

UPDATE 2



Singur to Lalgarh via Nandigram

**Rising Flames of People's
Anger against Displacement,
Destitution and State Terror**



Amit Bhattacharyya



UPDATE 2

This booklet is **Second update** to our book:

Singur to Lalgarh via Nandigram

Rising Flames of People's Anger against Displacement, Destitution and State Terror published in April 2009 by the same author

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Preface

We are bringing out this Update 2 which is in continuity with our earlier Update 1 (published in June 2009) to the original booklet: *Singur to Lalgarh via Nandigram Rising Flames of People's Anger against Displacement, Destitution and State Terror* by Prof. Amit Bhattacharyya. He has quickly put together these two updates as the people's struggle in the Lalgarh-Jangalmahal region of West Bengal is unfolding into a historical uprising with very many new creative forms of dissent.

Encouraged by a great response from various sections of people from all over India in receiving these booklets, we are publishing the Update 2 quickly. We are also encouraged to see the translation of these booklets into various languages like Oriya, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi, Punjabi etc.

What started as a struggle in November 2008 against displacement and police atrocities in Lalgarh has now acquired manifold dimensions of a larger people's struggle. Keeping in view the significance of this people's struggle, we are placing these updates before the people in struggles or those who are interested in people's struggles at a time when media coverage of the developments in Lalgarh has dwindled to two-line news items or literally no coverage outside West Bengal. We hope this Update 2 will give an idea of what is going on in Lalgarh-Jangalmahal, though by no means it is a comprehensive report as no outsider is allowed by the West Bengal and Central Governments to go to the area of struggle to have a firsthand knowledge.

We publish these dispatches on Lalgarh struggle because we believe that there is a symbiotic relationship between the struggle of the adivasis of Lalgarh-Jangalmahal and all other struggles against displacement, destruction, destitution and decimation that are going on in various parts of the country.

However, the views expressed by the author in these series of reports on Lalgarh are his own. Various people's movements against displacement participating in *Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan* shall not necessarily agree with all the views expressed here.

We are thankful to the author for giving us this opportunity to publish these reports.

Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan



People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA)

In Lalgarh Update 1, we dealt with the salient features related to the state-sponsored war against the people or the Battle for Lalgarh till 23 June 2009. The ensuing state terror in Lalgarh very much resembles many more battle fronts in others parts of the country where people have been resisting displacement, destruction, destitution and decimation. In fact, the situation in Lalgarh-Jangalmahal has been brewing for decades to explode particularly under the regime of the 'left-front' led by CPI (M) which perpetuated brutish exploitation on the tribal population with a view to puff up the moneybags of their leaders.

The present banner of revolt raised by the adivasis in Lalgarh-Jangalmahal is symptomatic of struggles elsewhere in the country in our contemporary space and time. The struggles of Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal or Kalinganagar, Kashipur or Jagatsinghpura, Niyamgarh and other regions in Orissa or the struggles of Bastar adivasis against large scale mining and gigantic industrial plants or the struggles of adivasis in North-eastern Ghats or mountain ranges in Andhra Pradesh against large-scale aluminium mining or the struggles of adivasis of Jharkhand – all have a lot in common – that they have initiated an uncompromising struggles to save themselves irrespective of the consequences and support they may be given or not from the democratic sections of the rest of the society.

Interestingly in all these regions the Indian state has deployed its mighty armed forces with a view to brutally suppress all these struggles with impunity. Today, the valiant struggle of the adivaisi of Lalgarh-Jangalmahal is pitched at a high level after consecutive defeats, at least temporarily for now, of the Indian state forces in Bastar, Kashipur, Kalingarnagar, Jagatsinghpura, Singur and Nandigram.

What is undercurrent in all these struggles is the democratic aspirations of the most oppressed people of this country. The present wave of struggles of the wretched of this country is for their survival and against destitution planned by our ruling elite for the oppressed.

The story of the struggle of the people of Lalgarh-Jangalmahal today is synonymous with the stories of our contemporary struggles elsewhere in the country. But then, the story of Lalgarh is also a story of two contending Indias—one of which is the vast multitude of people of the country rendered impoverished in more than 60 years of rapacious exploitation of the ruling elite, and the ruling elite themselves who were created, trained and maintained by their colonial/imperialist masters.

Let us continue with the story of Lalgarh as it is unfolding before our eyes after what is being narrated in the *Update one* of the book, *Singur to Lalgarh via Nandigram*: published by the Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, in April 2009.

‘Operation Lalgarh’ and Resistance by the People

It was no easy task for the joint armed forces to deal with an invisible ‘enemy’. One CRPF jawan admitted to a media person that it was difficult to confront the ‘enemy’ in guerrilla war, where one could not distinguish between the villagers and



PCAPA Supporters Clash with Paramilitary near Pirakata on 19th June

the Maoists. As the forces are haunted by the spectre of mine traps, they are unwilling to proceed unless safe passage is guaranteed by minesweepers of the paramilitary troops (*Bartaman*, 25 June 2009). The forces started from Goaltore police station on 24th and no sooner did they advance up to Gorabari, they got the news of thousands of villagers coming out from the jungles and were forced to retreat in haste to the police station. On that day, Sidhu Soren, the PCAPA leader told a newsperson that they were prepared to counter any attack from the joint armed forces of the Indian state (*Bartaman*, 25 June 2009). The PCAPA made it clear by organising a meeting attended by eight thousand villagers at Dharampur just 8 kms away from Lalgarh police station to assert that they will not be cowed down by state's show of strength, violence and fire power (*Dainik Statesman*, 25 June 2009).

According to news reports, on 24th June, the armed Maoists attacked the house of one Bankim Mandal in Kurni village under Balarampur police station in Purulia district. Bankim is a member of Danrda local committee of the CPI (M) and a liquor dealer. As he was not found in his residence, his liquor shop was blasted (*Dainik Statesman*, 25 June 2009).

The strategy of the joint armed forces is to take control over the towns, set up as many base camps as possible, consolidate their forces and then wait for the proper time to enter the interior villages after 'sanitising' the jungles and mud roads with the help of CoBRA forces. As an English daily described: "The moment you cross Kalaichandikhal, where the Chief Minister's convoy was ambushed on November 2, 2008, it's like stepping into a war zone. Schools have turned into bunkers. Machine-gun nests have been set up on roof-tops. Whole villages have been emptied out. Only the old and infirm remain. Stealthy figures slink away from homes as soon as you step into the threshold. Lalgarh seems to be holding its breath before the last blow". (*TOI*, 26 June 2009).

According to news reports, as soon as operations by troops started in Lalgarh and adjoining areas, the Maoists have spread out to other areas. According to central intelligence reports, there are about 700 armed Maoists in other districts like Bankura and Purulia. Till then they were unable to capture a single Maoist

leader, although they have arrested twenty people in Lalgarh alone. Meanwhile, six companies of CRPF had arrived in Goaltore along with a mine-resistant armoured vehicle to initiate operation from that side. What is particularly disturbing for the government is that rainy season is about to set in, and that will put an end to all military operations for the time being (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 26 June 2009). That will, as the government knows well, enable the Maoists to regroup. Meanwhile, some landmines were located and defused after a lot of effort. One four-foot-long mine, placed at a strategic point between Pingboni and Kadashole and packed with 10 kg of explosives, was detected with ultra-sophisticated electronic equipment and defused after a two-and-a-half-hour struggle. It was an indicator, according to media reports, of the kind of danger and obstacles that lie before the security forces in their attempt to capture the territory along Katapahari, Barapelia and Lalgarh (*TOI*, 27 June 2009). The Maoists blasted mines near Kadashol village and there was a heavy exchange of fire, while the CRPF had to fire mortal shells in response (*Bartaman*, 27 June 2009).

The security forces entered Ramgarh town on 27 June reportedly after the CoBRA commandoes cleared the passage for the police and paramilitary troops to march into Ramgarh. A back-up team from Lalgarh police station was repelled with double ambushes including an attack by women Maoists (*TOI*, 28 June 2009). According to one report, minutes before the troops entered Ramgarh, one CPI party office was destroyed by armed Maoists (*The Telegraph*, 28 June 2009). On the road to Ramgarh from Kadashole, the village that the security forces took on 26 June, a freshly painted poster in Bengali was pressed back with four stones on the black asphalt. “The people are urged not to use this path. It is laid with mines. Signed, the Communist Part of India (Maoist)” (*The Telegraph*, 28 June 2009).

One Bengali daily carried front-page news of women welcoming the troops by sounding conch-shells and giving water to them as if to show that they would now be rid of the ‘Maoist terror’ (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 28 June 2009). Another daily in an editorial however, asked: “Those who welcomed the police,

quenched their thirst—are they residents of that locality, or well-to-do middle class people residing in a semi-muffasil town? There were no Murmus or Mahatos among them, there were only Basus and Mitras” (*Ekdin*, 30 June 2009). (Persons with ‘Murm’ or ‘Mahato’ surnames are adivasis, while those with ‘Basu’ and ‘Mitra’ surnames are upper-caste Hindus). It is known from many sources that some of these people, quite well-dressed, which is unusual in such a critical situation, who reportedly welcomed the troops, were actually brought from Medinipur town and produced before the media to give such a false impression. An English daily stated: “The tribal hamlets of Ramgarh were emptied. There is a clear tribal and non-tribal divide in the town. The people on the streets welcoming the troops were mostly non-tribals” (*The Telegraph*, 28 June 2009).

An English daily stated that the panic that gripped the security forces is to be seen to be believed. “In Lalgarh town, where the IRB has been roped in for perimeter security, jawans stood facing the Jhitka forest—the dreaded Maoist lair. You couldn’t mistake the nervousness in their young faces. Some were edgy, gripping the rifles tightly turning sharply at every noise, and rubbing their sweaty palms on their newly issued battle fatigues. One of them got a sharp rebuke from his section leader for heading a few steps deeper into the forest to relieve himself” (*TOI*, 26 June 2009).

According to another news report, a team comprising of ten CoBRAs and 50 BSF and state troopers that went to Godamouli forest in Sijua ran into a hail of bullets and had to beat a retreat. This, according to the report, was “the first instance of a tactical retreat by central forces in Lalgarh and the portent of the pitfalls of letting the guard down” (*The Telegraph*, 30 June 2009). One state officer stated: “It was too late into the day and it had started raining as well... We would have got trapped in the forest had we proceeded this afternoon”. He had to admit that the guerrilla attack of 29th came as a surprise. The security establishment was hoping to overrun the Maoists in the forests by sending small CoBRA teams to lie in wait for fugitives being pursued by other forces. “But the Maoists turned out to be smarter...While we had planned to wait for them in the jungle and attack them, they

reached there ahead of us and caught us off guard” (*The Telegraph*, 30 June 2009).

In course of this military operation, no Maoist could be caught; this has prompted the government to think that the Maoist leadership must have fled to Jharkhand. According to one report, contrary to what the state government has been saying, the Maoists including Kishanji and Bikash, are very much present in Lalgarh and have regular contact with the local people. It is reported that the Maoists held a meeting at Mohulboni with the villagers and had lunch on the occasion of Hul Dibas, a local tribal festival. The information that the police could come back was not new to them. “Let them enter, but how long do you think the central forces would stay. They will have to go back. We are waiting for that day”. “They have said they are not going away to Jharkhand. We have been assured that they are with us”, said a villager in the new temple. It was also learnt that the jungle, where the Maoists were holed up, extended all the way to Goaltore through Jhitka and Salboni. Sources said the attack on 29th on security forces at Sejua near Salboni was the handiwork of this squad (*HT, Kolkata Live*, 1 July 2009).

Chhatradhar Mahato accused the government of targeting not just the Maoists, but also members of the PCAPA. The jawans are raiding villages, beating people, forcing them to locate Maoist stronghold, failing which they are threatening people with dire consequences. The CPI(M) *bermads* are behind the forces to take control over villages and are using the ‘Majhi Marwa’ — the Santhali social organization — against the PCAPA (*Ekdin*, 27 June 2009).

Meanwhile, in the late night of 3 July, according to government, four Maoists were held from Ghatberakerua near Purulia’s Ajodhya Hills, one of whom was a woman. They are Malindra Besra, Gostho Gope, Haradhan Kumar and Mala Kumari — all in their early twenties. On 4 July, Chhatradhar Mahato on behalf of the PCAPA has given a call for general strike (bandh) on 8 July in the three districts of West Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia to protest the arrest of thirty PCAPA workers, the warrant issued against him and the harassment caused to city intellectuals, who

went to Lalgarh during the joint operations and has sought the support of all political parties (*TOI*, 5 July 2009).

Tales of Brutality Perpetrated by the Police, Troops and CPI (M) Hermads Wearing Half-pants

The joint military operation is nothing but a state-sponsored war declared against the people of Jangalmahal. Since they failed to isolate the Maoists from the people, they are committing barbarity even of the most sadistic kind to humiliate, terrorise, maim and starve the poor people of the land so that they could never raise their heads and fight for dignity again. In the name of maintaining peace, they are doing everything to see to it that peace is destroyed. In the name of taming the Maoists and to enforce the 'rule of law' both the central and state governments and the hired CPI (M) goons have been breaking laws with impunity and letting loose hell that would put to shame even the most despicable of the lot. What the two governments are actually aiming at is to establish the 'peace of the graveyard'. The so-called 'Operation Lalgarh' has been creating such a psychological trauma in the minds of the people that it would have serious implications for the future. Biren Mal, a resident of Pirrakhuli village, told a reporter: "The last time I saw such fear and terror was during the British rule. This was such a peaceful place. We led simple lives. Look what they have turned us into. We are like hunted animals" (*TOI*, 26 June 2009). The tales that follow, needless to state, are only the tip of the iceberg; untold stories will be told after those come to light.

Tale1: Anilbaran Saha (age above 60) is a resident of Pingboni, Goaltore. He taught English in a local school and has retired. On 19th, there was an exchange of fire between the police and the Maoists near Pingboni. The forces thought that gunshots were fired from his house. So he was dragged out of his house and subjected to abuses of all types. The experience he faced for some hours before he was ultimately let off, was so humiliating that he preferred to die (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 23 June 2009).

