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COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)



Central Committee

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Report on Political Developments (Adopted at the October 12-14, 2012 Meeting of the Central Committee)

International Scene

The international situation in the past four months has been notable for the continuing crisis in the Eurozone and the efforts to overcome it. The prospects are of the global economic slowdown continuing next year. There have been fresh austerity measures imposed on the people which are meeting with stiff resistance from the people in Greece and Spain. In West Asia, the conflict in Syria has escalated and it is affecting the entire region. The US has been the target of widespread anger and protest in the Muslim countries worldwide due to an anti-Islamic film. The NAM summit in Tehran was a rebuff to the efforts to isolate Iran. In Venezuela, the historic re-election of Hugo Chavez has reaffirmed the Left advance in Latin America.

Global Economic Situation

The IMF has lowered its forecast for global economic growth this year from 3.5 per cent to 3.3 per cent. For 2013, it has lowered it to 3.6 per cent from the earlier 3.9 per cent. The Eurozone economy shrunk by 0.4 per cent in 2012. The lack of adequate recovery in the United States and the continuing recession in Europe is having its impact on growth in the major developing countries. China, India and Brazil are expected to grow at a lesser rate in 2013.

The unemployment in the Eurozone countries has hit a record high. In August 18.2 million people were out of work in these countries. And it is the highest level since the Euro was launched in 1999. Spain is now in the forefront of the debt crisis and has the highest unemployment rate of 25.1 per cent. Both in Spain and Greece, the savage austerity measures imposed have led to massive protests and strikes including a three week march to the capital Madrid by miners in their thousands.

The European Union is trying to stabilize the situation by the setting up of a European Stabilisation Mechanism (ESM) as a permanent bail-out fund. But the debt crisis has reached such a stage in Greece and Spain that the Euro is still precariously balanced.

West Asia

Syrian Conflict

The imperialist intervention in the region is focused on Syria and Iran. The civil war in Syria has aggravated in the past four months. More than 30,000 people have died in the violence and the fighting. More than a half a million have fled Syria and are living in refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan. The conflict is now threatening to spill over into Turkey and Lebanon and engulf the entire region. Russia and China have steadfastly refused to go along with the US and its allies and vetoed their resolutions in the Security Council. After having failed to get the sanction of the UN Security Council to militarily intervene, the US and NATO embarked on helping finance and arm the rebels through Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. Israel is also providing covert support. The armed groups which are now operating within Syria have succeeded in widening the conflict. Both the Damascus and Aleppo are seeing street battles and urban warfare.

A striking feature of the rebel forces is that it is increasingly being dominated by Al Qaeda fighters and other Islamist groups. The Al Qaeda fighters like the Jabhat and the Free Syrian Army which is backed by the US and the West have accepted these fighters and they are playing the main role in the fight to overthrow the Assad regime.

Wherever the US and NATO have intervened militarily whether it is Iraq, Libya or now in Syria it is the Islamist forces and extremist who were brought to the fore in the fight against the secular Arab regimes. The dangerous consequences of such a strategy was seen in the blowback in Libya. During the protests against the anti-Islamic film in Benghazi the US mission was attacked and the US Ambassador and three other Americans killed by extremist Islamic brigades. These were the very same rebels who were armed and supported by the US and NATO bombardment there.

Within Syria, sectarian strife is rearing its head with the Alawite and Christian minorities being subjected to indiscriminate violence by the Sunni extremist groups. The United States will not directly intervene in Syria. But it will make every effort to dislodge the Assad regime even if it means the destruction of Syria and the rise of Islamic fundamentalist and extremist forces in the region.

Iran

The US resolve to destabilise Syria is connected to its main target, Iran. Since Syria is a close ally of Iran, the removal of the Assad regime is meant to isolate Iran. After the two rounds of talks of the P5+1 with Iran, no progress was made on the nuclear issue. Iran has continued to affirm that it will continue to enrich nuclear fuel which is its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had in the past two months been threatening to launch a preemptive military strike against Iranian nuclear installations. He sought to pressurize President Obama to go along with this plan thinking that Obama would be vulnerable to such pressure during the presidential campaign. However, the Obama administration refused to endorse the Netanyahu plan. Moreover, the security establishment in Israel itself opposed the war plans. In such a situation, Netanyahu had to backtrack and state that there are a few more months before Iran reaches the threshold when Israel will have to act. In order to keep up the pressure and confrontation with Iran, a big military exercise headed by the US navy was conducted in the Persian Gulf in August.

