

## Intellectuals appeal for peace in Lalgarh

Statesman News Service

LALGARH, 21 JUNE [2009]: Barely a day after CPI (Maoist) leader, Koteswar Rao alias Khishanji, appealed to Intellectuals to visit Lalgarh and "witness the atrocities committed by security forces in the name of police operation", a team of Intellectuals from Kolkata including noted film director Aparna Sen, theatre personalities Saonli Mitra and Kaushik Sen today held a meeting with villagers and members of the Police Santras Birodhi Public Committee (PSBPC), in an effort to resolve the Lalgarh conflict.

Their meeting with PSBPC leader Mr Chatradhar Mahato saw the latter distancing himself from the Maoists. "The forces are targeting innocent villagers; they are not even sparing women and children. We want both sides to sit for talks so that the common people can live peacefully. Our meeting with the state government was scheduled for 14 July, but the state government started operations before that," Mr Mahato said.

Aparna Sen and other intellectuals, who had to walk quite a distance to reach Amelia in Hariharpara, appealed to both the state government and the Maoists to put down arms. "We have heard instances of police personnel dragging women out of their homes and beating them up. We sincerely appeal to the state government and Maoists to observe ceasefire till 14 July," Aparna Sen said.

The Intellectuals, however, failed to meet Maoists leaders including Kishanji. The core team also hit-out at the state government for not checking Maoist activities on time. "What was the state government doing when the Maoists were building up a base here?" Saonli Mitra rued. They said they would write to the Governor, the Prime Minister and the Union home minister requesting them to put an end to the operation.

Later in the day, Union ministers of state, Mr Sisir Adhikary and Mr Mukul Roy defied the state government warning and entered Salboni. They were allegedly thwarted by groups of CPI-M supporters. Apart from submitting a detailed report to the Union home ministry, the ministers said they would submit a report to the Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee too.

"In the name of flushing out Maoists, the state government is allowing CPI-M cadres to regain ground in the tribal belt," Mr Adhikary said. They said they would camp in West Midnapore to campaign against police atrocities and provide relief to the affected villagers.