Tale 2: Ashok Kadma is a resident of Pingboni. He is still staying in his hamlet with cattle stock. He said; “Never did I see such things happening. On Friday (i.e.19 June), the police resorted to indiscriminate firing on all sides. I had to run away for fear of life”. Since then, he had been suffering from trauma that police forces are coming. Throughout the 20th he ran from pillar to post. As there was no police operation till Sunday afternoon, he summoned courage to get back home. But no sooner did he start cooking rice, news spread that forces were coming, and he was forced to flee again (*Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, 23 June 2009).

Tale 3: Reporters wrote that all the hamlets in village after village in the Goaltore block were seen locked up with no one in sight. Ashok Kadma told the media that in the name of search operations, many houses have been ransacked; the mirror placed on the trunk of a tree in a roadside saloon was broken (*ABP*, 23 June 2009).

Tale 4: In Hariharpur village on the evening of 21st June, Swapan Singha was going to Lalgarh bazaar in a bicycle to buy puffed rice and batasha (sugar candy of a Bengal variety) for ritual purposes (Puja). He was dragged down from the bicycle and searched by the CRPF and beaten up badly (*ABP*, 23 June 2009).

Tale 5: Dulal Mal of Pathardanga village, Lalgarh, has had the same experience. On 20 June, he went to the veterinary physician in Block Sadar with his goat. On his way back home he was beaten up by the CRPF soldiers. One CRPF jawan had died due to sun-stroke. The CRPF accused Dulal and others of his type of being responsible for their colleague’s death and subjected him to utter humiliation (*ABP*, 23 June 2009).

Tale 6: Belpahari area in West Medinipur has been bearing the brunt of state attack. This is the region near the Jharkhand border which was witness to activities by the CPI (M-L) People’s War from the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was also the area of activities by PCAPA. The police forces were boycotted by the traders and other people. On 23 June, the police broke down the people’s check-posts set up by the committee and ransacked shops, beat up local residents including women (*ABP*, 24 June 2009).

Tale 7: Anil Bez, aged 50 plus, is a resident of village Guri in Lalgarh. He was returning home after visiting his son-in-law's house at Sarenga. He was picked up by the security forces and he now desperately wants to forget those horrible four hours when he was under their custody. What did the forces do to him in the name of 'imposing the rule of law'? Santosh Singha, his son-in-law, a resident of Bejdanga in Sarenga, told the media in a hushed voice: "My father-in-law's house is in Guri village in Lalgarh. My father-in-law, Anil Bez came to my house. When he left for his home on Tuesday morning (i.e, 23 June 2009), the jawans arrested and took him to their camp. He was hit with fists, slapped, his hands and face were tied up and he was beaten black and blue and kept in a sleeping posture on the floor of the roof of the camp for four hours". He was released at about 10 in the morning and could barely summon all his strength to reach his son-in-law's house, bruised, battered and humiliated (*ABP*, 24 June 2009).

Tale 7: Penchera village is adjacent to village of Bejdanga. In the morning of 22 June, Bablu Mishra (aged 32) was loitering in front of his house around 9 PM. He was picked up by the jawans, taken to their camp, beaten mercilessly throughout the night, showering abuses of all types. He was set free around 10 next morning with the threat that in case the tale of torture is revealed, he would be killed (*ABP*, 24 June 2009).

Tale 8: Madhusudan Singha, Prasanta Pratihar, Dipak Singha and Subhas Singha are the residents of Bejdanga village. They went to the field to respond to nature's call. They faced the wrath of the jawans. Barin Singha and Lakshman Pratihar said that in the name of search operations, the jawans are knocking at the door at the dead of night and showering unbearable abuses (*ABP*, 24 June 2009).

Tale: 9 In Kuldiha village, when a police team raided a house a few days before 25 June, the family desperately tried to salvage whatever little food-grains they had. A man told his son: "*Gom bosta ta sorie de* (move the sack of wheat)". "The police heard 'bomb bosta (sack of bombs)'. They ran away at first and then came back to beat us. They kept asking where we had hidden the

bombs’, said the villager, requesting not to be named (TOI, 26 June 2009).

Tale 10: The first target of the jawans in Pathardanga village was the daily-wage labourer Manoranjan Mal (aged 30) who stayed back when the other males had fled the village. The police kicked the door of his house and broke it open. They began slapping and punching Mal, his wife Jharna Mal told the press. “Tor ghore IED rakha ache (you have a bomb in your home)”, a policeman shouted as Jharna and her two sons covered. The ‘search’ began, with the police flinging utensils around and tearing the mattress apart. Then they came across the sack of 30kg of relief rice from the government. They ripped it open, spilled the rice on the floor, stamped on the grain and emptied a can of kerosene over it. “This was our month’s supply but now the rice is inedible. This is why we hate the police so much. That was all the rice I had to feed my two sons”, Jharna said at the committee’s Kantapahari camp. Manoranjan Mal, whom the police had taken away, is now in detention (*The Telegraph*, 29 June 2009).

Tale 11: Jipita Soren of Pathardanga village said she was alone when the police barged into her hamlet. “They threw my dinner—a bowl of cooked rice—on the floor and stamped on it” (*The Telegraph*, 29 June 2009).

Tale 12: Kamalmoti Tudu of the same village said that the police poured water on her firewood, so she couldn’t cook. “In the evening the Maoists came and said they would look after us” (*The Telegraph*, 29 June 2009).

Tale 13: At Kadashole, the forces assaulted a couple, forcing them to flee, leaving behind their two-year-old daughter Sujaya. While Shibu Hembrom, the girl’s father, is still missing, his wife Ratimoni fled to a relief camp across the forest and sought help from officials there. On 28th evening, a team of district officials rescued the child from the forest (TOI, 29 June 2009).

Tale 14: Residents of Sarenga told media persons that on 18 June 2009, one company of paramilitary force arrived at Sarenga along with state police, and started to route in different parts of Sarenga bazaar area. In the mean time when a procession of the women’s wing of the PCAPA entered the bazaar area, they were

attacked by the jawans. Unprepared in the face of such brutality, the women got scattered and some entered a private nursing home to protect themselves. The jawans also pursued them into the nursing home, dragged some of them, beat them up and booked them on several cooked-up charges; many among them are still in jail (*Ekdin*, 29 June 2009). That was the beginning. Since then, the number of arrests on the charge of being 'Maoists' has been increasing every day.

Tale 15: On 21 June, four persons were arrested on the charge of planting landmines at a place near Kangshabati canal. The villagers of Khayerpahari village assert that none of them were in any way involved in the act. The fact is that they were arrested from the Khayerpahari club organized by the PCAPA around 11 am in the presence of many other people. As that club does not have any legal electrical connection, the members hooked it from the side poles to plug in a TV set. On that day, when those four people were watching the TV, they were picked up along with the wire through which electrical connection was drawn. They were implicated in a case whereby they were alleged of planting mines with that very wire (*Ekdin*, 29 June 2009). This, according to the top brass of the West Bengal bureaucracy, is how the 'rule of law' is to be established.

Tale 16: This war against the people had forced a pregnant woman to flee her home, to take shelter in a relief camp organized by the PCAPA and give birth to a baby. Here is the story as related to a media-person. Mrs. Parvati Kisku gave birth to her baby on 25 June in a relief camp set up by the PCAPA at Narcha, which is located 1km short of Kantapahari. Her husband was not by her side during the time of delivery, neither was a doctor or a midwife present. It was left to some women staying in the camp to help her through labour. In lack of any kind of facilities they had to use a piece of broken glass to cut the umbilical chord. As the security forces marched by on 29th morning on their way to Kantapahari, Parvati was spotted sitting in the courtyard of the Narcha primary school with her son on her lap, both of them visibly weak. At first she would not say anything, but quizzed a few times, she said: "We have severe shortage of food here", and

turned her attention to her son who had already developed rashes on his body. Her mother-in-law refused to disclose her son's name, or his whereabouts. She even declined to name their native village. "We are staying here for the last eight days. We are living in a painful condition. But we cannot go back to our village as the police will torture us again, said Mrs. Jaba Kisku. The reporter rang up the top boss in charge of the operation and some others. An ambulance was sent; but Parvati refused to take any help from the government who was responsible for her plight. Parvati was taken inside by other women. They said: 'She will not go to Lalgarh. Her son is fine. Please do not bother us'. When asked whether they would allow a doctor to come and examine the child, they were still hesitant. The BDO, of Binpur Mr. Sourabh Barik tried to speak to Parvati over phone, but she refused. Some other woman spoke to the BDO and declined to take any help for the ailing mother and her child (The Statesman, 30 June 2009). As the baby was born at night, she was given the name *Ratri* or night (*Dainik Statesman*, 30 June 2009). Parvati lives in Chhotopelia village — the cradle of the present movement where the Lalgarh police let loose a rampage on 5 November 2008.

Parvati later told another reporter: "In our village, hundreds of children are born at home without any medical supervision. The government has never bothered about us. Now they are putting up a show of sympathy. We won't take their help". The reporter commented: "The aversion to anything to do with the government is understandable when the elderly woman in charge of the daily needs of the camp between Kantapahari and Lalgarh narrated how an expectant Jashomoni Mandi was kicked in the stomach by policemen raiding their village last November...Jashomoni, 22, gave birth to a son last night" (*The Telegraph*, 1 July 2009).

Tale 17: Dr. Jatin Pratihari of Kantapahari is a very popular doctor in the locality. The top brass of the marauding jawans believed that he was closely associated with the Maoists and treated their wounds. The police claimed that Dr. Pratihari treated the wounds of Sambhu Mandi and Purna Murmu, who sustained injuries during the encounter with the joint armed forces at

Kadashole. So on 29 June, under the leadership of Siddhinath Gupta, Special IG (Operation), a huge police and paramilitary force encircled his house and searched and ransacked it as if they are raiding the house of a hardened criminal. The patients who were there at the chamber were taken aback by the way the jawans ransacked the house. According to his wife, he had just left the house for the relief camp at Kantapahari Vivekananda High School. His next-door neighbour is Nirmal Pratihar. That house was also raided under the leadership of Shyam Singh, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Maldah (*Bartaman*, 30 June 2009).

Tale 18 and many more: The CPI (M) hermits are back in action like the vultures falling on their prey. Closely following the police the hermits are used to recapture areas that were lost to the people in the Nandigram style. In the villages near Sijua, the police and the hermits operated in unison raiding the village hamlets such as Godamouli, Madhupur, Memol etc. On 30 June. Relief camps were forcefully vacated by the jawans to make room for army camps. The house of Gopinath Soren, one of the PCAPA leaders, was burnt down and he was arrested. Not a single hamlet was spared. The six-month pregnant Simli Mandi and her husband Duhkhiram have left their village Godamouli of Salboni out of fear of police and hermit brutality. Her mother-in-law, Rani Mandi is so much distressed that she has lost her will to cook. On 29th, police and BSF came to her village. They ransacked her house in search of Maoists. “I saved some money and bought a *hari* (a container meant for cooking food), but they left it broken. How can I cook now?” The trauma suffered by Rani Mandi is shared by all others in the village. On 29 June, this village witnessed a battle between the forces and Maoists. At the end, jawans entered and destroyed every house. It was the repetition of the age-old policy of all repressive, anti-people forces—”burn all, destroy all”. The shop of Mohit Mahato was broken down. Mohit Mal went to respond nature’s call in the forest in the morning. When he heard gunshots, he rushed out and ran towards his house. The police got hold of him and beat him up so severely that his nose and mouth bled profusely. He was arrested (*Bartaman*, 1 July 2009). Dilip Malik was arrested for having supposed Maoist

links. His wife, Manju Malik is supposedly an active member of the women's wing of the PCAPA. She used to alert people by sounding conch-shells whenever the police entered the village — a lesson taken possibly from the experience of the Nandigram. She was beaten up and humiliated by the joint forces and the CPI (M) goons.

Mani Mandi of the same village said: "Some of the hermits who entered our village to torture earlier are known faces. Yesterday (29 June) we identified one of them with the police. He was wearing half-pants and had a band held tight to his head. They were kicking and breaking open the doors. Have you ever seen policemen wearing half-pants?" she asked (*Ekdin*, 1 July 2009). Apart from Godamouli, other villages such as Ghugudanga, Madhupur, Garra, Memul, Babuibasa, Debagram, Sijua, Mandaria, etc. bore the brunt of state terror as well. The police arrested Madan Hansda and Los Mandi from Godamouli village. Their wives said that they were identified to the police by the CPI (M) hermits (*Bartaman*, 1 July 2009). Police informers indeed!

The police also raided the house of Chhatradhar Mahato twice, ransacked the house and showered abuses of all types on his wife, Anita in Amlia village, 3kms from the Lalgarh police station. First they went to the adjoining Pathardanga village. Manju Mal, wife of Haradhan Mal, had just come from the field and started cooking, when the police dragged her to the next Amlia village to identify Chhatradhar Mahato's residence. The way the jawans entered his house was narrated by Chhatradhar's mother, Bedanabala Mahato. "The police encircled the house. 'Where is your son?' asked the officer-in-charge of the police station, pointing the gun at me. He broke the emergency light and took out the battery and said: 'Your son murders policemen with this battery. People's leader! Your daughter-in-law will be a widow. And then he started beating me with the stick'" (*Dainik Statesman*, 5 July 2009). Although her two sons were traumatised by the police, his wife did not break down and boldly said that she was proud of her husband and was ready to go to jail along with him (*TOI*, 1 July 2009).

Samir Mahato of Pirrakhuli village narrated, “the police made me go and fetch local liquor for them and forced me to drink it first, fearing they would be poisoned. I don’t drink or smoke, and puked at the first gulp. But they still forced me. They think everyone in a tattered vest and lungi is a Maoist. They are snatching at shadows” (TOI, 26 June 2009). What the joint security forces are doing can be assessed when we see that “in village after village... the local people call the security forces by a different name—‘*shontrash babini*’—repressive force” (*The Telegraph*, 25 June 2009).