Afghanistan

The US and NATO plan to withdraw their combat troops from Afghanistan in 2014. For this, they have been building up the Afghan army and training them in order to get them to replace the US-NATO troops. However, this plan has run into difficulties. In the recent months Afghan soldiers have turned their guns on US and NATO soldiers. There have been 36 attacks by Afghan soldiers killing 51 soldiers belonging to the US-NATO forces so far this year. This compelled the US commander to halt joint operations. The Afghan President is trying to carve out some autonomy by insisting on the handing over of various security duties to the Afghan forces immediately. There is no let up in the Taliban operations, the talks which US had initiated with the Taliban having failed earlier this year. In sum, the US strategy for an orderly exit by 2014 is in disarray.

NAM Summit

The 16th Non Aligned Summit was held in Tehran in August. The NAM summit being held in Iran assumes significance since the United States and the Western countries have imposed stiff sanctions on Iran and are doing their best to isolate it on the nuclear issue. The Tehran declaration of NAM has unequivocally stated that the choice of states like Iran on the peaceful use of nuclear technology and their fuel cycle policies (which includes

enrichment of nuclear fuel) must be respected. This is a rebuff to the coercive attempts of the United States and its allies. The NAM meeting indicated that the concerted bid to isolate Iran internationally has not succeeded.

The NAM reiterated its opposition to the unilateral coercive measures and unilateral economic sanctions on non-aligned countries. It reaffirmed its support for the cause of Palestinian self-determination and called for an end to the Israeli occupation.

In the present international situation and given the fact that many countries in the NAM are aligning with the United States, the declaration adopted stressed the independence, sovereignty and autonomy of the NAM countries which is a positive development.

On the burning issue of Syria, the NAM could not come out with a united stand given the presence of many of the Gulf and Arab states hostile to the Assad government. The Egyptian President Morsi while calling for President Assad to step down mooted the formation of a regional contact group consisting of Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to get the Syrian problem resolved. Iran welcomed this step but Saudi Arabia did not respond and did not attend the first meeting called in Cairo.

Victory in Venezuela

President Hugo Chavez has been re-elected for a fourth term in the presidential election held on October 7. He has won with a 55 per cent majority which is a 11 per cent lead over the opposition rightwing candidate. These elections were crucial and it involved high stakes for all sides. Venezuela had struck out a path of asserting national sovereignty and rejection of neo-liberal measures. Under Chavez significant steps were taken to reduce foreign control by state control of the oil industry and nationalisation of some of the industries. Venezuela is a key player in rallying of the Left and progressive states in Latin America and along with Cuba had been instrumental in the formation of the ALBA.

This time the entire opposition united behind the candidate Henrique Capriles. The desperate bid to dislodge Chavez was backed with big money from the oligarchic elite and the US. A relentlessly hostile campaign was carried out in the rightwing media and the scare raised that Chavez will not step down if he loses. Chavez, who had to battle with cancer had to also overcome discontent engendered by inflation and rising crime.

The victory of Chavez has signaled that the people of Venezuela would like to continue on the path of the Bolivarian revolutionary

process. It will have a salutary affect on the balance of forces in Latin America and also on the global oil politics since Venezuela is one of the major oil producers in the world.

Sri Lanka

The Rajapakse government has shown no serious intent to proceed with a political settlement on the Tamil question. The talks with the Tamil National Alliance have not been fruitful. The main issue is still the constitutional and political arrangement which will devolve powers to the Tamil-speaking areas in the North and the East. The basis of such a settlement can be the 13th Amendment plus, which President Rajapakse has backed out of. The Indian government should renew its political and diplomatic efforts to facilitate the political dialogue and agreement.

National Situation

The four month period since the June Central Committee meeting has been marked by the continuing slowdown in the economy; no respite from the high inflation and sharp attacks on the livelihood of the people through the steep rise in the price of diesel and cuts in subsidized LPG cylinders. The Manmohan Singh government is seeking to get out of the economic difficulties by further appeasing foreign finance capital and big business, seen in the decision to allow FDI in multibrand retail. There has been a rising tide of mass struggles and protests against these measures. The UPA government is embroiled in another major corruption scandal regarding coal block allocations. The violence and clashes in the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District area in Assam displaced a large number of people; its repercussions were felt all over the country. The recent period has seen a rise in communal incidents and in the activities of the divisive forces.

