemen were stationed at the spot to guard the peaceful candle light vigil at Rajghat.

After a small programme, the people were to light candle at Gandhi's Samadhi, but unfortunately the Delhi Police did not allow the people to even cross the road. The candles were lighted opposite to Rajghat.

Hopefully many such events will keep on hapening all across the country and will spread awareness to the mass about the suffering of the people from the NE states and Lady Irom Sharmila.

NAPM, Asha Parivar, Gandhi Global Family, Jagriti Mahila Samity, Khudai Khidmatgar, Yuva Kosish Mission, Bharitiyam,
Rajghat, 25th June, 2011