Schools and Colleges Forced to Bid Goodbye to Teaching and Admission as Troops Set up their Camps in their Buildings

With central and state police forces engaged in this totally unjust war against the people, occupying about 14 school buildings. About 20,000 students have been affected as the schools have been shut down. Nobody knows for how long this situation will continue. Of these, five schools are situated in Medinipur Kotwali police station area while the rest are in Lalgargh, Jhargram, Salboni and Goaltore areas. The occupation of schools by occupation forces has resulted in strong resentment among students, their guardians and teachers. The students of Mohandas Vidyapith in Medinipur even staged a demonstration. A group of students and their guardians also demonstrated outside the district inspector (DI) of schools’ office demanding that the police camps be shifted to other places. But the DI expressed his helplessness as the acquisition of the schools is an administrative decision. Leaders of the Medinipur Suraksha Committee staged a dharna outside the office of the district magistrate on 26 June over the same issue. Students of Class V to IX of these schools could not appear for the unit tests which were to begin on 26 June. In all, they have to undergo five such unit tests before the annual examination and three before the pujas (annual social/religious festival of the Hindus) which had been pre-poned this year. Besides, the academic session in the state has also been advanced

by two months. Thus this loss of time would give them lesser time for preparation.

However, the problems of the students of Gargaria Subhas High School and Bejdanga high School in Sarenga, Bankura, bordering Lalgarh, seem to be more acute, particularly for those who stay in school hostels. They have been asked by the school authorities to vacate the hostels to make room for police accommodation. But some of them who hail from Lalgarh are in dire straits as they do not know where to go. Most of them have fled home fearing police atrocities and are now finding it difficult to go back home (*The Statesman*, 28 June 2009).

In Satpati village, Lalgarh, the local school has turned into a 'prohibited zone'. Even teachers were not allowed to enter. "We will allow only four", said a plainclothes police officer. The teachers protested. Seeing the media, the police let them in, but only because they had to collect their salaries (TOI, 26 June 2009). According to one report, every school and college in Goaltore and even a health centre in Kewakole have been requisitioned (*The Telegraph*, 25 June 2009). On 9 July, the students of the Ramkrishna High School, Lalgarh, protested in front of the two government secretaries who had come to look after the welfare of the adivasis on behalf of the West Bengal government and said that the camps of the jawans inside the school buildings should be shifted immediately (*Dainik Statesman*, 9 July 2009).

In the early 2000s, in order to combat CPI (M-L) People's War activity in the Belpahari area, the West Bengal police had set up camps of jawans in school buildings meant for scheduled tribe students. When Paritosh Mahato, the headmaster of the Odolchua High School protested, he was booked on the charge of having links with CPI (M-L) People's War. There is an old Supreme Court ruling relating to Manipur whereby the highest court debarred the setting up of camps in educational institutions and hospitals. The conversion of the schools into camps for accommodating paramilitary forces in Lalgarh - Jangalmahal is a clear case of violation of the Supreme Court order.

Another important development that will possibly have some bearing on the Lalgarh people's movement is the banning of the

CPI(Maoist) after it was included in the long list of, what the central government describes as ‘terrorist organizations’. It implies that the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 2008(UAPA) would henceforth be applied on the members of the CPI (Maoist) or on people who are sympathetic to their cause. Now the people of Lalgarh could be subjected to this draconian legislation as the Maoists have been present in this area for more than a decade and actively supporting the people’s movement of Lalgarh. But, quite possibly, the CPI (M) led West Bengal government in a completely reversal way could implicate the fighting tribal people of Lalgarh by imposing the draconian sections of this law saying that they are helping the Maoists.

Banning the CPI (Maoist) with a ‘Terrorist’ Tag

The CPI (Maoist) was banned on an all-India level, with a tag of a ‘terrorist organisation’, on 22 June 2009 and, henceforth, it came under the purview of the draconian UAPA. The banning of the CPI (Maoist) by the central government put the CPI (M) leadership in a dilemma. On that day itself, as if sensing that something like this is going to happen, both Prakash Karat and Biman Bose—the central and state leaders of the party—talked about ‘political battle’ with the Maoists and opposed any attempt to put any ban on them separately through a local legislation. Ironically, on the very next day (23 June) after the ban was imposed by the Centre, the West Bengal government toed the central government and declared its operative in West Bengal as well. Biman Bose retracted and said that the state government had no option other than imposing the ban in the state. The ‘left’-front partners who supported the joint military operation, opposed it but as expected, without any meaning. Gour Chakrabarty, the person who had been officiating openly as the political spokesperson of the CPI (Maoist) for quite some time, was picked up on 24 June from a local TV channel in the midst of a discussion on the current situation in Lalgarh. He was booked under the UAPA—the first instance of such an arrest since the ban was imposed anywhere in the country (*TOI*, 23, 24 June 2009). How

the Maoists will react to this ban is for them to decide. On our part, we would like to state a few words about the political implications of this ban, before we get back to the battle in Lalgarh again.

First, by banning the CPI (Maoist), both the central and state governments have clearly admitted the fact that the Maoists are a formidable enemy to reckon with. Second, by banning them, they have also admitted their own failure to combat them politically. The Naxalite/Maoist movement is the longest surviving revolutionary movement in the history of our country, having a history of more than four decades since 1967. Decades of brutal suppression through state terror, despite major setbacks, only increased their strength. They had raised certain fundamental questions on socio-economic conditions, poverty of the people, hunger, malnutrition, death, negative impact of the imperialist model of development; plunder of the country's resources by foreign MNCs and the need for introducing a truly self-reliant, pro-people development model in our country. Many of these issues are being raised by social scientists, writers, political persons, intellectuals, and retired and in-service bureaucrats in the past six long decades. Even when Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh described the Maoist movement as 'the greatest single threat to the internal security of the country since independence' in April 2006, he, apart from other things, also talked of 'walking on two legs'; he admitted the fact that this movement was the outcome of socio-economic deprivation. Even those democrats and intellectuals who may not agree with the strategy and tactics adopted by the Maoists, also don't wish them or their movement away. The reality is that the successive central and state governments had never cared to address these fundamental issues. So by treating it solely as a 'law and order problem', the ruling elite that is running this country has only betrayed its utter inability to combat them on the political and socio-economic planes. By banning the CPI (Maoist), both the central and the West Bengal state governments, in fact, have admitted their own defeat in the face of this formidable political challenge. Thirdly, the invocation of this draconian law like UAPA sections, like other similar laws

now in operation in other parts of the country, only tramples down the fundamental rights of the people that the Constitution of the country professes to uphold. Fourthly, history has proved time and again that such invocation of draconian laws and unrestricted terror thereby let loose on the people in the name of containing that ‘enemy’, would invariably have an opposite effect. When the state bans something, puts restrictions on the reading of literature of people’s own choice, gags freedom of expression, the people, particularly the young generation, get more attracted to these. They would want to know why such restriction was necessary. Fifthly, on the question of whether the CPI (Maoist) can be treated as a ‘terrorist organisation’, I would like to quote a few words from a letter written by K.G.Kannabiran, the eminent civil rights lawyer, presently All-India President of the PUCL and President of the Andhra chapter of the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners (CRPP) to the Prime Minister of India. Opposing the ban, he remarked in his letter: “Maoist intervention or for that matter any political intervention on account of the failure of successive governments to perform their fundamental obligations could not be considered an act of terrorism and justify invocation of draconian laws”(Indian Express, dated 25 June 2009).

The Involvement of US Intelligence and the Indian Army in Lalgah

The Bengali daily *Sambad Pratidin* of 27 June 2009 carried a front-page news item which clearly shows that US intelligence agencies and the Indian Space Research Centre, the ISRO along with the Indian army are very much involved in this war declared by the Central and West Bengal state governments against the people of Lalgah. The report is captioned “Chemical Dyes and Foreign Technology Used to Locate Maoists”, and written by Rajarshree Dattagupta. We give a free translation of the text of the news item here:

Goaltore: A literally ‘high tech’ war has started in Lalgah. The names of both the US intelligence satellite and the Indian

space research centre, ISRO have been tagged with this war preparation for regaining the areas held by the Maoists. On the other hand, in order to trace the Maoist guerrillas who have kept themselves mixed with the villagers, the administration has taken the help of the most modern technology. At the beginning of the second round of the 'Operation Lalgah', the air force has dropped special chemical dyes over Murarka village adjoining the Burishol forest where 1,500 Maoist guerrillas are supposed to be holed up. In case that dye falls on the bodies of the guerrillas, the colour will last for one year. It means that after they are driven out from that area by the forces, they will take shelter in other villages and then it would be easy to identify them. As a result, the Maoists, on the one hand, would not be able to get themselves mixed up with the villagers; on the other hand, the police forces would not be accused of arresting innocent people while going for the Maoists. The first part in this 'high tech' war was successful on Friday (i.e, 26 June). There will be a fresh expedition on Saturday. On that day, the administration has taken the decision to apply this special method.

For the last eight months, the police were totally in the dark about what had been taking place in the interiors. It was only after the decision was taken to undertake this joint expedition that the state Home Department woke up from its slumber. They requested the central government to help them know about the whereabouts, base area, the location of the forces, etc of the Maoist guerrillas inside the 'core area'. After a lot of discussion, it was decided that foreign technological assistance will be sought. The Central Home Department also thought about satellite pictures. Accordingly, the government turned towards the ISRO and US technology. It was through RI Sat-2 and US intelligence satellite that areas such as Baroperlia, Kantapahari, Ramgarh, Mahultal, Kadashol, Pingboni, Goaltore on one side and Dhrampur and Jhitka on the other came under the satellite scanner. After continuous scanning, the two institutes started sending still pictures. Then army intelligence officers were called upon to analyze the data. The army intelligence officials sat down at the eastern army headquarter at Fort William, Kolkata and

noticed the movement of a massive guerrilla army inside the Kadashol forest. They could also identify the movements of armed squads in Ramgarh-Narcha region. The news of a red Maruti van being parked in Ramgarh bazaar was communicated to police officials in charge of operations. On the basis of this information, the expedition started from Goaltore towards Ramgarh. More companies of the central forces were brought in. After that, order was given to those leading police supers, deputy supers and CRPF commandants to march ahead. Ultimately, the expedition started on Friday (i.e, 26 June). As the forces had prior knowledge about the area, the joint forces could, with ease, capture the 6-km area from Goaltore to Kadashol by overcoming the difficulty posed by 12 landmines and the Maoist guns.

In course of the expedition, time and again the debate over the question of how to separate Maoists from the villagers took place. It was to overcome this problem that the decision to drop one particular chemical from the helicopter was taken. On Friday, it was dropped on the Maoist guerrillas on an experimental basis. On different occasions in foreign countries and in many wars, this method has been applied. In Lalgah, for the first time in a state-led expedition, such things were applied against the secessionists (sic!). On the whole, it can be stated that from the satellite pictures to the dropping of chemical dyes from helicopters—everything in the ‘Operation Lalgah’ is ‘high tech’.

Near Mutiny within Joint Armed Forces

According to press reports, resentment is brewing among the police and joint forces as the government has virtually failed to provide them with basic amenities such as food, toilets and a place to sleep. On 23 June, troops from an IRB deployed at Lalgah were relieved after four days of constant duty only after they threatened to rebel. In Lalgah’s primary health centre, at least seven to eight security personnel are admitted because the heat has got the better of them. The only casualties that helicopters have evacuated are security personnel who suffered heat stroke. Bengal’s one IRB, however, was close to mutiny in the middle of

an operation because of faulty planning. The whole operation, it is now felt, was started in rather in a hasty manner without any back-up, particularly of doctors and paramedics accompanying the forces. In fact, since the security forces are aware that they are entering hostile terrain, and there is little they can expect as support from the villagers. Even in areas through which soldiers had passed, villagers did not conceal or disguise their anger and despise towards the forces (*The Telegraph*, 24 June 2009). Sensing that such discontent within the IRB might have a negative effect among other units of the joint armed forces such as the CRPF and the BSF, the administration took care to send those units on patrolling duty (*Dainik Statesman*, 26 June 2009).

A woman constable said: “We are barely managing. The time we get to get ready before an operation is too short, while long queues form outside the toilets. Men are worse off, as they are more in number. They have to go to the river bank to answer nature’s call. The condition of the toilets is deteriorating every day because of the pressure. We feel as if we have been simply dumped here”. Meanwhile eight dogs have been requisitioned to guard the cops at the Lalgah police station, keeping a watch through night and barking every time they see an unfamiliar face (*HT Live Kolkata*, 2 July 2009).

Transfer Requests from Lalgah Cops Pour In

The cops feel that the battle for Lalgah is far from over. At least that is the feeling among those who have fought the Maoists for the last two years from behind the locked gates of the Lalgah police station, scared to even venture out for a cup of tea or buy essential goods. According to press reports, most constables and officers manning the Lalgah police station have applied for transfer. According to a sub-inspector posted at Lalgah, “This is only a temporary victory for the security forces. Most of the hardcore Maoists have left the area for a safer place. The paramilitary won’t be here for long. What will happen after that?” The last two years have been a terrible experience for all of us.

We have seen our colleagues die from landmine blasts or bullet injuries”, he added.

The mental plight of the state policemen and women who have come from various areas in Bengal is also not at all encouraging. Many of them confessed to journalists that the operation was indeed dangerous and they had not informed their families about the exact nature of the assignment. “It is just a beginning and those who will have to stay in Lalgarh will have to face the consequences. I have applied for a transfer and I hope my seniors will oblige,” said another officer on condition of anonymity (*HT*, 1 July 2009).

NGOs under Intelligence Scanner

According to news reports, the effect of Lalgarh has fallen on the NGOs operating in the region. Following an upswing in Maoist activities, the state Intelligence Bureau (IB) is said to keep an eye on the activities of “some suspected NGOs” in the state. In a confidential report, according to the media, the state IB has asked district units to monitor the work of certain NGOs in places where Maoists operate. According to some sources, the IB supposedly has information that Maoists are striking roots with the help of certain NGOs and do not rule out their involvement in the upsurge in Lalgarh and its surrounding areas.

