

Lalgarh stir spreads, cops helpless

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LALGARH: The Lalgarh impasse showed no signs of a let-up on the 12th day of the agitation on Monday, with the government vainly trying to isolate the [Adivasis](#) from the Maoists who are calling the shots.

The situation has gone from bad to worse because the agitation is gathering support from villages of Bankura, Purulia and even parts of Hooghly.

Like before, leaders of all the five Santhal organizations sat with the district administration and promised to call off the blockade. But most of their followers went with the Maoists and decided to spread the movement in the neighbouring blocks [townships]. Worse still, the Kurmis (Mahato) joined the agitation against 'police atrocities', giving it a general character.

Additional district magistrate Raja Aron Israel kept waiting at the BDO office, sending feelers to the agitators that the tribal heads had decided to call off the agitation. But he failed to get any response.

While tribal leaders Nityananda Hembram and Munshiram Murmu pressed for doing away with the [panchayat](#) system and giving all power to tribal heads, about 3,000 men and women from 91 villages of tribal Midnapore held a four-hour long meeting at Kantapahari in Sonajhuri jungle over ways to scale up the agitation.

Maoists seized the opportunity to form village-level committees with 10 members each — five men and five women — thus taking their organization to the grassroots. Villagers from Bankura's Taldangra, Purulia's Bandwan and even Hooghly's Polba joined the first open meeting, sending ripples among the police. District police officers sent an SOS to Writers' Buildings, seeking directives on how to contain the 'rebellion'.

"The force can't wait and watch the situation go out of control. We need to intervene, at least in the fringes of the tribal belt. But there is no such directive from our higher-ups," a senior police officer said.

The ruling CPM is also at its wit's end. CPM district secretary Dipak Sarkar tried the Keshpur-Garbeta routine by sending in the infamous "bike brigade" but it boomeranged. The tribals — with funds from Jharkhand Dishom Party and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha — replied in the same vein. Toughs went around on motorbikes on Monday, brandishing posters of the 'Committee Against Police Atrocities'.

"We don't call it a tribal movement," said Sidhu Soren, secretary of the apex committee elected

from the Dalipur meet. "Most villagers, cutting across caste and creed, have endorsed our 11-point charter of demands against the police. We will continue with the blockade till the administration concedes to our demands."

Committee member Dhurakhaipil Hansda of Kalaboni warned that any police action "would make matters worse". Sensing the mood, mainstream Opposition parties chose to trail the Maoist agitation, even after the agitators denounced Jharkhand Party MLA Chunibala Hansda. Congress leader Manas Bhuniya backed the Lalgarh agitation, a day after Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee had done so.

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