Economic Situation

The economic slowdown noted in the report of the CC meeting in June continues. The GDP growth rate for the first quarter of the current financial year (April to June) was 5.5 per cent. This is only marginally more than the 5.3 per cent recorded in the last quarter of the previous financial year. Industrial production fell for the third time in a period of four months in June. The industrial output shrunk by 1.8 per cent in June. The general inflation continues to be high at 7.55 per cent in August. More worryingly, the food inflation rate touched 10.03 per cent in August going up from the 9.86 per cent in July. There are no prospects for a decrease in the domestic food prices. Internationally there is a sharp increase in food prices this year. According to the World Bank figures over the year ending

July 2012 India recorded the second largest (after Sudan) increase in wheat prices among all countries. It also recorded the third highest increase in rice prices among all countries. Since there are adequate stocks of foodgrains with the FCI, the major reason for such increase is speculative activity. The people are also suffering from the steep rise in the prices of vegetables and pulses.

It is in such a situation that the UPA government took the decision to increase the price of diesel by Rs. 5 and limit the number of subsidized cooking gas cylinders to six per connection in a year. Non-subsidized cylinders cost around Rs. 920.00. These measures will further spike inflation.

Floods and droughts have affected agriculture and farmers in different parts of the country. In Assam, severe floods have affected 22 lakh people and over six lakh hectares of paddy crop were damaged. Drought in parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh have adversely affected the farmers. On top of this, the continuous rise in fertiliser prices has rendered farming difficult. The UPA government announced a Rs. 50 per tonne increase in the price of urea in October.

Appeasing Foreign Capital and Big Business

The UPA government has gone ahead with a number of neo-liberal measures and anti-people policies. It has done so after the Prime Minister was being criticized by the corporate sector and foreign finance capital for being "paralysed" and for not pushing ahead with more neo-liberal measures. After the appointment of P. Chidambaram as the Finance Minister, the Prime Minister has gone ahead with a slew of measures to further the interests of foreign capital and to appease Indian big business.

The Prime Minister appointed an expert committee headed by Parthasarathi Shome to go into the General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR). This committee has recommended that the GAAR should be kept in abeyance for three years. Further it has diluted the provisions so that many foreign companies can evade the tax net. It has also recommended abolition of tax on capital gains on transfer of listed securities. The Finance Minister P. Chidambaram announced that the government would not pursue realizing tax from Vodafone which amounts to Rs. 12,000 crore. The Shome Committee has recommended in another report scrapping the retrospective tax amendment. By this, the government is nullifying its own amendment to the law brought by the then Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee during the last Budget.

In September, the cabinet took the decision to allow 51 per cent FDI in multi-brand retail trade. Thus a long standing demand of the United States and foreign capital was acceded to. Step by step, the retail market of the country has been thrown open to foreign supermarket chains. During the NDA government, FDI was allowed in wholesale and cash and carry operations. During the UPA-I government FDI in single brand retail was allowed. Now the cycle is complete with the decision to allow FDI in multi-brand retail. The CPI(M) and the Left had doggedly opposed the opening of retail trade to FDI. It is due to this opposition that the UPA-I government could not allow Walmart and other foreign supermarkets in the multi-brand retail sector.

Retail trade in India employs four crore people and there are 1.4 crore shops. After agriculture this sector is the largest source of employment. Entry of chain retails like Walmart, Tesco and Carrefour will displace a large number of small shopkeepers and traders. Once the supermarkets establish their sway, they will dictate prices to the producers and control the prices farmers will get on grounds of quality control.

Except for the Congress and the NCP all other parties have come out against FDI in multibrand retail. All the non-Congress state governments have taken the stand that they will not allow foreign supermarket chains.

The entry of FDI in retail will be the single largest attack on existing employment and livelihood. The Party should resolutely oppose FDI entry in retail trade and work single mindedly to build a broadbased movement against it. This is an issue on which the widest sections of the people can be mobilized.

The other cabinet decision which has pleased the big business and boosted the share market is the step to disinvest shares in four public sector companies – Oil India, Nalco, Hindustan Copper and MMTC. It is proposed to sell 10 per cent of the shares of Oil India and 12.15 per cent of Nalco. The government hopes to realize Rs. 15,000 crores from these sales. These measures have met with the desired response to create a stock market bubble. The corporates and the foreign financial institutions have welcomed these moves and the stock market has risen considerably. FII flows have increased.

In another signal to the foreign and Indian big capital, the Cabinet decided to bring the FDI in insurance bill to raise the cap to 49 per cent FDI in this sector and to adopt the Pension Bill to privatize and to allow 26 per cent FDI in pension funds.