Maoists on the Wanted List

When the troops are flushing out the Maoists in Lalgarh, the state cops, according to news reports, are preparing a list of Maoists whom they want to arrest. Other than Koteswar Rao alias Kishanji, the other names are Bikash who the police say is Karan Hembrom and is on the Belpahari list. Of the seventy names that figure in police records, thirty-one are from Belpahari. Sumitra (48), wife of Ananta, is also from Lodhasole in Belpahari. There are eight who are on the most wanted list from Lalgarh. The police, according to reports, have also scanned the names of Maoist activists from Goaltore, Salboni, Binpur, Garbeta,

Bankura, Purulia and Jharkhand. Sudip Chongdar alias Malay Ghosh is from Garbeta. There are six women activists from Balpahari. They are Sumitra alias Durga Hembram, Jamuna Singh alias Jayanti, Jagari Baske alias Rehala, Shobha Bhumij alias khepi, Chapi Singh and Puspa Mahato.

Sasadhar Mahato and his wife Suchitra alias Sulekha top the Lalgarh police list. Active Maoists in Lalgarh are Bimal Mandi, Laxmiram Mondal, Pradip Murmu, Matal Soren, Baidyanath Murmu and Jyotsna alias Manisha/Manika/Tara. Madan Mahato, Mongal baske, Ganesh Madal, Baneswar Tudu and Sukhdev Mahato are active in Salboni, while the 60-year-old Purna Murmu alias Lakhiram tops the list in Binpur. Adding to the Maoist strength are Sukumar Mitra, Chitta Mahato alias Fuchu and Mahadev Singh.

Jaladhar Mahato alias Jalan, Mansaram Hembrom alias Rajen, Sambhu Hembrom alias Gome, Biswanath alias Biswajit/Bishu Mahato, Subal Mandi alias Rameswar are active in the Goaltore police station area. In the Bankura-Purulia region, Jiten Mistry, Neel alias Sunil, Ranjit alias Tarit Pal, Sagar Soren alias Santal, Ananda alias Ananda Kumar and Lambodar Majhi are active.

According to police, the Maoists from Jharkhand are also active in Bengal. They include Purnima Singh, Puspa Munda, Purnima Sardar, Sumitra Sardar and Samita Sardar. Their male comrades are Bijoy Bhumij, Atul Munda, Bhola Singh, Milan Munda and Gangadhat Singh (*HT Live Kolkata*, 26 June 2009).

It was against these seventy Maoists that this whole military operation, according to the Central Home Minister and the West Bengal Chief Minister, is directed. What actually is the total number of soldiers of different companies being deployed in the Jangalmahal area for this unjust war against the people? The Lalgarh battle has already taken in 5,000 troops, although the figure has not been announced officially. Besides these, another ten companies of central forces are coming in. That will make the total around 6,000 (*The Telegraph*, 25 June 2009). These 6,000 troops, even if the unconfirmed reports in the media are true, though this figure could be possibly higher, have been deployed against 70 Maoists, which means that the ratio is 85 plus troops

each for just one Maoist rebel. It is clear from the announced names of the seventy targeted Maoists, (as announced by the West Bengal government to the media, if it is to be believed) that most of them are the local people. So Maoists or not, the war is against the local people of Jangalmahal.

Civil Rights Activists Prevented from Going to Lalgarh by West Bengal Government to Conceal their Own Brutality

The government of West Bengal has been using its muscle power to prevent people from making investigation into incidences of brutalities perpetrated by the joint forces and the CPI (M) hermds against the people of Jangalmahal. During the Singur struggle, the same government imposed section 144 in the area and continued it for nearly 70 to 80 days together to prevent people from making investigation into police atrocities and also to stand by the side of the people in struggle. In Nandigram, they used the hermds to do the same while the police forces remained mute spectators. Here in Lalgarh, the West Bengal police are back in business and thwarting any attempt by conscientious citizens to go there. An all-India team comprising Rajkishore, General Secretary, Revolutionary Democratic Front, K.N.Pandit, Co-ordinator, Visthapan Virodhi Jan Vikas Andolan, Gopal Menon, documentary film-maker, Padma, a woman rights activist from Tamil Nadu, Damodar, and M Srinivasa Rao, anti-displacement activists from Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh were arrested the moment they got down from a train in Medinipur station on their way to Lalgarh on 27 June. In the name of enforcing the so-called 'rule of law', the police broke the law itself and booked them with impunity (Case no. Kotwali PS no. 1668 dt.27-6-09 u/s 151 Cr.Pc.). The team threatened to start hunger strike and refused to give any undertaking that they would not go to Lalgarh. In late night, they were released and sent to Kolkata in a police vehicle (*Dainik Statesman*, 28 June 2009).

On 3 July another team comprising Medha Patkar, Gopal Menon, Sujato Bhadra, Amitdyuti Kumar, Saktiman Ghosh and

some other civil rights activists were prevented from going to Lalgarh at Debra about 60kms distant from Lalgarh. When Gopal Menon started taking photographs, he was beaten on the chest with rifle butts on instruction from the Pranab Kumar, Addl. S.P. Another media photographer was also hit hard. Both of them had to be taken to Debra hospital. The whole team was booked under sections 151 and 188 and released after sunset. This CPM-led 'left-front' government seemed to have invented this novel method—mobilize the whole state machinery and the hired goons and debar people from going to affected zones by violating all laws in the name of 'rule of law' with total impunity. They applied it in Singur and Nandigram, and they are applying it in Lalgarh also. After the Gujarat carnage, even the much-maligned Narendra Modi government did not restrict people from visiting the affected areas so shamelessly.

Section 144 for Others, Not for the CPI (M) Goons

Both Mr. Ashok Mohan Chakraborty, the chief secretary, government of West Bengal and Mr. Ardhendu Sen, the home secretary, government of West Bengal, are all set on a very noble mission. They will establish 'rule of law' in the Jangalmahal area with all muscle power at their disposal. However, what they are actually doing is the trampling down of that very 'rule of law'. We came to know from Mr. Sen's statement that Section 144 (which prevents assembly of more than 3 persons together) is in operation within 2kms radius of Lalgarh police station. When some urban intellectuals went there to meet Chhatradhar Mahato and came back, nobody told them anything about this at all, although they had been subjected to all forms of checks by the police on the way. It was only after they started relating tales of police and hermad brutality in the adivasi villages in front of the media, that the administration started threatening them with arrest. When the all-India team was encircled in Medinipur station and taken to the Kotwali police station, they were charged with breaking Section 144. When the team asked whether 144 was imposed in the Medinipur town, they stammered to answer; then

they said that their presence in Lalgarh would create law and order problem, so they would not be allowed to go there. The police insisted that if they gave a written undertaking that they would not go to Lalgarh, they will be released. The team protested and refused. When the team members said that they would stay in the Medinipur town for the night and decide on their future course of action, the police said that they would not be allowed to do so. Is this the 'rule of law' that Mr. Chakraborty-Sen & Co wants to establish? When another team comprising, among others, Medha Patkar, Gopal Menon, were stopped at Debra, was there 144 in Debra Mr. Sen? In the same way they were prevented from moving further; when they sat down on the road at dharna, they were arrested. Why was the film-maker Gopal Menon beaten up by the police with rifle butts on his chest on the orders of Pranab Kumar, Additional SP, which caused vomiting and his shifting to the hospital? Was it because he was shooting another tale of barbarity perpetrated by your police forces? Is this 'rule of law', Mr.Chakraborty? Is this 'rule of law', Mr. Sen? What you are actually establishing is the rule of the lawless law, the law of hell.

Where was your 'rule of law' and so-called 144 when the armed CPI(M) goons in bikes came in large numbers together and demonstrated their muscle power in Lalgarh and Goaltore, where 144 was operative? On being pressed by media questioning, the home secretary replied that CPI (M) members were roaming in areas outside 144 zone; hence the question of arresting them did not come up (*Sanbad Pratidin*, 30 June 2009). There should be a limit to telling fairy tales, Mr.Chakraborty-Sen & Co. On 7 July, 2009, Medha Patkar has filed a suit at Kolkata High Court stating that the police did not have any right to prevent a free citizen like her from going to Lalgarh and appealed to the court to direct administration not to stay in the way of her going to Lalgarh (*Sanbad Pratidin*, Mahanagar 8 July 2009).

Political Prisoners on Hunger Strike in Protest against the Lalgarh War

Thirteen Maoist political prisoners in Krishnanagar jail in the Nadia district of West Bengal started an indefinite hunger strike from 22 June demanding withdrawal of joint armed forces from Lalgarh and resolution of problems through mutual discussion (*ABP*, 23 June 2009). About 100 political prisoners from different parties started an indefinite hunger strike in Alipur Central Jail, Kolkata from 24 June (*Dainik Statesman*, 25 June 2009).

Santhal Editor Resigns in Protest

Noted Santhal intellectual Mr. Dhirendranath Baskey resigned from the advisor's post of the government journal *Pacchim Bangla* to protest against the joint operation of police and paramilitary forces in Lalgarh. He has been the advisor of this Santhali magazine, published by the West Bengal state government since 1990 and was its founder editor. Dhirendranath is the author of many books including one on the Santhal rebellion of 1855 (*Santhal Ganasangramer Itibas*). He was the first to introduce the Santhali language in Bengali script. "I am marking with great pain that the state government is mercilessly applying force on the quiet way of life and honour of the tribal people", he said reading out his resignation letter to the director of information and cultural affairs department at a press conference held in Kolkata on 27 June 2009 (*The Statesman*, 28 June 2009); *Dainik Statesman*, 28 June 2009). In that press conference, Nirranjan Haldar ridiculed the Chief Minister as 'stupid' as he described 'alchiki'—a script, as language; so profound is the ignorance of Buddhadev Bhattacharya, who happens to be the Chief Minister of West Bengal, that he does not know that alchiki is the script of the Santhali language (*Dainik Statesman*, 28 June 2009).

Protest Demonstrations in the Urban Areas and Debates within the Forums

In Update1 we wrote that the response from the urban literati to the Lalgarh struggle was partial and not that encouraging. One plausible reason might be that the obvious involvement of the

Maoists in the Lalgarh movement made them respond with caution. In Nandigram also, the Maoists were very much there and became an important part of the BUPC which spearheaded the anti-SEZ/CPI (M) movement along with the TMC and other political parties. It was mainly their armed resistance that enabled the people of Nandigram to stand up to the challenge of their enemies. But the urban intellectuals either were ignorant about the reality, or preferred to remain non-committal on the issue as Mamata Banerjee's party was also involved in it. The TMC leader had all along been maintaining that there were no Maoists in Nandigram, herself knowing full well that she was telling a lie. In Lalgarh, people assembled under the banner of PCAPA and TMC as a party was nowhere to be seen and so Mamata Banerjee was not at all interested in this movement initially. Just after the Central Ministry was formed, she even spread the fairy tale — which many eminent intellectuals accepted as true — that the Maoists are the creation of CPI(M), working hand in hand with the CPI(M) and even branded Buddhadev as a Maoist. There is also another side which many might not accept. As the Lalgarh movement is a tribal movement, and as the tribals are people having a lower social status, urban higher class/caste people preferred not to give it its due. Among those who on other occasions take to the streets, are some former Naxalites who are very critical about their past political existence and even disown their Naxalite past. They are critical of everything revolutionary or those associated with some 'violent' acts. These people are more critical when people either under the influence of Maoism, or under the banner of any forum, take up arms and resist oppression or state terror; they are less vocal when it comes to continuous acts of violence that the state goes on committing over the years. To some of them, there is no class nature of 'violence'; they condemn all violence — irrespective of their nature and the context against which these were committed. When it was pointed out by some that the destruction of palatial buildings of CPI (M) leaders and their party offices were also acts of violence, and so need to be condemned in the same way, they did not have any answer. Someone said that since the Lalgarh Andolan Sanhati Mancha

(LASM) was born to express and act in solidarity with the PCAPA, so we should simply toe what the committee advocates. In reply, others said that the LASM was a separate entity and should take decisions on the basis of its own understanding and historical experience and could not toe anyone's line. Someone blatantly said that since the state is trying to brand this movement as 'Maoist', so the LASM should try to exclude the Maoists from this movement, and in this would they be able to have a larger following under its fold. Such opinion was strongly opposed by others. They argued that the Maoists had already been identified by the central government as the greatest threat to the internal security of the country, and it is trying first to exclude and then to suppress them; at such a juncture it is the duty of the civil rights forums to stand by their side without necessarily subscribing to their ideology. But without doing so it tantamount to falling into the trap that government has laid and actually isolating them. This was reflected also at the time of making a draft for a leaflet on the basis of consensus. Needless to say, there was heated exchange of arguments among members of the forum. There was another clear opinion. This forum should not be the site for discussion/criticism about the ideology or method of struggle of any political party.

And as these people do not find any regular forum to give vent to their feelings and political opinion, they try to utilise these broad forums to air their feelings. Lalgarth is also a site which they try to utilise in their own way. But when things do not go their way, they resent and stay away and also tell others to do the same. That is how the LASM (Solidarity Forum for Lalgarth Movement) almost died out of existence. A new forum was formed called Lalgarth Mancha (Lalgarth Forum) with Mahasweta Devi as the convenor and it was announced through a press conference in College Square, Central Kolkata on 26 June 2009. Needless to mention, debates on the same issues continued in the new forum also.

On behalf of the new forum (LM), the following demands were highlighted: 1) Immediate withdrawal of joint armed forces from Lalgarth; 2) Immediate cessation of state terror in Lalgarth;

3) Repeal of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA); 4) No organisation can be banned; 5) Immediate unconditional release of all political prisoners including Gour Chakraborty; 6) Withdrawal of the case under section 144 against the intellectuals. It was pointed out that no ideology can be banned. The Lalgarh Mancha does not consider the CPI (Maoist) a terrorist organization. As none of the constitutionalist parties could solve the problems of Jangalmahal, the villagers themselves had invited the Maoists to fight for their cause. Finally, all the contending parties should sit together and try to resolve the problems through discussions (*Dainik Statesman*, 27 June 2009). Sujato Bhadra, Anuradha Talwar, Manik Mandal, Sabyasachi Deb, Pradip Banerjee and others spoke on that day. On 28 June, Mahasweta Devi said that the whole military operation against the adivasi people was conducted to hand over large chunks of land to the Jindal industrial group so as to set up an SEZ there. She urged upon the people to build up a mass movement in solidarity with the Lalgarh people's struggle (*Dainik Statesman*, 29 June 2009). Rajkishore, Debabrata Bandyopadhyay and Gopal Menon, among others, spoke on that day. The dharna mancha in College Square continued for some days and decision was taken to organize a mass procession on 11 July with as many participants as possible. Meanwhile, decisions were taken to initiate campaigning in different corners of Kolkata from 8 to 10 July by moving in a van. A number of organisations are reported to have decided to organise a procession on 9 July in Asansol, district Bardhaman.

