

Activists launch fresh campaign for Binayak Sen

After Nobel laureates appealed to the Indian government for release of physician Binayak Sen, rights activists have announced that they will hold a protest rally here Wednesday against his continued detention.

Sen, 58, will complete one year of imprisonment in Raipur Central Jail Wednesday.

The Chhattisgarh police picked up Sen, a paediatrician by profession and vice president of the rights group People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), May 14, 2007 from Bilaspur town for his alleged links with Maoist ideologue Narayan Sanyal. Sen is being held under the stringent Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005 (CSPSA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

Police filed a charge sheet with a list of six witnesses against the doctor in March this year, accusing him of treason and conspiracy among other offences.

The four-day initial trial of Sen ended May 3 with the six witnesses deposing and being cross-examined at a fast track court at Raipur.

Twenty-two Nobel laureates Monday sent a letter to President Pratibha Patil and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, asking them to allow Sen to travel to Washington to receive the Jonathan Mann Award for Global Health and Human Rights.

Sen was chosen for the Jonathan Mann Award by the US-based Global Health Council in April. The award ceremony is scheduled for May 29 in Washington.

The physician's wife Ilina Sen said she was grateful to the Nobel laureates for their help.

'I welcome the appeal of Nobel laureates to support my husband. This is really emotional for me but I do not think the Indian government or the Chhattisgarh state will respond to the appeal,' Ilina told IANS.

Prompted by the Nobel prize winners' support for Sen's release, activists of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Chhattisgarh Mahila Jagriti Sangathan, Chhattisgarh Bal Shramik Sangathan, National Alliance of Women, Indian Social Action Forum, Sabla Dal, Nadi Ghati Morcha, Ekta Parishad, Roopantar and Mukti-Niketan will participate in Wednesday's protest.

Rajendra K. Sail, state president of PUCL, said: 'The Chhattisgarh government is hiding under the cover of black laws such as the CSPSA and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, whose credibility is questionable because these are anti-democratic and anti-constitutional laws.'

'Provisions of the CSPSA are similar to that of POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) that was repealed in 2004 by parliament itself,' Sail added.

Ilina said: 'My husband has been languishing in jail for the past one year on trumped up charges. He just needs a fair trial under the Criminal Procedure Code, not under CSPSA, to be cleared of the charges.'

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