Coal Block Allocation Scandal

The CAG report tabled in the monsoon session of parliament has revealed that the allocation of captive coal blocks between 2004 and 2009 have resulted in an estimated Rs. 1.86 lakh crore financial gain for these companies. Of the 142 blocks allocated, over 70 were given to private companies, the others being given to state utilities. The CAG report deals with only the open cast mines and not the underground ones. The CAG states that the delay in bringing in competitive bidding in 2006 resulted in windfall gains for the private companies and a part of this was a loss of revenue for the government.

The BJP demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister and stalled parliament on this issue. The last two weeks of the session were disrupted.

Our Party took the stand that a high level enquiry should be ordered into the whole matter. Since the Prime Minister was looking after the coal ministry during this period, the enquiry should cover the role of the PMO too. Those found responsible for the irregularities and malpractices should be prosecuted, allocations made to the private companies should be cancelled and steps taken to recover the loss of revenue. Coal allocation scandal has exposed how the "captive coal mining" route has led to corruption and crony capitalism.

Unlike other minerals, the coal industry is in the nationalised sector. It is because the NDA and UPA governments failed to amend the Act to allow private sector mining of coal that the captive coal mining route is being utilized as a backdoor means to privatization. We had opposed the 1993 amendment to the Coal Nationalisation Act which provided for captive mining blocks for the private producers. We had also strongly opposed the 2000 Coal Privatisation Bill which is still pending in the Rajya Sabha. Coal Unions had conducted a big strike against this Bill.

The competitive bidding for coal block allocations will only strengthen the process of privatization. It will lead to the big private companies and players in steel, power, etc. going in for competitive bidding and garnering the coal resources. It can lead to monopolies and cartelization. Already it is estimated that 20 per cent of the coal resources have been allocated through the captive mining route.

Instead of initiating competitive bidding for captive coal blocks, what is required is an alternative route. Coal block allocations should be made through the nodal agency of Coal India Ltd. The CIL

can provide dedicated coal blocks for such private power and steel producers and the mining should be done by the CIL and its subsidiaries and the coal supplied to them through fuel supply agreements. In the coal bearing states, the mining can also be done by the state run mining corporations.

This will avoid the corrupt practices and crony capitalism of the existing system of allocation and the selling of coal resources by auction/bidding which will erode eventually the nationalized coal resources.

The BJP which attacked the government on the coal allocation scandal has no policy difference with the UPA government. The NDA government sought to privatize the coal industry by bringing an amendment to the Coal Nationalisation Act. Failing to push it through, it initiated the allocation of captive coal mine blocks through the screening route which has resulted in the corruption and crony capitalism.

The coal block scandal has damaged the Congress and the UPA further as it comes in the wake of a series of corruption scandals. The government's brazen defence and claim that nothing was wrong in the system of allocation is reminiscent of how they dealt with the 2G spectrum scandal.

Since parliament was deadlocked, the Left parties along with the Samajwadi Party and TDP, took a joint stand. We wanted the parliament stalemate to end, an enquiry by a Supreme Court judge and cancellation of the allocation to private companies.

The coal block allocation scandal, the Goa mining loot and the granite quarrying scandal – all underline the necessity to have the mineral and national resources under state control and mining to be a state enterprise.

Corrupt Nexus: Other CAG Reports

Two other CAG reports were tabled along with the report on coal allocation. One of the reports is on the Sasan Ultra Mega Power Project. Here permission was given to use the excess coal produced from the coal block allocations to the UMPP. This was a post-bid concession to the Reliance Power Company getting the benefit of Rs. 29,033 crore. Action should be taken to realize the amount.

The other report pertains to the PPP for the Indira Gandhi International Airport with the GMR group. Under the agreement a big part of the total land area of the airport was given to the private

airport company at a lease amount of Rs. 100 per annum. Further the project cost is financed by development fees charged to passengers which amounts to Rs. 3415 crore. This user development fees itself is not legal. We have to highlight these two other reports and demand action on them. The PB demanded revision of the PPP agreement with GMR and the cancellation of the user fee charges.

Robert Vadra Affair

The revelations about the dubious business dealings of Robert Vadra, the son-in-law of the Congress President has further tarnished the image of the Congress, as it illustrates the nexus between a big real estate company, the Congress government in Haryana and a person with powerful political connections. There has to be an enquiry into the business affairs of Robert Vadra's companies and its links with the DLF.

Assam

The clashes between the Bodos and Bengali speaking Muslims in the Kokhrajjar and adjoining areas of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) in Assam have resulted in the death of 100 persons and over four lakh people being displaced from their homes and living in relief camps. Even after the deployment of the army and other central police forces sporadic incidents have taken place. In the last week of August there were a series of incidents in which persons living or returning to the relief camps were attacked and killed or injured.