Rallies were held in other areas as well. The Bandi Mukti Committee (Political Prisoners' Release Committee), West Bengal organised a demonstration programme on 26 June in front of the office of the district magistrate, Nadia district with a 8-point charter of demands, which included immediate withdrawal of joint armed forces from Lalgarh, cessation of police terror, granting of political prisoner status to the captives and the immediate unconditional release of all political prisoners (*Dainik Statesman*, 27 June 2009). On 30 June, in the town of Berhampur, district Murshidabad, eight organisations organised a mass sit-in demonstration at the crossing of the Berhampur Textile College

amidst torrential rains. Civil rights bodies, cultural organisations, Union of rickshaw-pullers, workers' union, and college students joined the programme (*Dainik Statesman*, 1 July 2009).

Discontent is brewing also among the adivasis in other districts. The adivasis of Murshidabad took to the streets on 6 July against state repression of the adivasis of Jangalmahal. On that day, more than 100 adivasis on Nabagram block gheraoed (encircling a place with a view to stop its operation) the Nabagram police station and demonstrated. The secretary of the cell of the block told reporters on 7 July: "The state government is solely responsible for the volatile situation in Lalgarh. In the name of nabbing the Maoists, the intense brutality has been perpetrated on the adivasis of that place. We are demanding immediate cessation of military operation and sit down for dialogue with due respect to their hopes and aspirations, failing which police station would be gheraoed for an indefinite period". On 6 July at the initiative of the Berhampur branch of Paschimbanga Ganasanskriti Parishad a protest demonstration was held by the intellectuals at the crossing of the Berhampur Textile College (*Dainik Statesman*, 8 July 2009).

Protests Abroad

Lagarh people's movement earned support and solidarity from a number of organisations from abroad. On 8 July, people demonstrated in front of the Indian High Commission office at Athens, Greece condemning military intervention in Lalgarh. Another demonstration took place in Birmingham, UK on 10 July. Like Nandigram, Lalgarh has already become another inspiring symbol of resistance against displacement, destitution and state terror.

Eminent Personalities Speak on the Lalgarh Movement

Let us see the views of as many shades as possible of political activists, academicians, civil rights activists, artists, writers, and persons connected with the human rights commission.

Kanu Sanyal, a leader at the time of Naxalbari movement and now leader of a CPI (ML) group: “Our agenda was fixed. We led the farmers from the forefront and were ready to die. So many of us got caught and killed, but it was for the cause of revolution. But the Maoists are egging on the tribals of Lalgarh from the rear. When the state machinery strikes, they have their retreat route ready. Do you call this revolution? I had expected them at least to come up with their charter of demands for the people. Instead, they have already played on the emotions of the tribals by calling them a class. During the Naxalite movement we just had two classes—the rich and poor—we did not create such class divides” (TOI, 19 June 2009).

Prasanta Roy, a former professor of the department of Sociology, Presidency College: “The Lalgarh offensive should not be seen as a solitary case. Sporadic tribal unrests have been breaking out all over the country for some time now and Lalgarh is just one part of that picture...Lalgarh is just the name of a place, much like Naxalbari was, but it might soon be associated with a phenomenon. It has taken a violent turn today and a distinct political leadership has emerged out of the seething discontent. Chhatradhar Mahato was leading a relatively spontaneous movement, which was not acutely political initially. He unwittingly prepared the ground for Maoists and they simply seized the opportunity... . The Maoists have seized the opportunity of the existing discontent and the somewhat weak leadership to penetrate into the zone and expand their political base. That is completely natural...The Lalgarh agitation revolves around the question of right to land, forest rights, food, health and jobs. It is a story of continual deprivation of life’s basic needs...Today the Maoists can be militarily controlled and Chhatradhar Mahato too might go, but that will not put an end to this revolution. Even if the state suddenly decides to pay attention to the development of the tribals it will not succeed because such development needs time and understanding of the situation. Moreover, the state would do from within its capitalist frame. It also requires radical redistribution of resources...Such questions have always come up when revolutions need to be resolved. But

the irony of a revolution is that its purpose soon gets corrupted. No revolution has ever been able to bring in equality, mind it” (TOI, 25 June 2009).

Sujato Bhadra, a well-known human rights activist: “Unlike Singur-Nandigram, the initial social resistance movement in Lalgarh revolved around police atrocities; with tribal people raising their voice against law-enforcing agencies breaking the law of the land. So, this movement is political in nature; a story of the demand for the restoration of civil liberties since November 2008...The question is whether the presence of a few gun-toting Maoist cadres are sufficient, reasonable and proportionate factors for joint military operation in Lalgarh. Are more reinforcements of force and deployment of deadly CoBRA jawans going to serve any purpose except more suffering and torture of the tribal people? It is a clear case of “pre-emptive” military action. As reports reveal, such ‘war on terror’ has created “tyrannicide” in the affected region...The institutionalised left parties now fiercely argue that the “world is a better place” without Maoists and hence eliminate them. Another question: why did armed oppositional politics gain a social base among the ‘wretched of the earth’? The answer lies in the actual condition of the area where people live in abject poverty. They are deprived of all sorts of civic amenities and simply denied all their entitlements as citizens of this country...Crores and crores of allotted money have either not been spent on the development of the adivasis or siphoned off. It is a matter of shame that after 32 years of rule, the self-proclaimed pro-labour government is still announcing fresh schemes for social and economic development of regions like Lalgarh...Now the security-centric approach will not resolve the conflict...What we need today is to build up a new ethic to enhance all potential for non-violent pursuit for the creation of dialogue and articulation of alternate versions of comity as public good” (TOI, 26 June 2009).

Purnendu Basu, a former Naxalite: “They (Maoists) are using helpless tribals as bait to increase their influence. Several Naxalite leaders like Santosh Rana, Pradip Banerjee and Aditya Kiosk, have been trying for the past year to visit them and start a dialogue.

It would have helped the Maoists as these three leaders had led the struggle in the same zone in the '70s and could have shared their experiences and seen that there were no excesses" (TOI, 19 June 2009).

Sbyamal Sen, former WB Human Rights Commission Chairman: "Personally, I have not visited lalgarh in recent times, but I came to know from media reports that the local tribals even eat ant eggs just to live. Neither there is supply of safe drinking water, nor any healthcare facilities. These are all basic human rights as per the constitution. When the people of Lalgarh are not getting what they deserve as human beings, their rights are surely violated. It's the state's duty to make basic things of life available to its people" (HT Kolkata Live, 26 June 2009).

Saibai Mitra, writer and former Naxalite: "Banning an organization doesn't help to either to root out or prevent it from carrying on its activities. So, I don't think the decision to ban the Maoists will serve any purpose...History shows that whenever the Communist Party was banned, it emerged stronger and bigger. From a political point of view, it is not sensible either. If the Centre proposes a ban on Leninism or Gandhism, shall we support that? Having said that, I must add that I don't subscribe to this politics of terror and murder. But has the government ever tried to probe why these people resorted to this extreme path?...For the last 60 years, no government has ever addressed the needs of these poor people. They have only made empty promises...The Lalgarh movement and all previous armed Naxalite movements are a consequence of that. Unfortunately, governments in India take a very simplistic view of things and follow the easy route. Once an armed movement spins out of control, they declare it banned and try to crush it with the help of army and police. In the long run, this has no effect...there seems to be an effort to equate this movement with secessionist movements like the one we saw in Punjab and in Kashmir. The Maoists are not a separatist force. They are apparently fighting for the poor and the neglected sections of society...We can't compare the Maoists with Al-Qaida either. Is it too late to counter the Maoists politically? I don't think so. Any time is good for a dialogue to commence. They can

still be called for a discussion and asked to lay down arms. There are other channels through which this movement can be defeated. The civil society, for instance, can play a big role in brokering peace by acting as a mediator between the government and the Maoists...A simple move on the part of the leaders could have helped defuse tension. They could have visited the area and spoken to PCPA members. Excesses were committed, so PCPA was quite justified in asking for an apology. It could have acted as a balm and soothed the frayed nerves. Instead, the government waited for the movement to escalate and take the form of an armed revolt” (TOI, 27 June 2009).

Maoist Leader Kishanji Speaks on the Significance of the Lalgarh Movement and the Passive Attitude of Kolkata Intellectuals

This piece is based on an interview which was published in the *Biplabi Gana Pratirodh*, the mouthpiece of Gana Pratirodh Mancha (Forum for People’s Resistance) in its June 2009 1st year no.3 issue. It was taken, as we learn from the editorial note, before the results of the Lok Sabha elections were declared. The interview covered many aspects of which we have taken only those which are relevant for our purpose. This is the only piece available at hand till now where we could get an idea of how the Maoist leadership has assessed this historic struggle. Some portions of the text, I feel, need clarification. However, in view of the overall present situation, it is next to impossible to get any direct access to him. So we are keeping the text exactly as it was published in the periodical. This is a free translation from the Bengali original.

Lalgarh is second Naxalbari: The Naxalbari movement has brought forward an alternative to parliamentary politics. After Telangana, Naxalbari brought armed struggle to the political agenda. When Naxalbari received a setback, the Communist Party, though in existence, was a very weak and ordinary force. The Lalgarh movement started in November and its historical context is the success of the November revolution. In the state of West Bengal, revisionist social fascists have been in power for

more than three decades. Lalgarh got rid of this politics. In none of the other states was the CPI (M) in power for long. They came to power in Kerala earlier, but were unable to remain in power for long. During the thirty years the CPI (M) was in power in West Bengal, they converted it into an experimental ground of how revisionism could strike root throughout the world. Thus West Bengal became the real testing ground for the genuine revolutionary force. Here one thing should be kept in mind. The area which is weak from their point of view will crumble first. In this state, they are comparatively weak and revolutionary forces are strong in Jangalmahal. For this reason, the Lalgarh movement could be built up here. In no other part of the country, not to speak even of Naxalbari, could a movement with such a powerful mass base be built up. For this reason, we are considering the Lalgarh movement as the second Naxalbari. There is also another observation here. At present, under the leadership of our party, in Dandakaranya, Andhra, Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand, resistance movement has been advancing. This advance is developing towards positional war. It was at such a moment that the Lalgarh movement was born. The movement spread and people of 1100 villages got themselves associated with it. In the areas blockaded, thousands of people sat down on the road—this developed into a rebellion. Why did the revolt continue so long? The discontent and anger that had been accumulating over the years burst forth as a rebellion like Naxalbari uprising. It stormed the gates of the revisionists. Lalgarh has showed how to carry out the boycott of administration by combining military activity and mass movement. See the election, there was a massive boycott of votes after Naxalbari. In some areas, polling was very low. See what happened during the 2008 election in Dandakaranya. Boycott was nearly total. Dandakaranya advanced towards mobile warfare. Lalgarh movement is not a mobile war; it is a preparatory stage towards that direction. In those areas like West Bengal as also other states, where class struggle is weak, the Lalgarh movement will act as the torch-bearer. For these reasons, we consider Lalgarh to be second Naxalbari.

Passive attitude of the intellectuals: Actually, as a result of the Nandigram and Singur movements, a large section of the West Bengal intellectuals parted ways with the CPI (M). In our country, a sizeable section of the intellectuals was associated with the Communist movement. Before the division of the CPI, most of the intellectuals were with them. There was an organization of writers and intellectuals also. In the later period, a large section of them got themselves attached to the CPI (M). Then after the Naxalbari movement, intellectuals again got divided. As a result, one part joined the stream of Naxalbari, while the other remained with the CPI (M). Specially a large section of intellectuals in West Bengal joined the stream of Naxalbari. However, when the Naxalbari movement faced a setback in the decade of the seventies, this section of intellectuals almost receded into the background. Except one or two, the polarization among intellectuals came again as a result of the influence of Singur and Nandigram movements.

Today, we are confronted also with another problem. Throughout the world, imperialism, particularly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been purchasing intellectuals through various means. In today's world, in any country in any university, professors are either directly or indirectly connected with World Bank or IMF projects. In this way, the many intellectuals in West Bengal are given advantages by the CPI (M) and thereby kept within their fold.

Another thing should be considered. In the present-day social life, luxurious living and consumerism are increasing to such an extent that there is no limit to people's lust for luxury. On the other hand, all political parties are buying intellectuals. During the last few decades, there was the weakening of mass movements, and this had its impact on the intellectuals as well. Along with that, what is also noticeable is the weakness in our movement. Although we have been able to develop armed guerrilla struggle into the stage of mobile warfare, we have not been able to spread the political movement in a way so as to influence the intellectuals throughout the country. For these various reasons, the intellectual

section today is not in a position to combat state terror. There is a change in the method of state terror also.

At one point of time Andhra Pradesh was the hub of social activism of intellectuals. Civil rights organisations also supported armed struggle there. The state killed some of them. It even killed Dr Ramanatham, a children's doctor. In the later days, due to the pressure put on the state by various intellectuals and organisations, the state could not commit such brutality for decades. Once they had killed Dr. Ramanatham; now they kept Dr. Binayak Sen behind the bars for two years. This imprisonment of Dr. Sen had its effect on various intellectuals and that is precisely what the state wants. But now if the intellectuals do not cast off their middle class mentality, they won't be able to counter the state. Just pay attention to the case of West Bengal. A large number of intellectuals came out to the streets in a spontaneous procession with the participation of around 70 to 80 thousand after 10th November 2007. Later, however, they got themselves tied up, either directly or indirectly, with various parliamentary parties. Now they will not come out of the ambit of parliamentarism. Whatever solutions they seek, they want that to occur within the fold of parliamentary politics. Don't they know that problems cannot be solved within the parliamentary process? That they know, but they won't come out of it. They will openly criticise 'Maoism' and oppose the revolutionaries during the period of war. During the last forty years since the beginning of Naxalbari movement, there had been many ups and downs. Many generations have seen so many ups and downs during the course of people's war. Thus to remain revolutionary for long is no easy task. That is why Mao said clearly that it was easy to do good work for some days, but to do good work for the whole life was not that easy. We have to realise this well enough. Along with this, ideological struggles have also receded to the background; particularly after the setback in Russia and China, post-modernism has raised its head in a big way. Post-modernism has blurred the vision of the future among intellectuals. This also is a major cause. There is no ideological clarity. Without ideological clarity it is no easy task for the intellectuals to come

to the field of struggle. The inability to fight an ideological struggle across the country in order to demolish these erroneous philosophical trends had been one of our major weaknesses. Illusion about imperialism, even if indirectly, has developed as a result. Similarly some faith in parliament and constitution has also developed. We are also weak in waging the struggle that is needed to help them break out of this bond. Because of all these reasons, the progressive, revolutionary role that is essential for the intellectuals to play suffers from serious weakness; there is erroneous thinking and they are confined within the parliamentary framework. Although one section among them recognises the need of revolutionary struggle, they have some hesitation in extending vocal support to it by wishing away state terror. That is why what we need today is more Lalgarhs, more Nandigrams, more political movements. Once they realise all this, there can be a polarisation among intellectuals.

