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Encounter deaths, custodial beatings of PSBJC members, and the *lajja-bisarjan* protest

By Partho Sarathi Ray and Koustav De. *Sept 8, 2009*

Police reported an extended encounter with Maoists on September 2 near Madhupur in which allegedly 2 Maoists were killed, and two others were arrested.

<http://www.anandabazar.com/archive/1090903/3med1.htm>

However, the PSBJC has asserted that the persons arrested and killed were all common villagers, supporters of PSBJC who were attending a rally called to protest the rape of a adivasi woman by the police. The police allegedly raped the woman by entering her house in the name of search-operation. The rally was reportedly 12,000 strong and unarmed when police started firing on the people without provocation. The PSBJC fully rejected the news of the encounter, stating it to be completely fabricated.

According to the police and administration, on September 2 there had been a 4-hour long gun battle between the combined forces and the Maoists near Madhupur village as a result of which two Maoists have been killed and two others have been arrested. On Thursday, September 3, the two arrested people, Ajay Sana and Gautam Mahato, were produced in court where they were remanded to seven days of judicial custody.

However according to sources in Madhupur village, on Wednesday afternoon the procession of PSBJC was proceeding from Madhupur, in Salboni block, towards Godamouli which is on the way to Sijua. Sijua is a CPI(M) stronghold and there have been previous attacks from this side on Madhupur (this correspondent has once witnessed such an attack himself). The procession was first fired on by CPI(M) haramdas hiding in the jungles on the side of the road, and people started running back towards the village. Apparently the combined forces and the COBRA forces were searching in the jungles on the other side of the road and they started firing on these fleeing people. Two of the processionists, Hemanta Debsingha of Madhupur and Jaladhar Mahato of Goaltore were killed in the firing.

Since then the administration have been claiming that these are Maoists. Both the PSBJC and the CPI(Maoist) have rejected the version. The PSBJC has called a 12 hour bandh in West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia against this.

Beating of arrested PSBJC members

In another action, the combined forces had arrested 14 women and 3 men from a PSBJC rally in the Tensabandh area of Kantapahari. Among the three men, Ajay Murmu of Sarasbediya and Vishwanath Soren of Darigeriya were beaten up brutally before being released in the night. The other man, Ramdulal Mandi, and the 14 women were also beaten up badly and when they were produced in the court they actually told the judge about the

torture they have undergone. From eyewitness accounts, most of the women, including elderly women like Sumi Mandi, couldn't even walk by themselves when they were produced in the court. Their limbs were swollen from the beating.

There are also accounts of women being molested during the raids by the combined forces. However, according to the police version, when the police had raided Bansber village in search of Maoists, the women had tried to mobilize the villagers by blowing conch shells and beating drums. When the police lodged tear gas shells to disperse the villagers, the women had hurt themselves trying to flee. This sort of police version about injuries to prisoners is quite common.

On the other hand, Shibu Pratihar, a PSBJC member who had been arrested from Sarenga in Bankura was found hanging in the toilet in the court house in Midnapore where he had been brought to appear before a judge. The police are claiming it as a suicide.

The *lajja-bisarjan* protest

In protest against these atrocities, especially the assault and molestation of the women, the women of Lalgah have decided to go for "lajja-bisarjan" protest, i.e they will strip in front of the police and the combined forces in the same way that the women of Manipur had done in front of the Assam Rifles headquarters a few years back.