The Bodo Accord was signed in February 2003 between the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force and the Central Government and the State government. As a result of which the BTAD was set up under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution covering the four districts of Kokhrajjar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri. Various Bodo groups were armed and involved in insurgency action. Even after the setting up of the BTAD there is one faction which does not accept the ceasefire. There are other Bodo organizations demanding a separate Bodoland State.

The Bodos constitute 32 per cent in the Khokrajjar district, the Bengalis 21 per cent, Assamese 20 per cent and the Santhal adivasis 17 per cent. There is tension and conflict over land and resources between the Bodo and the other non-Bodo communities.

In 1996 and 1998 there were clashes between the Bodos and the Santhal adivasis in which hundreds of lives were lost and many of those displaced had at that time stayed in relief camps for more than a decade. The current conflict was sparked off by the killing of

some Muslim youth leaders and the attempt on the lives of some Muslim student leaders which was followed by the retaliatory killing of four surrendered Bodo Tiger Force workers. Over four lakh people took shelter in 278 relief camps. The delay on the part of the state government in deploying adequate security forces and the delay in the response of the centre contributed to the worsening of the situation and the spreading of the violence in the first one week. Extremist groups have been fanning the conflict which has affected the lives of a large number of people on both sides.

The question of land and land rights is crucial and complicated problem. During colonial rule the Line system was introduced as a means of protecting the land rights of the tribals like the Bodos who are plain tribals. Simultaneously they also encouraged migration of peasants from East Bengal to the Brahmaputra valley to increase yield and expand revenue. Muslim organisations are now accusing the Bodo groups of attempting "ethnic cleansing" by trying to drive out the Muslim peasant cultivators from the Bodo BTAD areas. The Bodos accuse the Muslims of being infiltrators from Bangladesh, though many of these Muslims have been living side by side with the Bodos in these areas from the beginning of the 20th century, before independence and partition.

The Party in Assam has condemned the violent ethnic clashes and the failure of the state government in containing the violence. It has appealed to the people to restore peace and normalcy particularly among the Muslims. The Party organized peace processions and public meetings in various places particularly in lower Assam. It has also submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister listing out various demands. Among them are steps to seize illegal arms and ammunition, supply of adequate relief material and medical aid to the victims, rehabilitation of the displaced people in their own places of residence and compensation for their losses, initiating a democratic cultural and land rights to the people living in the BTAD.

As per the latest official reports there are 1.56 lakh Muslims and 18 thousand Bodos in various relief camps. The Bodo Territorial Council and the Hindu communal forces are taking the stand that among the Muslims only those who can show land records and proof of citizenship can be allowed to go back to their homes. By this stand many of the Muslims will not be allowed to go back given the fact that they cannot produce their records. Our Party has taken the stand that all those in the relief camps should be able to return to their homes and lands. It is for the government to ensure their safety and security.

Communal and fundamentalist forces of various hues have been actively trying to utilize the situation. The Bajrang Dal with the support of the RSS and the VHP organized a Assam bandh on

August 27. This was followed by the bandh the next day called by the All Assam Minority Students Union and some other outfits. These bands led to violent clashes in some places and communal polarisation in the Brahmaputra valley. The issue of infiltration from Bangladesh has come to the fore again.

In this regard our Party has demanded the speedy updating of the National Register of Citizens based on the 1971 voter list and the distribution of photo identity cards to all citizens based on that.

Repercussions Outside Assam

The developments in the lower Assam districts have had an unexpected impact in the country. There has been widespread campaign about the atrocities on the Muslims in Kokhrajara area all over the country. Some of the extremist Muslim organizations have also aroused feelings on this issue. In Mumbai when a Muslim organization organized a protest rally in Azad Maidan a section of the crowd attacked the police and the media and two people died as a result of firing. The rage exhibited by Muslim youth can also be attributed to the pent up anger against the police who have been targeting Muslim youth for various terrorist attacks. There were some instances of attacks on North East people in Pune by some Muslim youth. In Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka a large scale exodus of people of North Eastern origin took place which also spread to Chennai and some other places. Thousands of people including workers and students went back to Assam and other North Eastern states. They reacted to threats circulated by SMS and due to the pleading of their families to come back home. In Karnataka, the RSS and its outfits conducted a campaign that the Muslims are threatening people of North Eastern origin. This along with the propaganda by extremist Muslim organizations resulted in insecurity and fear among the North Eastern people residing there.