State Suddenly Realises that there had been no Development for the Adivasis for Decades

Both the central and state governments have suddenly awakened to the realisation that there had been no development at all in the Jangalmahal area. A task force has been formed and Rs.100-crore package for Lalgarh mulled precisely at a time when the joint armed forces of the same governments have been letting loose hell in the Jangalmahal villages. Departments like agriculture, health, Paschimanchal Unnayan Affairs, ARD, irrigation, PHE, panchayat and rural development, etc would recommend development projects. The project proposals will be prepared after the eight bureaucrats of different departments of the state government hold discussions with local people to ascertain their needs (*The Statesman*, 1 July 2009). In order to woo the tribals in the backward areas of Bankura and Purulia, the state government has started talking about setting up a university in the two districts to address the long-standing demand of the region (*HT Kolkata Live* 24 June 2009). According to news reports, a 32-point charter of recommendations has been sent to the central government for

undertaking developmental work in the region (*ABP*, 2 July 2009). In an attempt to appease the tribal community, the West Bengal School Education Minister, Partha De said that Santhali medium education will be imparted to the tribal students up to the secondary level very soon (*The Statesman*, 7 July 2009). Side by side, as if not to be accused of lagging behind, the West Medinipur district health administration has prepared a blueprint to upgrade primary health centres (PHCs) in Ramgarh, Dharampur, Pirakata, Bhimpur, Kantapahari and many other areas in the Maoist dominated zone (*HT Kolkata Live*, 24 June 2009).

Lalgarh Effect in other States

The Lalgarh movement has already become a symbol of resistance against the oppressors and the lesson has been learnt by adivasis in other states also. Tribals of Koraput, Orissa reportedly supported by the Maoists, have started tilling their lands over which they had forfeited their “legal claims” due to skulduggery of rapacious traders, non-tribal local businessmen and outsiders many years ago. Many adivasis in Narayanpatna block, with pieces of red clothes covering their head or tied to their wrists, marched into agricultural fields on 7 July and ploughed the rain-soaked fields as some armed with sharp-edged weapons kept surveillance over the proceedings. Narayanpatna was completely cut off after all roads leading to the area were blocked with felled trees. On 18 June, nine personnel of the Orissa Special Striking Force (OSSF) were killed in a landmine blast triggered by the Maoists, when they were moving in a vehicle to remove the trees from the road. The roads were cleared only after the Central Home Minister P Chidambaram visited Koraput on 25 June. During the 12-day blockade of Narayanpatna, the activists of the Chasi Muliya Adivasi Sangha (CMAS), which is spearheading the movement to restore the lands to the dispossessed tribals, had started forcibly occupying the lands possessed by the non-tribals. Srikant, the state convenor of CMAS, told a reporter: “Under the regulations of 1956, tribal land cannot be transferred or sold to non-tribals without the

government's permission. But nearly 2000 acres in Bandhugaon clock and another 400 acres in Narayanpatna have been taken over by traders, businessmen and influential local non-tribals over many years. The government did nothing to restore the lands to the rightful tribal owners and hence, we have launched this agitation". The government, as usual, has branded it as a Maoist-backed movement. If the Maoists have made a political intervention as a result of the failure of the successive governments to meet the legitimate demands of the adivasis, then for all this, the governments themselves are to blame. Meanwhile, indications are that Koraput is going the Lalgarh way.

The Contours of Lalgarh Battle

The developments in Jangalmahal got influenced by events happening elsewhere, which have similar political significance. On 12 July 2009, as reported in all the leading dailies, the Maoist guerrilla army trapped a huge contingent of police and paramilitary personnel in Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh, killed as many as 36(or 44) jawans including one SP, injured many and decamped with their weapons(*TOI*, 13-7-09). As reported in one daily, the jawans in the Jangalmahal area were so panic-stricken by the threat of Maoist attack that after the completion of post-mortem of the two CPI (M) cadres killed by the Maoist guerrilla army in the night of 10 July, they failed to take the bodies to Shirsi village in the Dherua area (*Sanbad Pratidin*, 13-7-09). Meanwhile, as the news of the Chhattisgarh ambush spread and pictures of the dead bodies of the jawans were shown on the TV channels, terrible fear gripped the paramilitary and police forces. In Chhattisgarh, the Maoists allowed the jawans to enter the dense forests of the Sitagaon area of Rajnandgaon and then launched a series of ambushes. Though in the Jangalmahal area, such serious incidents didn't take place, the joint armed forces have feared similar attacks. They had set up three camps in the forest area, and immediately after that, the Maoist armed squads had killed one CPI (M) leader after another at places which are only at stone-throw distances from the camps. According to press reports, the

members of the families of the jawans had been making frantic calls to their kith and kin (*Bikeler Pratidin*, 13-7-09). The central intelligence officials were making enquiries into the possibilities of connections between the Maoist activities in Rajnandgaon and those in Jangalmahal. According to unconfirmed reports, some posters were seen in the jungle area between Khorgaon and Karkoti villages in Rajnandgaon district, which asserted that the ambush in that place was in retaliation to paramilitary atrocities in the Jangalmahal area of West Bengal (*Sanbad Pratidin*, 14-7-09). However, the SP, Manoj Verma denied that the armed forces had been suffering from a fear psychosis due to the ambushes in Chhattisgarh (*Dainik Statesman*, 18-7-09).

Police Forces Gripped by Fear-psychosis Using People as Human Shields

However much the senior police officials might deny the mental stress undergone by the jawans for fighting an invisible and elusive enemy, the stress of the battle for Lalgarh is proving to be too much for many of them. In order to avoid a Maoist strike, senior officials are using everything from vehicles with Press stickers to ambulances to move around the forested terrain. As for example, during the bandh on 22 July, police supplied food and essential items to the Dharampur and Gohamidanga police camps in an ambulance. “Some officers are using Press and other stickers like ‘patient’, ‘LIC’ and ‘BSNL’. This is increasing the risk for vehicles sporting authentic stickers”, said a constable. This implies that these state agents are actually using genuine patients, LIC and BSNL staffs as human shields, which the West Bengal home department itself had accused the Maoists precisely of doing. “Some senior officers have gathered stacks of these stickers and are using them after removing the police tag from vehicles. There are at least 12 four-wheelers with such stickers. They are even changing number plates to prevent identification”.

Another policeman said: “Our seniors are taking off stars and other identification marks from their uniforms and are moving around as constables and home-guards. They are moving with us

as they know fully well that Maoists generally target only higher-ranked officers”. Another constable from North 24-Parganas alleged: “We have no training in firing tear-gas shells or automatic rifles, but the seniors are forcing us to carry SLR rifles (sic!) and tear-gas guns. Some aged constables have been sent for duty here, which violates a police department order. The order clearly states that only policemen below 40 years of age were to be sent. We have some constables here between 50 and 55 years”.

As the battle for Lalgarh has been dragging for days and months with no clear victory in sight for those who imposed this unjust war on the people of Jangalmahal, the murmurs of protest are growing louder among the rank and file. “This might spark a revolt. Our superiors had told us that we would be on duty here for a maximum of two weeks, but we have already spent a month in this hostile terrain. The money we had also been running low”. Why are the Maoists still roaming freely in the area? According to a media person, a CRPF jawan had a unique reply: “Actually, we came here to provide protection to the policemen. There is not much else for us to do” (*TOI*, 23 July 2009).

It has now become quite clear that the joint armed forces have not been able to apprehend any one of the Maoists so far. The Maoists apparently, as the intelligence officials admit, have a far better intelligentsia network than the police and pick out police informers with ease. “They have killed many for supplying information to the police. We can’t expect a villager to turn up with specific information about guerrillas in Maoist hotbed”, one senior officer said. Kuldeep Singh, IGP, had to admit that the police had not been able to flush out the rebels from the forests. “The jungles of Pingboni, Kadashole, Kantapahari and Jhitka are inter-linked and the guerrillas can go from one place to another freely”, he said (*The Telegraph*, 13 July 2009).

Students, Guardians and Teachers Raise their Voice

On 13 July 2009, at Gohomidanga, 600 students took out a procession and marched to the local high school, demanding that the armed forces staying in their school building should move



Cops Lathicharge Students and Women

out (*The Telegraph*, 14 July 2009). On 18 July, when the Chief Minister of West Bengal came to Bankura, he was forced to admit that occupation of schools by jawans was wrong and promised to shift camps from school buildings in no time (*ABP*, 19 July 2009).

However, the Chief Minister of West Bengal appears to flaunt one face in public speeches and another in actual practice. Those who have observed him at least from the Singur-Nandigram days would know how his real face looks like. So on 20 July, more than 10,000 people, including children and their guardians, were lathi-charged while holding a demonstration in front of Gohamidanga High School. They were demanding for the past one month that the combined armed forces vacate the school building. According to PCAPA sources, over 50 people were hurt as result. The students, who were at the forefront of a procession that arrived at the school building, bore the main brunt of lathi-charge (*HT*, 21 July 2009). In protest against the lathi-charge, students and guardians started a relay hunger strike from 22 July by setting up a platform (dharna manch) in Gohamidanga and demanded that the DSP, Burdwan, Jyotimoy Roy and the Circle Inspector Asit Bhattacharya should tender apology for ordering the lathi-charge. The students flaunted posters written on sheets of paper, some of which read as follows: “Shame, shame, Buddhababu, we came to school to study only to find that you have kept jawans to beat us. Does ‘Sarbashiksha abhijan’ (Literacy for all) mean precisely this?”. Another poster read as follows: “We spit on you Mr. Chidambaram, does your plan of adivasi development mean beating us? Why are you creating so much trouble in our lives? Is this the policy of the Congress?” (Free translation from the Bengali original) Simple words, but with profound implications. (*Bartaman*, 23 July 2009).

The Bhimpur High School is under the minority commission. It has also been taken over by the armed forces. More than two hundred students of this school along with their teachers covered a distance of 35 kms and went to meet and demonstrate in front of the office of district magistrate in Midinipur town. They could meet the additional district magistrate Aswini Yadav and demanded the withdrawal of armed forces within two days failing which they would start hunger strike along the line of Dharampur (*Ekdin*, 25 July 2009).

The setting up of paramilitary camps inside school premises caused not only the end of study, but also the end of midday meals for the students. The day the joint armed forces reached Dharampur, one DIG distributed lozenges and biscuits among the students as a means of integration with the local people to fight the Maoists. However, that attempt was too short-lived to have any impact at all. The children of the villages soon saw with their own eyes that those 'police uncles' were quick to seize their schools as a result of which they were deprived not only of study but also of their daily midday meals. One leading Bengali daily gave an estimate of the total number of children (in nine schools), who ceased to have the midday meals at all because of the occupation of their school buildings by the security forces. The names of the schools are given below along with the number of hungry students in brackets. 1) Lalgah Ramakrishna High School(745); 2) Kantapahari Vivekananda Vidyapith(587); 3) Ramgarh Mokshadasundari High School(895); 4) Gohamidanga High School(770); 5) Binpur High School(1,194); 6) Tilabani High School(867); 7) Nachhipur High School(599); 8) Lalgah Saradeshwari Primary School(211); 9) Gohamidanga Primary School(135). The Headmaster of the Kantapahari High School, Asim Gangopadhyay said: "Eighty percent of the students in this adivasi area belongs to the scheduled castes and come from very poor families. As the midday meal has come to a close, almost 600 students are being deprived of getting one meal a day". As a result, 69 students staying in the hostel were forced to leave and go their homes. Ganesh Tudu of class V and Lakshimoni Hansda of class VII said that they could not have two meals a day. There

are times when they are forced to go to bed with empty stomach. The midday meals enabled them to have rice and vegetables; but now that has been stopped (*ABP*, 25 July 2009).

As the schools were not vacated by the jawans despite the tall talk by the Chief Minister and the home secretary every now and then, the People's Committee started three makeshift schools at Gohomidanga on 25 July (*Bartaman*, 26 July 2009).

Many villagers, according to one report, said that protests that began spontaneously among students and teachers were being steered by the Maoists and their sympathisers now. Police sources said that the Maoist rebels were trying to cash in on the anger of the students and their parents. "Had it not been for the Maoists, we wouldn't have suddenly got so many students in different areas clamouring for the immediate shift of the forces", an officer remarked.

While there is nothing unnatural in the Maoists 'cashing in on the anger' of the students and their parents to champion and extend their revolutionary cause, there is reason to accept the fact that the students would have in any case stood up to fight. Essentially, it also implies that the Maoists have become so strongly integrated with the people of the region that it is almost impossible to isolate them from the people.

Slander Campaigns against the People's Committee by the Police

When the show of might and repression failed to weaken the resistance of the people, senior police officials have started a slander campaign against the PCAPA with a view to weaken it. They alleged that the committee had forced local businessmen and even the urban tribal people to donate funds amounting to about Rs.15 crore in the past nine months, the majority of which was spent on purchasing ammunition and the building up of the organisation. Chhatradhar Mahato refuted such allegations and said that the police were levelling such allegations only to file false charges against them. "We appealed before all to contribute funds for PSBPC (PCAPA), many people had contributed but

the majority was contributed by the local people. As the movement was for the local tribals, they contributed willingly” (*The Statesman*, 14 July 2009).

