

THE BAN ON RDF IN ANDHRA PRADESH

A Background Note

Introduction to Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF):

RDF is a federation of revolutionary and democratic people's organizations working at grassroots level in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. Each of its constituent organizations works among the various sections of the people on their issues to democratise the society as per the understanding of New Democratic Revolution (NDR). RDF holds that NDR is the stage of democratizing the society by smashing the feudal and imperialist shackles which are obstacles in building a democratic social fabric in India. This also involves raising the consciousness of the people who are being kept in backwardness by the semi-feudal semi-colonial and reactionary social set-up that has emerged in the last two hundred years. This backwardness is due to the historic confluence of brahminical feudalism and colonialism, which built the foundations for the continuation of imperialist plunder.

RDF was formed in May 2005 through the merger of All India Peoples' Resistance Forum (AIPRF) and Struggling Forum for Peoples' Resistance (SFPR). It aspires to establish a new democratic society in India by building and leading anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles, by coordinate among peoples' movements and to give it the form of an organised and united political resistance struggle. RDF also stands united with all forms of peoples' struggles that envision the aspiration for a new democratic India. The organisation further holds that political mobilization of the working people is the only way to democratize the South Asian Subcontinent, and much of its political activity is aimed at building such democratic mass movements which stand up against the reactionary classes, challenge their anti-people policies and resist the might of the state when it is pitted against the people. Throughout its seven years of existence, RDF has been providing a platform for a large number of mass organisations which have been serving the people by taking up their issues or by protesting against the exploitation and injustice on various sections of the masses in the society. As a result, RDF and its constituent organisations have become an eyesore for the rulers of the country, leading to the persecution and even banning of RDF in several states including Odisha and very recently in Andhra Pradesh.

Ban on RDF in Andhra Pradesh:

RDF has been banned under Section 3 of Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act, 1992 by the Andhra Pradesh government through Government Order No.430 dated 9 August 2012. The Government Order alleges that "Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF) a front organisation of Communist Party of India (Maoist) – Declared as Unlawful Association". The government further claims that RDF "is a part of Tactical United Front" and enlists the following as the organisation's 'unlawful activities':

- (1) Sub serving the interest and objectives of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) whose avowed objective is to overthrow the lawfully established Government by means of force and violence through terrorist activities involving the use of firearms and explosives;*

- (2) *Urging people to fight against the Police and join the Maoist movement;*
- (3) *Opposing and demanding stoppage of anti extremist combing operations of the police and security forces in the left wing extremism affected area of the States and there by abetting and encouraging the violent activities of Maoist;*
- (4) *Organising dharnas, rallies and other forms of agitations in support of the unlawful activities of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and*
- (5) *Opposing lawful actions of police and criminal justice system and inciting the people to take violence against the democratically elected government established by law.*

The government goes on to allege further that “RDF interferes with the administration of the law and upsetting the maintenance of public order constituting a danger to the public peace”, thereby justifying the declaration of the organisation as an ‘unlawful association’.

The ban is totally baseless and arbitrary:

There is absolutely no basis for the Andhra Pradesh government to declare RDF as an ‘unlawful association’. Indeed, the Government Order banning RDF itself is unlawful, because it violates the basic rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, including the right of the citizens to form associations and freely express their grievances against or opposition to the government. By proscribing RDF the Andhra Pradesh government has launched a direct assault on the right to association and freedom of expression of the citizens of the country, which is nothing short of authoritarian and arbitrary use of political power against an established peoples’ organisation. The arbitrary nature of the ban becomes even more apparent if one notes that RDF is yet to form its organisational structure in Andhra Pradesh, and has only two persons as its members from the state – Varavara Rao (Viraam member and President, RDF) and Ganti Prasadam (Secretary, Association of Martyrs’ Families and Friends and Vice President, RDF). Both are well-known public figures and to attribute such a long list of ‘unlawful activities’ on the two of them is highly malicious in intent on the part of AP government. This is particularly so because RDF started functioning in the state only from the month of April this year. Its first activity was to hold its First All India Conference in Hyderabad on 22-23 April 2012, barely three months before the ban.

The hostility of the AP government towards RDF was visible during the conference as well. It banned the Public Rally of 23 April in an arbitrary manner by serving RDF a letter which alleged that some Maoists were present in the conference and that the Rally would ‘disturb’ the law and order situation of the state. Under instructions from the state government, Andhra Pradesh police also arrested a team of 35 cultural activists from Chhattisgarh on false charges and prevented them from attending the conference.

The only activity conducted under the banner of RDF in Andhra Pradesh after the Conference was a round-table meeting that raised voices of protest against the recent massacre of 20 adivasis in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh. This was a well attended meeting with the participation of several prominent intellectuals, writers and representatives of civil rights organisations besides being attended and addressed the meeting by three senior editors of newspapers. By no figment of imagination can these activities of RDF be justifiably labelled as “sub-serving the interests and objectives of CPI(Maoist)”, “Urging the people to fight against the police and join the Maoist movement”, “inciting the people to take violence”,

“encouraging and abetting the violent activities of the Maoists”, and such like. However, these are among the charges on the basis of which RDF has been banned in AP.