The whole episode shows how fragile relations between different communities are. The North Eastern people are often subjected to racial abuse and get a feeling that they are alien in other parts of India.

Divisive Forces

In Mumbai the other aspect has been the efforts of the MNS and Shiv Sena to utilize the occasion to spew hatred and target the "foreigners". Apart from attacking Muslims for the violence in the Azad Maidan rally, Raj Thackeray has threatened to throw out the Biharis whom he called infiltrators. Attack on migrant workers in a train has taken place in Karnataka by students owing allegiance to the ABVP. These workers belonging to Orissa, Bengal and Bihar were beaten up and branded as infiltrators.

In Punjab, efforts to glorify Sikh extremism have continued. After honouring the person convicted for the killing of Chief Minister Beant Singh at the Akali Takht, the SGPC honoured the relatives of the killers of Gen. Vaidya who were executed for the crime. The Akali Dal-BJP government turns a blind eye to the propagation of Khalistani sentiments.

In a situation where economic conditions are deteriorating and discontent is rising, various divisive forces are seeking to divert the attention of the people by targeting migrant labour and people who have come from other states. The RSS and the Hindutva forces are as usual trying to target the Muslims in such a situation.

Communal Violence

There have been a number of communal incidents in the last three months. In Uttar Pradesh, particularly in Western UP there have been communal riots and violence in Kosi Kalan, Barielly, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Pratapgarh and other places. The RSS is active in creating communal tensions out of minor incidents. The effort is to portray the SP government as a pro-Muslim government and to help the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections by creating a communal polarization.

In Karnataka, the Hindutva groups are continuing their aggressive activities. There has been a communal incident in Belgaum in which two people have been killed. Clashes have taken place in Chintamani and other places at the time of the immersion processions of the Ganesh idol.

Naroda Patiya Verdict

The judgment in the Naroda Patiya case by the Special Court Judge, Jyotsna Yagnik is a landmark one. The Naroda Patiya massacre was one of the worst incidents in the Gujarat communal violence of 2002 in which 97 people were killed. 32 people have been found guilty and sentenced, including some for life. Maya Kodnani, the MLA of that area and former minister and Babu Bajrangji, former Bajrang Dal convenor were convicted. Kodnani has been sentenced for 10 to 18 years respectively and Bajrangji to life imprisonment until death. The judgment is significant on a number of counts. This is the first time so many have been convicted in a case of communal violence. Secondly, criminal responsibility has been fixed at the level of the political leadership as conspirators and instigators. The judgment is a serious blow to Narendra Modi who has been denying any political planning or involvement in the Gujarat carnage. This judgment should help set the judicial trend for dealing with cases of communal violence in the future.

Presidential Elections

The Presidential elections was held on July 14. The UPA put up Pranab Mukherjee as its candidate. The NDA backed P.A. Sangma who was initially proposed by the AIADMK and the BJD. The candidature of Pranab Mukherjee got the support of most of the non-Congress secular parties including the Samajwadi Party, the BSP, Janata Dal(S), RJD and the JD(U) which did not go along with the NDA stand on this matter. Among the Left parties, the CPI(M) and the Forward Bloc decided to support Pranab Mukherjee's candidature, while the CPI and the RSP decided to abstain in the election.

Our Party has been taking a consistent position since 1992 that the post of President should be occupied by a person of secular credentials. The post should not be held by a person who can be subject to the influence of the BJP and the communal forces. Hence there was no question of supporting a candidate backed by the BJP. Mamata Banerjee and the TMC initially opposed the candidature of Pranab Mukherjee. They made efforts in tandem with the BJP to see if Abdul Kalam can be made the opposition candidate. But this could not succeed after Mulayam Singh and the JD(U) refused to go along with this plan. The rift between the TMC and the Congress was getting aggravated on the presidential issue. At this juncture it was essential to counter the moves of the TMC. After consultations with other secular opposition parties the Polit Bureau decided to extend support to Pranab Mukherjee. The TMC got isolated and finally it had to do a *volte face* and support Pranab Mukherjee.

Attacks on Women Alarming Situation

The past few months have seen an alarming increase in the atrocities on women all over the country. Rapes of women and minor girls and children have seen a sharp increase. Gang rapes of young girls in cities have become a regular phenomenon. In Haryana, in the period of one month between September and October there were 13 rapes, many of them dalit or minor girls. Rape and molestation cases have occurred on a large scale in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP and other states. There is a breakdown of social values and preying on women with impunity is growing. The failure on the part of the police to act promptly and to take strict action against such crimes is fuelling insecurity among women and young girls. The Party and the mass organisations should take up this issue seriously and campaign against such crimes against women and the social degeneration. The Party should demand concrete steps to ensure the safety and security of women in public places, public transport and work places.

