

Fresh arrests in Lalgarh case

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KOLKATA: A day after two persons were arrested from Kolkata, Vivekananda Kumar, a former CPM leader and now with People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA), was arrested from Arsha in Purulia on Tuesday for alleged Maoist links. Besides, police sealed a press in Manicktala for publishing PCPA posters and leaflets and arrested owner Sadananda Singh.

Two members of rights organization Bandi Mukti Committee Ramesh Das and Bhanu Sarkar were also picked up from College Square late on Tuesday and detained at the Amherst Street PS. Swapan Dasgupta the editor of magazine People's March was picked up by plainclothesman from his Garia residence the same evening.

The crackdown against the Maoists and their sympathizers in the state follows a method similar to Binayak Sen's arrest in Chhattisgarh. The plan, as it appears, is to isolate the core group of Maoists from those in the periphery, snap the intellectual fraternity between Kolkata and Lalgarh and confront the Maoists on their home turf.

But the process is less simple than said. A day after chief secretary Asok Mohan Chakrabarti gave a veiled threat to city luminaries sympathetic to the tribal cause, state home secretary Ardhendu Sen said police won't arrest writer Mahasweta Devi, filmmaker Aparna Sen or poet Joy Goswami because there is no evidence against them.

However, the less-known or the unknown may not have this privilege. For, under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, the onus is on the accused to prove his innocence. Senior lawyers maintain that the state administration need not ban any outfit such as PCPA before rounding up an individual on charges for aiding and abetting a terrorist act or killing police personnel. "The most important thing is how police frame charges using provisions of the UAPA," said a retired high court judge. Under the legal framework, a person collecting funds for PCPA can be booked under provisions of the UAPA, no matter what the court observes while passing its judgment. The administration is thus not going into the debate of whether PCPA is a frontal organization of the banned CPI(Maoist), or whether it should be banned. Instead, it is concentrating on individuals, PCPA organizers and their linkmen as the state government has been doing for long without banning the Maoist outfit like many other states. That explains why Prasun Chatterjee and Raja Sarkhel have been booked under the UAPA. Police claimed that both Chatterjee and Sarkhel, who were working under the banner of Gana Pratirodh Mancha, had provided financial assistance to the rebels through Chhatradhar and PCPA.

"These two had handed over more than Rs1.5 lakh to Chhatradhar in the last few months and attended several PCPA meetings where Mahato and some Maoist leaders like Bikash, Batas,

Rakhal and Sasadhar were present," said a senior official. The grounds are enough to create pressure on those who had been to Lalgarh to meet Chhatradhar when the Lalgarh movement was on in full swing.

Also, the government isn't coming clear on whether it would ban PCPA. But DGP Bhupinder Singh clearly says: "At this moment, we are looking at the PCPA as a frontal organization of the CPI (Maoist), but we are not the ones to decide on a ban."

Police have also shortlisted 20 PCPA leaders who can continue the movement. Some of them are Santosh Patra, Srikanta Mahato, Lalmohan Tudu and Lochan Sardar.

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