

Press release on Lalgarh

**By a fact finding team of students from
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**

A fact finding team of nine students from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) recently visited Lalgarh, to probe into the reality of the ongoing movement of the people in the area. Here we are enclosing the preliminary details of what we saw. We would like to appeal to your daily/ news channel to also highlight on certain issues of the movement, which we feel are not coming to the forefront, as much as it should have.

We heard through various media and other sources that there had been massive state repression in Lalgarh and other adjacent areas in November 2008, after the attempted mine blast on the convoy of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya. We heard of incidents of rampant police atrocity especially on women and school children in Chhotopelia and Katapahari. We also heard that post that rampage the people there have formed the Pulishi Santrash Birodhi Janasadharoner Committee (PSBJC) and have blockaded Lalgarh and other areas out of police and other administration.

With these preliminary facts we had been inside to Lalgarh. We stayed there from 7th of June to the tenth of June. We visited the Chhotopelia, Katapahari, Bohardanga, Sijua, Dain Tikri, Sindurpur, Madhupur, Babui Basha, Shaluka, Moltola Kadoshol, Basban, Papuria, Komladanga, pukhria, Korengapara, gopalnagar, Khash jongol, Shaalboni, Shaal danga, Andharmari, Darigera, Bhuladanga, Chitaram Dahi, Teshabandh, Bhuladanga villages and talked extensively to people. We attended one big meeting in Lodhashuli called by the Committee and witnessed other small meetings which were held inside the villages. The current firing and frontal battle between the people and the state and CPM [the so-called CPI(Marxist)] in Dharampura and Madhupur/Shijua had started while we were there. So we believe we have observed many facets of this movement pretty closely.

The visit to Lalgarh and talking closely to people broke many of the myths which we still held before going there. After listening to the chronological narrative of the history of police atrocities in the area, we realized that the November incident was not unique. It was just the continuation of extreme state terror and police atrocities that the people of the regions have tolerated since 2000. What is unique this time is the resistance.

The people in all the villages virtually demonstrated how police had tortured them, entered houses at the wee hours of night to break everything and beat up

people in the name of 'raids', how any movement of the people at night even to look for their cattle were banned, how almost in every family there is some one or the other who had been booked for being a 'maoist', how 90 year old Maiku Murmu of Teshabandh was beaten to death by the police way back in 2006. Young school girls were regularly molested by the police in the pretext of 'body check', women were forced to show their genitals at night during 'raids' to confirm their gender. Before every election 30-40 people from every village were picked up as 'Maoists' in order to debilitate the opposition. The incident of Chhotopelia, where a number of women were ruthlessly beaten up and one of them Chhitamoni lost her eye, virtually broke the limit of patience of the people. They have now risen up against this long drawn police atrocity.

Coupled with Police terror they talked of CPM terror too. CPM cadres and leaders have only acted as informers to police the said. Today when we saw the jubilation among people after demolishing Anuj Pandey's house, we can understand the emotions of the people. Because what we saw among the people was utter hatred for CPM. They showed us around in Madhupur how the local panchayat office was turned into a camp of the *harmad vahini*. They told us how the 'motor cycle army' of the *harmads* zoomed around the villages, terrorizing people, breaking their houses brutally, firing in the air, and beating people up. We talked to one villager whose house was being demolished by the *harmad*, he helplessly kept calling the police to no vein. It was only after an armed resistance was put up, that the *harmads* were forced to retreat to Memul and further to Shijua.

Similarly, they narrated the incident of Khash Jongol, where because of the lack of armed preparedness from the committee, the *harmads* abruptly entered with the help of the police and open fired and killed three people, injuring three others and fled.

Police and CPM are not just in alliance, they are the same thing. They told us how the police stood as mute spectator whenever the *harmads* went on a rampage. The *haramds* have even used police jeeps to move around. The local CPM cadres provide information about the people within the villages to the police.

From our team, therefore when we see the current violence, which many media house is branding as 'anarchy', we have a different opinion. We have seen the genuine anger of the people, their tolerance, their suffering. And we have no hesitation at all in holding the police, administration and CPM responsible for the current precipitation of the situation.

