

Democracy weeps in Nandigram: NHRC and NCW urged to act



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"The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) must take immediate cognizance of the violations in Nandigram and recommend stringent penal action against all those involved, including instituting an inquiry into the involvement of the CPI (M) leadership and cadres in the planning/abetment/execution of the crimes committed" demanded firebrand activist and leader of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) Medha Patkar.

"The National Commission for Women must immediately constitute a fact-finding delegation that must visit Nandigram and submit its Report to the NHRC and also direct immediate payment of compensation to all the women raped and all others injured" further stressed Patkar.

On 18 April 2008, known members of Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] and armed members of Hamad Vahini Party from Khejuri, leashed another wave of barbaric violence, gang-rape and loot in Nandigram, West Bengal, India.

Nandigram gained the spotlight in early 2007 when state government in collusion with private corporations was trying to forcibly evict farmers from arable land, and resorted to one of the most heinous ways to serve

the private corporations, all in the sake of development. The outrage on this massacre by the state authorities of poor farmers in the interest of private companies was paramount globally.

"On 18 April 2008, CPI (M) members attacked the house of Radha Rani and Pratap Ari, threw Pratap Ari in the tank nearby and gang-raped Radha Rani Ari for the second time, in her own house" said Debyeet Shrikant from Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), Nandigram.

Radharani Ari is one of the women at the forefront of the Nandigram struggle. Coming from a dalit landless family, supported by Pratap Ari (her husband), she has always vehemently protested against the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) chemical hub project and giving away the land, houses, nature, and culture of Nandigram. She is one of the most articulate and courageous women in Nandigram and has also strengthened pro-people movements in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Maharashtra during the Nandigram-Narmada- Gorai Jaththa.

Narmada Sheet, another very committed and outspoken woman from Sonachura and Mona Pramanik were also brutally attacked. Few men have been missing since that ill-fated night last week.

Radha Rani, Pratap, Narmada Sheet and some others are admitted in the Nandigram Hospital while rest of them, are admitted in Tamluk hospital.

At least 20 houses have been attacked since then, houses destroyed and belongings looted, making more than 100 members of the families homeless. These people are presently being supported by the BUPC.

These atrocious incidents had occurred in Gokul Nagar, Sonachura,

Gadhchakrabadia, under the leadership of Nabakumar Samanta and other CPI (M) active cadres and leaders from Garu Pada, Gokul Nagar, some of whom came from Kejuri.

Reportedly, there were also blasts in some houses, including in the house of one Kokhon Sheet, who was just released after months-long judicial custody.

"Nandigram continues to be one of the worst blots on the face of Indian democracy. These atrocities continue to happen and recur in Nandigram with the active involvement of the local CPI (M) cadres and leaders and tacit approval and blessings of the party leadership at various levels" says Debyeet.

With most of the earlier victims of violence not having received any compensation and in fact false cases foisted against them, these fresh blows to the people of Nandigram "is nothing short of a death blow to the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the valiant residents of Nandigram" asserts Medha.

Social activists under the banner of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee, Nandigram (BUPC Nandigram) further demanded that:

- All the accused must be immediately identified, charged and arrested for gang rape, grievous hurt, intimidation, assault, illegal confinement and wrongful detention and other relevant penal provisions.
- Free legal, medical, psycho-social and other aid and support must be provided to the women and all victims of state and party violence in Nandigram.

- Compensation to all the affected and attacked, with houses destroyed and rapes/molestation faced, must be paid immediately as per the High Court orders.

Let us hope on World Earth Day (22 April 2008), justice will prevail in favour of people of Nandigram who have been struggling hard to protect their own livelihood, nature, natural resources and environment from the combined onslaught of the capitalists and CPI (M).

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