

## Maoists want talk with govt but on condition

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KOLKATA: The banned CPI (Maoist), which is leading a movement in Lalgarh and the entire Jangalmahal zone for the past one year, has put up three key conditions for joining talks with the Left Front government in West Bengal.

Maoist politburo member in charge of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa, Kishenji alias Koteswar Rao told ET on Thursday they would not mind holding talks with the government, but on three conditions.

"We want the immediate withdrawal of joint forces from Lalgarh and the entire Jangalmahal area, want unconditional release of 60-odd women who were arrested from Lalgarh and the release of those poor villagers who were implicated falsely in various criminal cases," Kishenji said on Thursday.

The Maoist leader, however, ruled out the possibility of surrendering arms to pave the way for a dialogue with the state government. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and CPIM state secretary Biman Bose had earlier urged the Maoists to surrender arms and give up the path of killings to hold talks with the government.

"How can we surrender arms? We believe in an armed revolution and it is impossible for us to give up arms. The CPIM is asking us to surrender arms knowing fully well our political ideology of armed struggle. The CPIM believes in parliamentary democracy. Will it be possible for them to shun the path of parliamentary democracy?," asked the fugitive Maoist leader.

He said he had written to chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee a long time back requesting him to carry out development activities in Lalgarh and other economically backward areas in West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura. "But we have not received any response from the chief minister. Even, the chief minister did not convey his message to us about our letter to him through the media," Kishenji said.

The Maoist leader was speaking to ET in the aftermath of Monday's fierce clash between the CPI (Maoist) and the CPIM at Eniatpur in West Midnapore district. "Armed CPIM cadres with support from the joint forces are killing innocent villagers and raping poor women ever since the joint operation in Lalgarh got underway a few months back. We want to know how long this torture will continue. We, therefore, want an immediate withdrawal of joint forces from Lalgarh," said Kishenji.

While Kishenji refused to surrender arms, he did not hesitate to welcome Forward Bloc chief Debabrata Biswas' observation that the Lalgarh issue should be resolved politically instead of handling the same with police and armed forces. Biswas told reporters on Tuesday that they considered CPI (Maoist) as a Left party and felt that Lalgarh issue should be solved politically instead of applying force.

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