The committee was formed against police atrocity. But what impressed us most was the alternative developmental work that the Committee and the people have been doing inside Lalgargh in the past seven months. These areas are marked by extreme poverty and backwardness. Rainfall is scanty and the people are

dependent only on rainfall for agriculture. We saw the dysfunctional government canal, which is lying dry. They described the faulty nature of governmental dams which ultimately dry up the natural falls. They showed us the pathetic condition of roads which becomes completely inaccessible during the monsoons. The Committee on its own has made 20 km of roads with red stone chips ('morrum'). The people have volunteered labour to make these roads. The total cost to make this 20 km of road, they showed were Rs. 47,000, while the panchayat always shows atleast Rs. 15,000 for 1 km of road. They have repaired quite a few tube wells, and have installed new ones at half the price than the panchayat. They have started to make a check dam in Bohardanga to fight the water crisis. The two best things that have been done by the Committee is to start land distribution and run a health center in katapahari. The vested forest lands are supposed to be distributed to the landless tribals according to a bill passed by the west Bengal government. But it never happened. Now the committee is taking initiative in Bansheri and other villages to distribute the vested empty lands adjacent to the forests to the people who have no land. We saw the distribution of the patta in one village. The condition of health facilities was also in a pathetic state in the villages, as there was not a single functional health center. The nearest ones are in Lalgah and Ramgarh town. Patients often died the way to the hospital, often there had been cases of snake bite of the people who were carrying the patients to the hospital in the monsoon. There was a dysfunctional building in Katapahari which was supposed to be a health center. The administration decided to turn it into a police camp. After police boycott, the committee turned it into a health center. Doctors from Kolkata and other regions visit there thrice a week. It is flocked by more than 150 patients every day.

We had also attended a huge meeting called by the Committee in Lodhashuli against a sponge iron factory located in the region. We visited the factory site and saw the adverse effect of pollution on the trees and regions. The people informed that even the paddy grown in the region have turned black, so much so that even the panchayat has refused to accept the paddy. There are hospitals and schools in the vicinity of such polluting factory. The meeting despite a bus strike called by CPM was attended by huge masses of people (around 12000), coming from different parts of the district. It was a vibrant meeting, where the committee resolves among other things to boycott the factory and build a resistance to stop the factory for good.

The presence of the Maoists within Lalgah is one of the most contended issues right now. We saw the open presence of Maoists and their mass acceptance. They paste posters and have also held meetings where about ten thousand people have participated. And unlike the popular myth that Maoists are outsiders from Jharkhand etc. we saw the Maoist brigade to be flocked by locals. The people are pretty clear about the need for an armed resistance in the face of the regular joint attacks by the CPM and the state. The restriction of

carrying traditional arms by them is a clear signal by the state to debilitate this movement.

By the time we left Lalgarh, the struggle has intensified. By now the people have been successful in making their immediate enemy CPM to escape along with the police. The enthusiasm we saw in the people was exuberant. For the first time they are being part of not some vote minting political party but a committee which is their own organization. They are living a life free of state terror and building their own developmental projects. In different villages many residents held one opinion in common, 'we have got independence for the first time'. Their fight is against age old exploitation, deprivation, torture and terror. In this way this is a historic fight. And we strongly feel that what is deemed 'anarchy' by many is real struggle for independence.

We urge the media houses to revisit Lalgarh. The movement has its roots in the extreme impoverished socio economic conditions of the people because of the inaction of the state. To The state is bound to strike back to this fight of the people. The CRPF will soon come back with the orders to open fire on the resilient masses. The state government is also shamelessly asking the notorious and infamous Grey hounds and Cobra to come and crush the people's movement. And that will be the most unfortunate and condemnable thing. The anger of the masses against massive state terror, underdevelopment and corruption is valid. And so is the long awaited fight against it. We are going to publish a detailed report back in Delhi about this movement of the people. We remember that the media especially the regional media in Bengal had played a pretty progressive role during the Nandigram movement and would appeal to you to also stand by the people of Lalgarh and their genuine fight before the state carries out yet another genocide.

Thanking you,

Priya Ranjan, Banojyotsna, Anirban, Gogol, Kusum, Reyaz, Yadvinder, Veer Singh, Sumati.

Contact : 09711826861

[This report was first published by Sanhati on 17 June 2009.]