It is also necessary to note that RDF held a day-long dharna against the Bijapur massacre on 31 July 2012 on a space allotted by the Delhi Police in front of the Parliament Street police station. A number of prominent speakers and democratic organisations from different parts of India participated and addressed the dharna. Justice Rajinder Sachar, Dr. B D Sharma, Bojja Tharakam, Prof. Haragopal, Jean Dreze, prominent Hindi writers, poets and artists like Madan Kashyap, Manglesh Dabral, Ashoke Bhowmick and others raised their voices against the massacre of adivasis. After the dharna RDF submitted two memorandums with a charter of demands to the President Mr. Pranab Mukherjee as well as UPA and NAC chairperson Ms. Sonia Gandhi. This completely exposes the frivolous and baseless nature of the Andhra Pradesh government’s charge on RDF of ‘unlawful association’.

The dark history of banning peoples’ organisations by governments in India:

The Indian government has inherited the policy of banning peoples’ organisations and movements from its British predecessors who used this fascist method to stifle the anti-colonial and democratic aspirations of the masses fighting the British colonial regime. While CPI(ML) was outlawed just after its formation in late 1960s, the next decade saw the imposition of Emergency and the suppression of all democratic voices of dissent. Subsequently all the organisations spearheading the national liberation struggles in the North East, Kashmir and Punjab – be it National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), Mizo National Front, United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) etc. – have been declared ‘unlawful’ and repressed. In 1992, CPI(ML) Peoples’ War was banned for the first time under the same Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act which has now been invoked to proscribe RDF. In August 2005, Revolutionary Writers’ Association (Virasam) was banned by Andhra Pradesh government. Varavara Rao and G Kalyana Rao, two members of the organisation acted as the representatives of CPI (ML) Peoples’ War and participated in the talks with the AP government in 2004. The same government banned their organisation and arrested them soon after the talks broke down. Virasam waged a successful struggle along with intellectuals, writers and democratic forces against the Andhra Pradesh government to withdraw the ban.

Apart from a fresh ban on RDF, Andhra Pradesh government has continued its ban on CPI(Maoist), All India Revolutionary Students Federation (AIRSF), Federation of Workers of Singareni Coal Mines, (Singareni Karmika Samakhya or SIKASA), Radical Students Union (RSU), Peasants and Workers Association (Rythu Coolie Sangham), Radical Youth League (RYL) and Revolutionary Workers’ Federation (Viplava Karmika Samakhya or VIKASA). This is in addition to the ban imposed by the central government on 35 organisations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).

Similarly, Odisha government imposed a ban on RDF, Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh, Kui Labang Sangh, Bala Sangam, Daman Pratirodh Mancha and Krantikari Mahila Sangh in June 2006 under sections of the colonial CRPC of 1881 amended in 1967 as Criminal Amendment Act. RDF has been consistently fighting against these bans. A petition challenging the ban on Daman Pratirodh Manch in Odisha is at present is before the Supreme Court which has issued notice to the Odisha government to file its affidavit.

In all the cases of banning such organisations under trumped-up charges, hardly any proof of 'unlawful activities' has ever been provided by various governments. One of the most glaring of such blatant suppression of popular organisations is the case of Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which was banned just after the attack on WTC on 11 September 2001. Aligning with the US imperialism-sponsored 'War on Terror', the Indian government banned this organisation without an iota of evidence. The ban has been repeatedly extended by the Indian government for the last eleven years even though no evidence could be brought to light by its investigative agencies to implicate SIMI in any unlawful activity. The Unlawful Activities Prevention Appellate Tribunal of Justice Geeta Mittal threw out the ban on SIMI in 2008 citing lack of evidence, but this judgment was set aside by the Supreme Court and the ban on the organisation still continues.

The politics of ban needs to be steadfastly opposed:

The provision of ban is a draconian instrument of coercion which the government have consistently used to stifle political opposition, as has been made clear by the circumstances and the manner in which RDF is banned by Andhra Pradesh government. We must stand up for our right to freely subscribe to and propagate any political opinion or ideology without fear and favour. We must uphold our right to freedom of expression. We must defend our democratic space and our basic rights as citizens of a free country. We must not allow the government to criminalise dissent.

RDF refuses to accept this authoritarian ban. It pledges to resolutely fight against this undemocratic and criminal ban on the organisation. It will take up all means of democratic protests, mass rallies, meetings and dharnas to compel the AP government to withdraw the ban. All judicial avenues to revoke the ban and to challenge the draconian Andhra Pradesh Public Security Act, 1992, will be explored.

RDF appeals to all the democrats and democratic organisations in the country and worldwide to raise voices against the authoritarian, arbitrary and undemocratic ban and to fight for its immediate withdrawal.