

LETTER

**APDR 40**

It was 25 June 1975. The eastern Indian state of West Bengal was going through tremendous political turmoil and state terror. At that crucial juncture, the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) began its journey with the demand for freedom of expression and the task of organising people against state repression. The first rally was on the demand of release of political prisoners, because at that time opposition political activities in West Bengal inevitably led to death by "encounter" or imprisonment.

Since then, APDR has marched through four long decades working for the protection and extension of the democratic rights of the people against state tyranny. In the last 40 years, APDR has not confined its activities to the movement for release of political prisoners. It has been able to play an important role in the democratic rights movement by mobilising public opinion against custodial deaths, campaigning for the abolition of capital punishment, raising the demand for the withdrawal of repressive laws such as MISA, NSA, TADA, POTA, POCA, AFSPA, etc. The association—sometimes together with other organisations - has registered its protest against gross violation of human rights in Singur, Nandigram, Lalgarh and other places. Today, it is as vocal for the right to free expression as it was at the time of its birth. It has been carrying out a sustained campaign against evictions in the name of development. It believes that the state cannot disregard its constitutional duty to ensure food, clothing and shelter for all. It is the very basis of a civilised society.

Whatever may be the creed and colour of the political party in power, no act of state repression should go unchallenged—this is the fundamental principle of APDR's work. It tries to stand by any activist who has been a victim of state repression irrespective of one's political affiliation. It believes that people's consciousness of democratic rights and their protests against state repression are the only trusted sentinels of democracy.

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