

Intellectuals to rally for Chhatradhar: Mahasweta Devi

Kolkata [October 4, 2009]: The West Bengal government's veiled warning yesterday to supporters of tribal leader Chhatradhar Mahato on Sunday evoked strong reactions from a section of intellectuals here with noted writer Mahasweta Devi saying a big rally would be held in the city in his support.

"I am not supporting him alone. We will bring out a big rally in Kolkata. We will fix the date and time," the octogenarian writer, a Magsaysay awardee, told a news agency.

She said she had met Mahato on a number of occasions and "during these meetings, I used to advise him to campaign against Special Economic Zones or to demand ration cards for the poor".

"But I am always against the politics of bloodshed and never asked him to do such politics," she insisted.

Mahato was arrested on September 26 by a CID team which posed as journalists to get close to him. Yesterday, state Chief Secretary Asok Mohan Chakraborti had said those supporting Mahato were liable to be punished under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

On claims by the police that Mahato got financial help from his supporters here, she said, "Let them prove that he had got financial support from us. Let them say how much money we have given him."

Describing the state government as "fascist", theatre personality Bibhas Chakraborty said Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was using the administration to threaten intellectuals after failing to intimidate them politically.

"The (CPI-M) leaders have tried many times to intimidate us, but could not. Now they have unleashed the administration to intimidate us with false propaganda. They are doing this to hide their misdeeds, notably, the recent Vedic Village episode," Chakraborty said.

Asserting that the intellectuals have no connection with Maoists, actor Kaushik Sen said, "When we met Chhatradhar in Lalgarh, we told him to bring the PCPA from the hands of the Maoists to enlist more popular support. We told the government that people at Lalgarh were under threat both from the Maoists and the police."

Poet Joy Goswami accused the government of "targetting" the intellectuals to hide its misdeeds.

"We have always been saying that peace cannot be restored with violence, but only through talks," he said.

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