

Deadlock continues in Paschim Medinipur

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Agitators-officials talks inconclusive, will continue

Tribals arrested for blast cannot be freed: government

KOLKATA: Parts of West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur continued to remain cut off from the rest of the district on Friday, following protests by tribal villagers against alleged police excesses. Maoists are known to have a presence in the region.

Representatives of the agitators met local authorities to break the deadlock. The talks, held in the affected Lalgarh area, were inconclusive and would continue, Home Secretary Ashok Mohan Chakravarty said here.

For more than a week, ever since roads were dug up and trees felled to set up roadblocks, access to Lalgarh has remained restricted. Supply of water, power and food has been severely disrupted.

The agitators are protesting against alleged police excesses during raids to track down those responsible for the November 2 IED blast in the region. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had a narrow escape that day as a powerful IED went off moments after his convoy passed through Kalaichandi.

Roadblocks have also been put up in the adjoining sub-divisional town of Jhargram and only a few were removed following Sunday's meeting between leaders of tribal groups and the local administration.

The district authorities assured the agitators that allegations of police excesses would be looked into and action taken against anyone found guilty.

But they were told that the demand for release of all tribals arrested in connection with the blast could not be met.

Those in whose possession arms were found and against whom specific charges were framed would not be released, Mr Chakravarty said.

Nor would the three camps of the Central Reserve Police Force, set up earlier in the region, be withdrawn.

In Kolkata, senior officials and those from the police administration attended a review meeting held by the Chief Minister.

The government, which is keen on avoiding a Nandigram-like situation, has advised authorities in Lalgarh not to take any action that might precipitate a confrontation with the protesters.

Asked about the situation at Lalgarh, Biman Bose, secretary, State Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said the move to apprehend those behind the blast was guided by the administration's anxieties over the law and order situation and was not aimed at the tribals.

The Congress has sought Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi's intervention to facilitate restoration of normality in the area, said its legislature party leader, Manas Bhunia.

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