

Ready for talks, but no farewell to arms: Top Maoist Kisenji

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A day after Union Home Minister P Chidambaram called upon Maoists to lay down their arms before they could be invited for talks, top Maoist leader Koteswar Rao alias Kisenji, who is wanted by the security forces, said he was willing to sit across the table with Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee but ruled out giving up arms. He also claimed he had spoken to the CM on September 20.

"We have no problems sitting for talks with the CM or anyone from the state government here. But we cannot lay down our arms, since it is not in our agenda. We want development for the people of Lalgah and therefore we are ready for talks," Kisenji told The Indian Express from an undisclosed location. "We have had bitter experience while going for talks with the governments elsewhere in the country. But we are ready to risk it in Bengal," he added. Kisenji claimed he called up Bhattacharjee on September 20 and had a brief talk over phone with him. "I asked him to stop police atrocities in Lalgah. He said he personally was not for police action, but was under pressure," said Kisenji, adding that the conversation lasted for one-and-a-half minutes. "Later, I wrote letters to the chief minister, but there was no answer," he said.

On Chidambaram's call to lay down the arms, the Maoist leader said, "We will not lay down the arms. We know the government is trying to bring in the Army and the Air Force on us. We are prepared to deal with it." Asked why so many people are being killed in Lalgah, Kisenji said, "They were punished for working against the people. We do not kill innocents."

The Maoist leader admitted to the death of one of his armed cadres in Lalgah. "One of our armed squad members, Comrade Maran, was killed this afternoon by the joint forces in Lalgah," he said. "He was a member of People's Liberation Group. He was travelling near Goaltore when security forces with the help of some CPM goons killed him. He was one of our trusted members." **IE**

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