

“We are Ready to Talk to the Government”

[Interview with Koteswar Rao (Kishanji)]

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Koteswar Rao, alias Kishanji, is undoubtedly the backbone of the movement in Lalgarh. Number two in the CPI(Maoist) politburo, the 51-year old landmine expert trained by the LTTE tells Snigdhendru Bhattacharya that the Maoists are ready to talk to the government to resolve the Lalgarh crisis.

Is the CPI(Maoist) ready to talk to the government?

We have no problems with solving the crisis through talks but for that the state and Central governments will first have to withdraw the force from areas where there is a boycott against the police. It is not possible for the agitating tribals to sit for talks when gun-toting police and paramilitary forces are raiding the area.

Have you send a proposal to the state government, as indicated by the West Bengal home secretary Ardhendu Sen on Friday?

No, we haven't. But we are not rigid — we will not hold on to our demand that the state must apologise. We also want to avoid bloodshed.

Any other conditions?

The talks can only be held at Dalilpur chowk [a stronghold of the tribals/Maoists], in the presence of local tribals who have been subjected to police atrocities.

What about the statement by the Union home minister P. Chidambaram that the Centre favoured banning the CPI(Maoist)?

Nothing more is expected from a stooge of the World Bank. The government has initiated an attack on the tribal population and there must be a reply.

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