Government’s Development Plan

Whenever there is any form of strong resistance by the people against state or government policy/action, the government jumps forward with its various plans for ‘development’. Such steps are necessary to deceive the innocent people as also for their own survival. However, it conveniently forgets everything when the movement subsequently subsides. This is how the ruling classes operate and this is how they would act in future also, unless, of course the people stand up united to assert their rights and dignity and attain their emancipation. This had happened in many places before and there is no reason to believe that it would have a different affair here in Lalgarh. What is important is that such programmes are adopted not in all areas of the country, but only in areas where people are very angry about government apathy and resistance against ruling parties and government policies is particularly strong. The West Bengal government sent a large body of bureaucrats to Jangalmahal to assess the situation there; and in their report prepared after the assessment, the task force submitted a 21-point action plan. These would include drinking water facilities, jobs, irrigational development, supply of essential goods by modifying BPL and rationing system, etc. All these are to be done within three months through the district magistrate, and not through the panchayats (*TOI*, 15 July 2009; *ABP*, 15 July 2009). Side by side, pattas have to be given to those adivasis living in the jungle areas under the Forest Rights Act. Here the government played a mean political game. On 23 July the state government said that although formalities had been completed for the disbursement of 60,000 pattas in response to 90,000 such applications, these could not be distributed due to the three-day bandh call given by the PCAPA and the absence of panchayat officials due to the Maoist threat (*The Statesman*, 24 July 2009). Any lay observer would be tempted to ask: neither the Maoist threat nor the three-day bandh was a thing of the past; so why

did the government do nothing in the past decades when the adivasis were left to die and fend everything themselves? Now that, according to the government itself, the Maoists have entered the stage, you are busying yourselves and coming up with tall promises of doing so many things. Had there been no Maoist threat, would you have made such promises? The answer is obvious.

Lalgarh Mancha Demands Withdrawal of Armed Forces

The Lalgarh Mancha (LM), once again, at a press conference held on 13 July, demanded the immediate withdrawal of troops from different areas, including educational institutions in Lalgarh and initiate discussion with the PSBPC. On behalf of the Mancha, Sujato Bhadra said that the imposition of Section 144 was illegal and activists should be allowed entry into the area to ascertain whether there were any human rights violations in the area. The members also highlighted the need for dialogue for the settlement of disputes and denounced the government for cancelling the meeting with the PSBPC slated for 14 July 2009. The organisers also demanded the release of Gour Chakraborty, the spokesperson of the CPI (Maoist) (*The Statesman*, 15 July 2009). Speaking on behalf of Sanhati Udyog, Sukhendu Bhattacharya said that if the Lalgarh movement resembled something violent in nature, then that was due to the long period of neglect and patronage of crime. Among others who spoke were Swapan Ganguly, Krishna Bandyopadhyaya, Pradip Banerjee, Sabyasachi Deb and Sumit Choudhury and others (*Dainik Statesman*, 15 July 2009).

In a recent interview with a daily held on 29 July in Kolkata, Vara Vara Rao, revolutionary poet from Andhra Pradesh, remarked that Lalgarh has now turned into a second Naxalbari movement that rocked the state and the country in the later 1960's. "The developments in Lalgarh are a subject of household talk in Andhra Pradesh. The struggle is inspiring poor and deprived people across the country", he said. He feels that West Bengal is again turning

into a hotbed of revolutionary movement, following the struggle in Singur, Nandigram and Lalgarh, he further added (*HT*, 30 July 2009).

Continuing Brutal Atrocities Perpetrated by State Armed Forces/CPI(M) Hermads

The repressive police machinery did perform the task for which they are created and brought here—the task of beating up and breaking up people’s resistance. They did it against the students and guardians. They did not spare others either. Chandan Raut, a reporter of the Bengali daily, *Dainik Statesman*, was beaten up with a bamboo stick and he got injured on the right elbow; another newsman, Lakshman Roy of *Tara* TV channel, was writhing in pain as he was pushed to the ground. Debnath Maity, a photographer attached to another daily, *Bartaman*, was pushed to the ground and beaten up; Debraj Ghosh, another photographer attached to *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, was hit by a stone thrown by a police jawan. Gangaprasad Dandapat of NE Bangla TV channel was also not spared. The reporter noted that it was done particularly by jawans without any nameplates on their uniforms, who had been doing such things. The forces used filthy language of all types against reporters, students and guardians. The reporter writes that some of these persons were CPI(M) hermads or part of the ‘ghoskar brigade’ (*Dainik Statesman*, 21 July 2009).

The day the TMC central ministers went with relief materials, women were lathicharged in Lalgarh. Mrs. Sitamoni Hembrom, Mrs. Hiramoni Kisku and Mrs. Bharati Hansda showed their scars to the ministers. Mr. Banamali Mahato of Asnasuli, Mr. Haripada Mahato of Bamal and Mrs. Barun Mandal of Goaldanga narrated to the visiting ministers and leaders how they were tortured by the joint armed forces and how studies of school children of Lalgarh area have been affected since 17 June. The presence of the troops has also affected the livelihood of the adivasi people. Mrs. Usha Rani Rana of Bagjhora told the leaders that they could not go to the forest to collect firewood as the joint armed forces were not allowing them to enter the forests. The villagers also demanded the arrest of Dalim Pandey, Dharampur local

committee secretary of the CPI (M) and his cohorts as they had looted lakhs of government funds meant for tribal development (*The Statesman*, 29 July 2009).

Manoranjan Mal, the husband of Jharna Mal, a resident of Pathardanga village, was picked up by the joint armed forces during 'Operation Lalgarh' and had not returned since. His wife told a reporter: "come and see how I am surviving, how I am feeding my four children. What was his fault? Jharna fails to understand why he should be arrested while sleeping in his own house. "Where should he have slept if not in his own house? If my husband is such a bad man, then I too should be arrested". When the troops came, they found him in his house, promptly dragged him away and lapped a few cases on him.

There are others, in and around Lalgarh, who have suffered similarly during the police operations. Santosh Mahato of Tarki village is one. Since 24 July, he has been limping along a 4-km stretch of kutchra village road, from Tarki village to the hospital in Lalgarh town, twice a day, to take pain-killer shots. His trouble started on 24 July morning when police forces surrounded the village. "On seeing the police, most villagers fled. I was in my house. They called me out and asked me to take them to the house of a PCAPA leader. When they did not find him at his house, they hurled me to the ground and a policeman stood on my chest. Then I was thrashed with rifle butts. My lower back aches so badly that I can hardly walk on uneven ground", said Santosh Mahato, who works in a cattle-shed in Jhargram town.

Subrata Bhattacharya, Congress leader of Belpahari, remarked: "Terrorism practised by the Maoists is bad. But when the government practises terrorism, the implications are far more serious". He feels the way police are arresting people indiscriminately and slapping cases on them, the cause of the Maoists would be strengthened. Dhirendranath Baske, who resigned as advisor to tribal affairs of the government, feels that the division between tribals and backward castes and the other sections of these areas would deepen as a result of the operations. "The operations have broken the back of the economy of the tribals. Large tracts of paddy fields in these areas are lying

uncultivated as people have fled their villages. At this rate, they will face starvation” (TOI, 30 July 2009).

Loot and Plunder by the Joint Armed Forces

The joint armed forces have been accused of indulging in loot and plunder of the property of the villagers of Jangalmahal. For a mercenary army such as this, there was, however, nothing unusual in it. The PCAPA has accused the joint armed forces of looting the property of the adivasis and also licensed guns permitted by the government. On 18 July, hundreds of troops from the Dharampur and Gohamidanga camps entered Ajnashuli village at 7am, encircled it and started searching for the Maoists. They first entered Banamali Mahato’s house and ransacked it. The roof tiles were broken and under the pretext of looking for the Maoists, they broke utensils, and threw away rice and grains on the floor. As Banamali Mahato was in the field to meet the needs of this harvesting season, his wife Mira Rani Mahato was beaten up with sticks. As Mira Devi narrated the event to the media, the troops came and asked: “Where have you hidden the Maoists?” They then started breaking up everything they could lay their hands on. They looted a licensed gun, motor cycle, broke open a cash box and took away gold ornaments, cash and everything. They also beat me”. Then the marauding forces entered Rajkishore Mahato’s house and ransacked it. At that time, food was being cooked on the hearth. The vegetables were thrown on the ground. Valuable articles were looted. As Rajkishore Mahato was not in his house, his wife Anita Mahato got a thrashing. An amount of Rs.10, 000 was looted by these ‘keepers of law and order’. After that, the houses of Jogen Mahato, Kshirod Mahato and Ajit Mahato were searched and the mercenary soldiers burnt down valuable documents relating to their house property. The forces forcibly took away Bhabesh Mahato, Naresh Mahato,

Ajit Mahato and Asit Mahato along with many articles. Although these four were later released from detention, their goods were not returned (*Dainik Statesman*, 19 July 2009).

Mass Resistance Continuous Even Amidst the Brutal Suppression of the Armed Forces.

The presence of thousands of troops seemed to have made hardly any impact on the Maoists who have been operating in the vast countryside of Jangalmahal. They have been setting up people's courts in many areas and delivering judgements on those they described as 'enemies of the people'. Through posters, they demand the distribution of food through ration shops five days a week. They organised such a court in Dherua under Midinipur Sadar and carried out the verdict on two CPI (M) activists on 11 July (*ABP*, 12 July 2009). On 12 July, they set fire to the house of Sudarshan Das, a CPI (M) worker of Memul under Salboni police station (*Dainik Statesman*, 13 July 2009). One reporter noted: "These two incidents of Midnapur Sadar and Salboni at an interval of 20 hours are a pointer to the fact that Maoists, untamed even after a 24-day operation by the forces, have reconsolidated their grip in some parts of Jangalmahal with renewed vigour and that too in the presence of 44 companies(sic! At least 50)...The opening of newer fronts by the Maoists, a tactic of guerrilla warfare of the outfit, was enough to bewilder the police..." (*The Statesman*, 13 July 2009). Two other CPI (M) leaders/activists were also killed at Madhupur by the Maoists (*Dainik Statesman*, 15 July 2009). Throughout this period, gun-battles between the security forces and the Maoists have become almost a regular feature.

There is no doubt that at the initial stage of the aggression by the joint armed forces, the people and the People's Committee leaders got afraid and were at a loss what to do, how to resist. They had never seen such mobilisation of troops with sophisticated weapons before. Gradually, however, they could overcome the initial shock and braced themselves for resistance. The PCAPA held its first open meeting on 12 July since the armed forces moved into the region about 7km from Lalgah town and

addressed a gathering of about 50 villagers (*The Telegraph*, 13 July 2009). This was a very small gathering to start with at that stage, as big gatherings like those in earlier times were difficult to organise due to military operations. It was decided to hold small gatherings, instead of holding central gatherings. However, once it started going, it gained in speed, frequency and size.

For many days, the 'left-front' government, besides initiating 'Operation Lalgarh' have imposed Section 144 for preventing the people in the locality to commence big rallies and also to debar people from other areas to enter into Jangalmahal. During the time of Singur movement, the same government imposed Section 144 for months together and even detained and arrested people well before they could reach the restricted zone. The same method was applied here in the case of Lalgarh. In fact, all repressive governments have a lot to learn from the CPI (M) on how people's movements can be suppressed by trampling down democratic norms and even by breaking the laws which the government is supposed to uphold in order to serve the state. In order to break the chain, the People's Committee called a three-day bandh from 20 July 2009 in the three districts of West Midinipur, Bankura and Puruli and also organised a mammoth procession in Dharampur with participation from many villages, assembled at Mulapara More and marched to the Gohamidanga High School where the jawans had set up a camp by seizing the school buildings. In the process, they broke Section 144, challenged the authority of the government and served an ultimatum to the officials to vacate the camp within the next 24 hours. Contacted over the phone, the Maoist leader Bikash remarked that their organisations CPI (Maoist) should not be mixed up with the movement launched by the People's Committee (*ABP*, 20 July 2009). On 18 July, there were two big processions, one in Dharampur where around 2,500 people joined, and the other at Brindabanpur where around 3000 people took part (*Sanbad Pratidin*, 19 July 2009). Meanwhile, the PCAPA recommenced their police boycott programme in Dharampur and Kantapahari from 17 July (*Dainik Statesman*, 17 July 2009). Such processions gradually became almost a daily feature now again.

During this period of hectic political activity, people participated in processions of different sizes. The media described some of these as being organised purely by the PCAPA and some others purely by the Maoists. This distinction emerges from a notion—in vogue now-a-days also among some sections of the urban literati—that the Maoists are trying to hijack this people’s movement to further their own political interests. On the other end of the spectrum of this thinking the ruling ‘left front’ and the oldest party of the Indian ruling classes would like to coalesce both the PCAPA and the CPI (Maoist) as one and the same. Although the full story of Maoist involvement in the Lalgarh movement remains to be told, it is difficult to make such a distinction between the two at this stage of the people’s movement. In fact, the participation of Maoist cadres in the PCAPA processions as also that of PCAPA members in Maoist led mass rallies, if not on the same level of people’s military front activities is visible. It is too early at this stage to dwell on this question now as sufficient information is unavailable. If the governments have not decided to totally block the region for the entry of the media and those who wanted study this movement, it could have been possible to devolve on this issue.

Land to the Landless

Faced with the people’s wrath, maybe also because of the presence of the Maoists despite the deployed security forces flag marching all over the region, the CPI (M) cadres and leaders in different areas started to withdraw their membership of their party by affixing posters on the walls or the tree trunks and doing sit-ups (standing and sitting in turn simultaneous holding their ears with both hands indicating their surrender) in the people’s courts (*Ekdin*, 23 July 2009). Many others had fled their village homes when they found that the joint armed forces which were supposed to resettle them in the villages (like Nehru and Patel resettled the landlords in Telangana villages in 1947-53 deploying Indian army) to renew their notorious activities as hermdads were rendered useless in the face of people’s wrath as in Nandigram.