Prosecution of Minority Youth

There has been anger in the Muslim community the way Muslim youth are being targeted and arrested in cases connected with terrorism charges. Over the years instances of arrest of innocent youth and their being in jail for long periods without sufficient evidence has grown. After the exposure of the involvement of the Hindutva terrorist outfits in the bomb blasts in Malegaon, Mecca Masjid etc, the Muslim youth who were arrested in these cases were obviously falsely implicated. Yet, the trend of rounding up Muslim youth on terrorism related cases and under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act has continued.

A recent study by the Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association documented 16 cases in which Muslim youth were picked up on charges such as sedition and terrorism. In all the 16 cases, the accused were acquitted by the courts. Recently, around a dozen young educated Muslims were arrested in Karnataka and they have been charged with having links with the Lashkar-e-Taiba and groups based in Saudi Arabia. In all such cases where the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act is invoked, it is difficult for the accused to prove their innocence and it is easy for the police to frame charges on flimsy or often misleading evidence.

In the face of the mounting evidence of harassment and targeting of the minority community in terrorism related cases, we should demand that the government give out clear instructions against such biased investigations. States where such harassment of Muslim youth have taken place must be specifically told to rein in the police investigative agencies. The Party should campaign for the protection of the democratic rights and civil liberties of the minority community in all such cases.

Koodankulam Nuclear Plant

The local people have been conducting an agitation against the two reactors which are to be commissioned in Koodankulam. There are genuine apprehensions about the safety amongst the people, especially after the Fukushima accident in Japan. The Koodankulam area has been hit by a tsunami. The Party had opposed the setting up of imported nuclear plants in the aftermath of the Indo-US nuclear deal, in the political resolution of the 20th Congress. In that we had stated: "The two reactors set-up in Koodankulam and purchased from Russia much before the nuclear deal falls in a different category. The local people have various apprehensions about the safety and the impact on the environment of these reactors, especially after the Fukushima accident. It is necessary to

conduct an independent safety review and allay the apprehensions of the people before commissioning the plant.”

Based on this, we have been demanding an independent safety review be conducted and adequate safety measures be put in place before the plant is commissioned. Further, the Party condemned the police repression on the protesting people and the filing of cases of sedition against a number of people.

Protest Against Anti-Islamic Film

A film produced in the United States denigrating the Prophet and Islam has met with worldwide protests all across the Muslim world. In India too Muslim organisations have held protests in Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata and other cities. The US government claims free speech is a fundamental right and therefore the film cannot be banned or prohibited. The Government of India should have demanded from the US government that such a step be taken as inciting passions against any religion or community cannot be protected under the purview of freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression and the right of free speech which are provided for in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights are qualified. The covenant states “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement, discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law”.

In America and Europe there is an increasing tide of anti-Islamic propaganda and Islamophobia. Insulting the religious sentiments of the Muslims and their deeply held beliefs are considered of less consequence as compared to upholding the right of any obscure newspaper or film producer to spout venom against Islam and its Prophet.

The anger of the Muslim community is also fuelled by the American policies in the Middle East where it has invaded and attacked Muslim countries in the name of fighting terrorism.

Assembly Elections

The Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat assembly elections are to be held in November and December respectively. This will be followed by the Tripura assembly election in February 2013.

In Himachal Pradesh we should call for the defeat of the BJP government and also oppose the Congress. Given the advances we have made in the Shimla Corporation election and the victories in the student front and other mass activities, we should be able to do

well in the seats in the Shimla region. We should concentrate on winning some seats. In Gujarat we should call for the defeat of the Modi government and the BJP. Our Party should fight a few seats where we can improve our electoral performance and where it will be helpful to build the Party and the mass movements.

The Tripura elections will be a crucial one, especially because it is the only state which has a Left-led government at present. The remarkable work done by the Left Front and the pro-people measures adopted should stand the Left Front government in good stead with the people. The Rs. 2 per kilo rice for BPL card holders, the good performance in delivery of social welfare schemes such as MNREGA and the decentralization with the formation of new districts and sub-divisions and the developmental work undertaken in the tribal areas – all these have earned popular support for the government.

