

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Rights activists hit the streets

TNN 9 October 2009, 04:06am IST KOLKATA: Rights activists hit the city streets on Thursday demanding repeal of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), a day after arrested tribal leader Chhatradhar Mahato's lawyer pointed out in a Jhargram court that the court had not yet notified the Act in Bengal.

The court had then handed a three-day police remand for Mahato instead of the 18 days that the police had prayed for.

Members of different rights organisations, including Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), Bandi Mukti Committee and some peasants organisations like MKP joined the rally that set out from College Square and ended at Esplanade, where the outfits also held a meeting to protest against the arrest of Mahato and other activists such as Raja Sarkhel and Prasun Chatterjee.

Agitators complained that the state was unleashing a reign of terror on people speaking up against the government.

Demonstrators claimed that Mahato and his colleagues are members of a democratic movement for establishing tribal rights in Jangalmahal, where people have been deprived since Independence. "The UAPA puts a seal on what we call state-sponsored terrorism to stifle dissenting voices," said Manas Joardar, working president of Bandi Mukti Committee.

The rights activists flocked on Thursday under the banner of Co-ordination of Individual and Organisation with veteran writer Mahesweta Devi as its chief patron. However Mahesweta could not attend the rally as she is not keeping well.

Civil rights activist Sujato Bhadra demanded immediate release of Mahato and others rounded up illegally under the UAPA. Bhadra also condemned the arrest of Sadananda Singh and Swapan Dasgupta publisher and editor of Peoples March magazine.

Intellectuals have also decided to take out a rally on October 10 from College Square with a similar charter of demands. Intellectuals like Kaushik Sen, Shuvaprasanna, Bibhas Chakraborty

and Tarun Sanyal will attend the rally. All of them have also condemned the rampant use of UAPA as a suppressive measure. The forum of the intellectuals Silpi, Sanskritik Karmi O Buddhijibi Mancha has condemned killings in Jangalmahal as well as the suppressive role of the state

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