The result was that the land which was under their (CPI (M) goons') possession, remained uncultivated in this harvesting season. The PCAPA, as reported in the press, decided to distribute those lands among the landless adivasis for cultivation for the time being. Anuj Pandey, the CPM leader whose palatial residence was pulled down by the people, Bimal Pandey and Dalim Pandey own huge quantity of land some of which are *kebas* lands. All these plots of land are in the name of poor adivasis; but as they mortgaged these plots to Anuj Pandey for money and are unable to repay it, Anuj Pandey, the 'new moneylender-landlord' of the CPI (M) has been enjoying the entire cultivable land as his personal property. These plots of land are to be taken over by the PCAPA and distributed among the poor adivasis (*Bartaman* 18 July 2009). This 'land to the tiller' programme and the distribution of land among the landless poor by confiscating the land of the 'neo landlords' is the Maoist programme of the New Democratic Revolution and clearly bears their imprint, but it also clearly bears the mark of aspirations of the local people of adivasis as seen above in the case of Koraput adivasis in Orissa. Meanwhile, on 18 July, another CPI(M) leader was killed by the Maoists in Andharishol village near Jhargram (*Ekdin*, 19 July 2009).

On 28 July—a day when TMC (the major Parliamentary party after CPI (M) in West Bengal today) leaders were visiting Lalgarh, 16 tribal women were seriously injured when the police did a lathi-charge (beating with heavy wooden batons indiscriminately) and fired tear gas shells near the Lalgarh police station where the women had gathered to protest against atrocities by the joint armed forces. When the people set out for Lalgarh bazaar to meet the TMC leaders, many of them were stopped on the way, forced back, arrested and beaten up. A more serious incident involved nearly 200 women marching towards Lalgarh police station from Kantapahari. They were almost there, when a large police force blocked their way. But the women tried to force their way through the police barricade, raising anti-police slogans and demanding the withdrawal of joint armed forces. This led to a scuffle and police began a lathi-charge. When batons failed to cow down the

women, the police fired tear-gas shells. Salku Soren, one of the agitators, said: “We had gone to Lalgah to protest peacefully against the atrocities by the joint armed forces. They harass us by searching our houses and asking us all sorts of questions. We are living a life of fear in the presence of joint armed forces and innocent people are being picked up for questioning and beaten up on the pretext of being Maoists”.

Women in Struggle

Throughout these months since November 2008, women had been in the forefront of struggle, irrespective of the form it took. On 25 July, the joint armed forces in course of their hunt for the Maoists, entered villages such as Pathardanga, Amlia and Birkunri and picked up Sishuranjan Singh and Tapan Giri of Amlia and Bablu soren and Tuntuni Giri of Tantishole, at a time when they were busy on the field during this harvesting season of this late monsoon this year. Furious, womenfolk of different villages assembled and marched towards Lalgah police station to set the villagers free. They were released just before the procession reached the police station. Chhatradhar Mahato said that from 26 July onwards women in the region would directly join the police boycott programme. According to news reports, in every village mohalla (locality), women are conducting meetings and making plans of how to resist daily army operation and raids in the villages (*Dainik Statesman*, 26 July 2009).

On 27 July, when Paltu Hembrom, a daily labourer of Chandabila village, was working on the field, he was forcibly dragged away by the security forces of India the largest democracy in world and taken to the Lalgah police station (recently rescued station). Women of the village assembled and marched to the police station and demanded his release and the immediate cessation of raids by security forces. The police- paramilitary complex, however, remained adamant and pushed the women away (*Dainik Statesman*, 28 July 2009).

The women’s wing of the PCAPA is bracing itself for the struggle against state atrocities. The leaders, both men and

women, remember every village has equal number of men and women in their committees) have been moving from village to village, organising women and making plans. They complained to the scant media persons available by this time (as the West Bengal Government banished them from this forbidden land along with the urban intellectuals who seek to go there) that when the Mamata's Union ministers came to Lalgarh, a large number of bikes formed part of the contingent. But they were not accused of breaking Section 144; why then should the tribals be accused of breaking so when they form processions? Why should there be such differential treatment between one and the other? Can there be differential application of the same law? Purnima Murmu and Sraboni Soren, the leaders of the women' wing, asserted that they would carry on their just struggle against police atrocities (*Dainik Statesman*, 30 July 2009).

New Developmental Work

Despite 'Operation Lalgarh', the PCAPA is consolidating its position extending its influence in new areas such as the Ajodhya mountain area in the Baghmundi-Balarampur area bordering Purulia and Jharkhand. Very recently, the committee has set up a *bat* (village market) in Khuntanr village where people assemble every Sunday in the afternoon with their wares. The police camp that was set up in Tilai-Keroa primary school was vacated by the jawans. A health centre was created in this area. Amin Chandra Mandal, the doctor, said: "Many patients are coming. The government health centre is very far from this place" (*ABP*, 23 July 2009).

As the Dharampur High School is under the occupation of the troops, the PCAPA decided to set up temporary schools nearby for the students. The school building would initially be made of bamboo sticks and tarpaulins with sitting arrangements for around 800 students. The teachers of the Dharampur High School were asked by the PCAPA leaders to take classes at the temporary school. In fact, the school actually started very soon.

Apart from this, the committee also decided to start a health centre at Bohamidanga Chowk at Dharampur. This health centre would also have a temporary structure. Local doctors have been asked to treat patients at the centre. Earlier the PCAPA reportedly with the backing of the Maoists had started running two health centres at Belpahari and Kantapahari, both of which are under army occupation.

Needless to say, health and education are the two most primary needs of the people, of the young generation who, as we have been taught to remember from our school days, are the foundations of a better society to live in. However, for the last six decades since the 'transfer of power' in 1947, virtually no steps have been taken by either the state or the central government. The people have been forced to live under abysmal conditions without any proper food, health, education, not to speak a decent house to live in. The Maoists and the peoples' committee have taken up this task to do it themselves by mobilising the people amidst the struggle of this dimension and have thus made a mockery of unending governmental sermons on the development of the Jangalmahal region.

Maoists Abduct a Police Official and Then Set him Free Unharmd

Meanwhile, on 24 July, a police officer, Dipak Pramanik (ASI) was abducted by the Maoists in Lalgarh in protest against police atrocities on innocent villagers, according to them. It was around 2 pm when a truck carrying water, from Midnipur, was heading for the Bhimpur police camp. Besides the ASI, other policemen, there were a driver and a helper. When the truck came near Pirrakhuli village, a few hundred people blocked the road and dragged all these men out of the vehicle. Villagers claimed that early in the morning, a police team went to Belasole village and tortured several people. The crowd, then, drove the truck into Sitalpur forest where armed rebels had been waiting. They punctured the tyres of the truck and set it aflame. While the other two were released, the ASI was not. In fact, he bit the hand

of one of the rebels to escape. He was badly beaten up. A police team which went to rescue the abducted officer had to beat a hasty retreat in the face of strong resistance by the Maoists. The Maoist leaders claimed that he has been arrested and he won't be released unless he signed a declaration stating that police will not torture common villagers any more (*TOI*, 25 July 2009). Senior police officials made frantic phone calls to Chhatradhar Mahato to arrange the release of the ASI. In fact, there were phone calls from different sides. Ultimately, on the next day, the police officer was set free by the Maoists after keeping him in their company for 14 hours. The officer said that they behaved well with him and gave him rice and fish to eat. He remarked: "When they were taking me to the jungle, I had the feeling that I was going to meet my doom. But they behaved well. At late night, they even allowed me to make calls to my home. They served me with rice and fish". "They said: 'you need not worry. We hold no enmity with lower level policemen like you. Our fight is against senior officers and government". When asked why do they generally attack lower level policemen, he replied: "They said it was to procure arms". After setting him free, Maoist leader Bikash stated that it was on the basis of opinion of the people, intellectuals and media persons that he was released. (*ABP*, 26 July 2009). Police officials, however, held that the release was gained as a result of pressure exerted by the PCAPA on the Maoists. Meanwhile, in another similar incident, two police constables in plainclothes who had been returning to Dharampur camp on a bike were abducted at Brindabanpur on 30 July allegedly by the Maoists are still untraced. Neither the Maoists nor anyone else had claimed responsibility for their disappearance as yet. Search operations had been going on in the villages and jungles for them, till now without any result (*Bikeler Pratidin*, 31 July 2009).

What exactly transpired is not clearly known as yet. But that is not that important. What is more important is the question: How do the policemen treat a Maoist cadre when he or she gets arrested by the police? What type of atrocity do the police commit against the Maoist prisoners in the police lock-up when they are apprehended? What is the track record of the West Bengal police

force and those in other states in its attitude towards such political prisoners? By setting the policeman free and unharmed, the Maoists had underlined the basic difference between the state forces and the Maoist guerrilla army.

Maoists are All Around

For some time, sections of the media as also some of those bureaucrats who walk in the corridors of power kept on saying that Maoist leaders and cadres had fled to Jharkhand as a result of the flushing-out operations by the troops. In the initial stage of 'Operation Lalgah', there weren't many gun-fights between the Maoists and the security forces, barring some mine blasts none of which could hardly do any damage to the security forces. That prompted some officials to declare that they had been free from panic situation. Such a notion is a commentary on their profound ignorance of the basics of guerrilla warfare as propounded by Mao Tse-tung. This has actually been borne out by events taking place in the past few days in the Jangalmahal area.

As one newsperson writes, "The Maoists have not fled Lalgah and neither have they given up. Instead, they are organising regular meetings with villagers at Lalgah and surrounding areas, at times even at stone-throw distances from police stations, outposts and temporary camps, indicating that the government's goal to reassert their hold over the Maoist-dominated territory is still far away". Otherwise, one cannot explain the presence of the Maoist leader Bikash in many places, issuing press statements, giving speeches and leading processions. An officer posted at Lalgah police station was quite outspoken in his observation: "the Maoists are all around us. If anybody is thinking that by entering these areas from where we were banished the government had reclaimed its hold over the territory, then they are still only day-dreaming. Their presence is being felt every moment". According to him, the jawans are still mere spectators, whereas the Maoists are actually ruling these areas, remaining almost an invisible but potent force. An officer posted at Goaltore police station said: "They (Maoists) are continuing to propagate inside the villages against our 'forcible

entry inside the territory’ and asking people to prepare for another uprising. It is really tough for us to check their entry to these villages at present”. The police also admitted that they were still to develop an informer network on the movement of the Maoists (*HT*, 14 July 2009). This itself is an admission that even after nearly one and a half months of paramilitary presence and operation, the state had failed to isolate the ‘fish from water’.

Maoists Send an Open Letter to the Chief Minister of West Bengal

Recently, the Maoist leader Kishanji has sent an open letter to Buddhadev Bhattacharjee asserting that even if the central government sends its armed force to Lalgarh, it would not be able to ‘save’ the CPI (M) from inevitable doom. He stated that their battle would continue till the state government tenders an ‘unconditional apology’ for the excesses committed by the armed forces on the people of Jangalmahal and the government withdraws joint armed forces. To avoid further bloodshed, the Maoist leader advised the Chief Minister to hold talks with the people of Lalgarh and give them proper irrigation facilities within a year. He also urged the Chief Minister to abandon the Nayachar project in the interest of the fishermen of the area. He also urged him to return land to the farmers of Singur and stop setting up of SEZs in the state.

To counter the charges of unleashing terror on the common people, Kishanji urged Buddhadev Bhattacharjee to send a 12-member delegation comprising four government representatives, four human rights activists at all-India level and four persons who have faith in Maoism. Let them visit Lalgarh and see it themselves who are actually committing terror, stated in a five-page letter claiming that many people have fled their villages owing to state terror. Denying charges, Kishanji claimed that it

was not the Maoist cadres but the common people of Jangalmahal who themselves had destroyed the houses of the CPI(M) leaders at Lalgarh (*Ekdin*, 22 July 2009; *The Sunday Statesman*, 26 July 2009).

Our Observations

The people of Jangalmahal, at present, are apparently bracing themselves for another round of resistance against the state-led 'aggression'. The call for general strike (bandh) in the three districts given by the PCAPA on 9 July was total completely 'paralysing' West Midinipur, Bankura and Purulia, much to the astonishment of the authorities. The Lalgarh struggle started as a resistance movement against police atrocities. The war launched by the government of West Bengal and the central government by sending joint armed forces against the people left behind tales of torture and brutality which have only added to the pervading anger and hatred that the people can never forget, despite all the so-called healing touches and 'development' programmes. The brave young woman, Parvati of Chhotopelia village gave birth to her daughter in a relief camp and despite requests from the authorities, scornfully turned down all offers of help from those who themselves were responsible for her and her people's plight. She named her daughter *ratri* i.e., night. The baby was born amidst darkness all around. But darkness can never be permanent and so light will definitely gush out of the dark cavern and the morning sun would smile. The top brass of the joint armed forces, which had been celebrating their apparent victory and saying that the whole resistance movement is in disarray and that the Maoists have fled to Jharkhand, have suddenly woken up to the reality that the Maoists are actually all around. The events during the past one and a half months have proved that, contrary to what a section of the urban literati might hold, the Maoists have closely integrated themselves with the people and it is difficult to isolate the Maoists from them. In fact, they have been able to combine armed struggles with struggles over issues relating to people's daily needs. Demands have also been raised for the protection of tribal land, water and the vast natural resources. It is a departure

from the policy of the Naxalites in the early seventies. It is ridiculous to opine, as some urban people hold, that the Maoists have hijacked the movement of the adivasis. The Maoists (then known as CPI/M-L People's War) had been active in West Midinipur, Bankura and Purulia districts ever since the late 1990s and Belpahari and some other areas had been witness to police repression particularly from the early 21st century. The Maoist involvement in the Jangalmahal region needs to be studied from then on to appreciate what this so-called hijacking is all about. The Lalgarh struggle has also betrayed political maturity, flexibility and capacity for improvisation on the part of those who have been leading the movement from the front. Some newspaper journalists have earlier reported that "a whole generation of tribal youths is not in sight in villages the security forces have been through in Lalgarh, prompting fears that some could have taken shelter in forests..." (*The Telegraph*, 29 June 2009). The symptoms are more or less clear. The Jangalmahal region is showing signs of eventually bracing itself for becoming part of a "permanent insurgency".

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