The Congress party has been assiduously trying to create law and order problems and conducting a campaign to malign the government and its leaders. It is also instigating the extremist forces to try and destabilize the peaceful situation. The Party and the Left Front have to be vigilant about these manouevres. The Party and the Left Front have been conducting campaigns and movements against the anti-people policies of the central government. The Party Centre will extend all possible assistance to the Tripura state unit to fight the electoral battle successfully.

Countrywide Protests

The hike in diesel prices and the limitation of gas cylinders met with protests immediately all over the country. The Party units organized protest demonstrations and dharnas at the call of the Polit Bureau. After the government announced FDI in multi-brand retail and disinvestment in PSUs, the Left parties took the initiative and eight parties came together to give a call for the September 20 protest and strike. The NDA also gave a call for bandh on the same day. The country saw a big protest action on that day with most states observing hartal. In Kerala, the hartal had taken place earlier immediately after the diesel price hike. In Maharashtra because of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival the day was observed through protest demonstrations. Shops and markets were closed all over the country; many of the traders organisations joined the strike call. Motor transport also struck work that day.

Food Security Campaign

During this period, the Left parties also conducted the countrywide campaign for food security and for a universal public distribution system. The campaign began at the block level from the beginning

of July. This culminated in the five day dharna by the Left parties in New Delhi and state level dharnas and rallies during that period. Following this, the Left parties gave a call to observe food security day on September 12 which was widely observed with picketing outside FCI godowns and district level demonstrations and court arrest programmes. This campaign should be carried forward.

Political Situation

The UPA government has been further exposed by the massive corruption scandal of the coal block allocation. This time the Prime Minister's involvement itself is in question. The constant price rise of food items and essential commodities has sharply eroded the support for the UPA government. It is at such a juncture that the Trinamul Congress withdrew support from the government and broke off from the UPA citing the FDI in retail trade, hike in diesel prices and other measures. The response of the Manmohan Singh government to this crisis has been to further push for neo-liberal measures which will only increase the contradiction between the people and the government.

The resistance and struggles of different sections of people have also grown in this period. The September 20 strike is an indication of this. The situation is favourable for the intensification and widening of the popular struggles and movements.

The UPA government and the Congress leadership must be the focus of these struggles and campaigns. As the 20th Congress resolution of the Party pointed out "Defeating the Congress and the UPA government is imperative given the crushing burden of price rise, unemployment, suffering of the farmers and workers on the one hand and the brazen corruption and big sops to big business and wealthy sections."

Though the TMC withdrew support to the government, its survival is not at stake. Since there are parties which are still supporting it from the outside such as the SP, BSP and others. However, the UPA government has got politically more isolated. In parliament in the winter session we should work out tactics so that the government is put in the dock on the FDI retail issue. Since this is a policy which is opposed across the board, we should be able to rally even the parties who are supporting the government but opposed to FDI in retail to demand that the government seek parliamentary approval for this policy.

The anti-Congress mood among the people has grown. The BJP will try to take advantage of this. Therefore, while keeping the main focus on the anti-people policies of the UPA government and fighting it, we should also expose the BJP and its record of

corruption and the similarity of its policies with that of the Congress.

The BJP in its recent National Council session has talked of broadening the NDA and acquiring new allies. We should work to thwart that happening and to keep our relations with the secular opposition parties.

The talk of a third front is being revived again in some political circles, but some of the major regional parties do not see it as an immediate prospect. Mulayam Singh Yadav, after the Samajwadi Party national executive in Kolkata stated that the third front will materialize after the Lok Sabha elections.

As per the political line we have worked out at the 20th Congress we should step up our independent activities and role and strengthen the united Left actions. We should draw the non-Congress secular parties into joint actions on issues and cooperate with them in fighting against the government's policies inside parliament.

We should discuss the preparations for the Lok Sabha elections and the seats we wish to contest. State committees should discuss this issue and then the matter can be taken up in the next meeting of the Central Committee.

The struggle against FDI in retail, against price rise and corruption should be carried forward and intensified in the coming days. The issue of FDI in retail can become the centre of a massive countrywide movement if we are able to rally all the forces against this step.

The Party should campaign against the communal and divisive forces who are trying to disrupt the unity of the people and divert their attention away from the real problems. The Party should mobilize public opinion against the increasing attacks on women and young girls and demand measures to ensure their protection and security. The Party should observe a protest day on October 30 during which public opinion should be mobilized against violence against women and demanding firm measures against those guilty of such crimes.

The call of the central trade unions for joint struggles culminating in the two-day general strike on February 20-21, 2013 should be taken up in right earnest. The Party should campaign for and support the jail bhara call for December 2012 and the two day strike call.
