

Sen to the defence of jailed Sen

NOBEL laureate Amartya Sen says he would hesitate to post letters for others for fear of being charged with sedition and getting a life term in jail.

Sen made this telling point at the launch of a book on the jailed community worker Binayak Sen, titled *A Doctor To Defend — The Story of Binayak Sen*, by journalist and documentary filmmaker Minnie Vaid in the city on Saturday.

The 1998 winner of the Nobel Prize in economics was alluding to the charge of sedition slapped on the doctor who was sen-

By **Archana**
in New Delhi

tenced to life imprisonment by a Chhattisgarh court on December 24. "Binayak Sen has been unjustly convicted," the economist declared. "As the matter is sub-judice, one can't comment, but as a citizen and a human being, one is inclined to question the issue," he added.

Sen said: "The legal process will take its course, but the process cannot be divorced from reasoning." Binayak Sen is also the vice-president of the People's Union for Civil Liberties.

The Nobel laureate said, "The charge against him was not well-established and even if the evi-

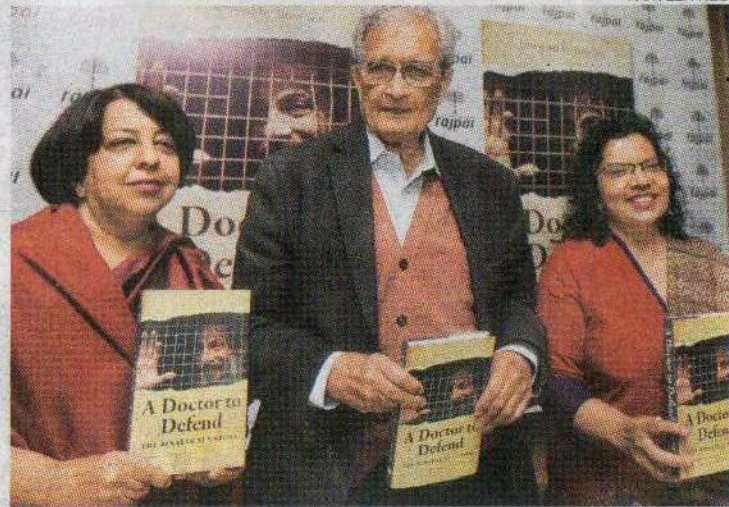
dence were correct, it was not enough to charge him with sedition." Sen added: "His conviction says a lot about the judiciary. I'm not committing sedition when I say this, but petty thinking is becoming dominant in the Indian legal system."

He reminded the audience that as a doctor, Binayak Sen could have made a huge amount of money, but he chose to serve the underdog in a deprived area.

The book, a first by Vaid, couldn't have come at a better time for the activist as well as the author — the voices supporting the doctor are only getting more stri-

dent. Vaid, who last interviewed Binayak Sen 10 days before the court verdict, recalled her meetings with him. "More than the activists, it's his patients who need him, because he has taken care of them without taking any fee," Vaid said.

In a question and answer session that followed, former attorney-general Soli Sorabjee engaged Sen in a debate about the "tone and tenor" of the verdict. Sorabjee said, "It is worrying, it seems to suggest that the punishment is exemplary." Sen replied that it looked like a miscarriage of justice.



PARVEEN GEGI

Amartya Sen along with publisher Meera Johri (left) releases a book on Binayak Sen, written by Minnie Vaid (right).

THIS ALSO
HAPPENED

The Delhi government plans to make **diabetes test mandatory for pregnant women**. State health and woman and child welfare minister **Kiran Wallia** said making the test mandatory for pregnant women will not only give them **long-term health benefits** but also help in spreading awareness.

She said diabetes educators will be specially appointed from among **Asha workers**. Anganwadi workers and officials at Delhi **government hospitals** will also be trained for **creating awareness** of the issue, Wallia said.

Officials said the government was also considering the possibility of extending such check-ups to the **slum and resettlement colonies** in the Capital with a particular **focus on children**.