

Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Central Committee Office

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Report on Current Developments

(Adopted by the Central Committee at its meeting held on
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The Central Committee is meeting two months after the 17th Congress of the Party. During this period, certain developments have taken place on the international and national plane, which have to be noted and analysed.

International

Israel's War Against the Palestinian People

At the time of the Party Congress the Israeli armed forces had begun their attacks on the towns in the West Bank. This continued and became a full-fledged military occupation. All the major towns in the West Bank were occupied by the Israeli armed forces. Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah was under siege by Israeli tanks and soldiers, for 34 days. Even the Church of Nativity, the holy place where Christ was believed to have been born was under siege, as Palestinian fighters had taken sanctuary there. The siege continued for 40 days.

The worst atrocity took place in the Jenin refugee camp which houses 13,000 people. The camp was subjected to continuous bombardment by fighter planes and tanks for four days, reducing a large part of the camp to rubble. After the Israeli's withdrew, 50 bodies were recovered many of them civilians.

The withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces from the cities of the West Bank and the lifting of the siege of Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah does not signify an end to the Israeli aggression. The Israeli armed forces have encircled the towns and are repeatedly entering them to attack Palestinian targets and arrest the fighters of the liberation movement.

The purpose of Prime Minister Sharon's offensive was clearly meant to weaken and destroy the Palestinian Authority (P.A) and the Palestinian leadership. He utilised the US "war against terrorism" to launch his own war against the Palestinian people. By this act, the 1993 Oslo Accords have become more or less redundant. Israel in the past eight years has refused to transfer to the Palestinian Authority even the limited territory agreed to. Only 18 per cent of the West Bank was handed over. Further, there are over 2,00,000 Jewish settlers in around 200 settlements dotted

across the occupied territories. Israeli armed forces have control and jurisdiction over most of the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

The besieged Palestinian Authority (P.A) was compelled to make further compromises. The agreement for lifting the Israeli siege on the Palestinian Authority headquarters required the handing over of six Palestinians for joint custody with American and British officers supervising their imprisonment in Jericho. Among those handed over are the General Secretary of the PFLP Ahmed Sadaat, the second largest organisation in the PLO, and another, the Financial Advisor of the P.A. It may be recalled that the PFLP General secretary Abu Ali Mustafa was assassinated by the Israeli armed forces last year and Sadaat had taken over after that. The Israelis accuse Sadaat and the PFLP of assassinating the cabinet minister Zeevi in retaliation for the killing of Mustafa.

This decision has attracted strong condemnation from all other Palestinian organisations. Israel continues to defy world opinion and violate all international norms because of the firm backing of the United States. The Security Council had adopted a unanimous resolution to send a fact-finding team to Jenin refugee camp. Israel first agreed and later backed out. As a result, the team could not go and the UN has cancelled its visit.

President Bush has called Sharon a "man of peace". Both the Senate and the House of Representatives have passed resolutions overwhelmingly supporting the Israelis and condemning the Palestinian "terrorist" acts.

Sharon had used the suicide bombings in Israel which killed a large number of people as the pretext for the military occupation of the West Bank and the hunting down of the Palestinian fighters. After two months of brutal military operations, the suicide bombings have not stopped.

The real intent of Sharon was to decimate the Palestinian leadership. During the military operations, apart from Arafat, some important leaders of the Al Fatah were arrested and others were sent into exile like the 13 fighters who took shelter in the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem.

The United States has now announced its plans to hold an international conference on the Middle East in a few months. It is mobilising the U.N, the European Union and Russia to sponsor such a conference. The US is also relying on Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to try and convince Arafat and the Palestinian leadership to accept a plan similar to the Oslo Accords which will mean a subordinate status for the Palestinians. The United States is not prepared to force Israel to accept a full-fledged independent state of Palestine.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and its brutal attacks on the Palestinian people have aroused worldwide anger and condemnation. In all the Arab countries, there have been huge demonstrations which has put pressure on the rulers of these countries. In Europe and America also there have been big demonstrations.

The importance of the Palestinian struggle has been highlighted in the Party Congress through a special resolution. In the present juncture, the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people is one of the key points of the anti-imperialist struggle. We should continue to take up the issue of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and mobilise wider sections of the people.

This is all the more important in the context of the BJP-led government's developing close ties with Israel and reversing India's traditional policy of firm support to the Palestinian people.

Venezuela

A major event in this period was the attempted coup in Venezuela, its failure and the return of President Hugo Chavez to office. Venezuela is one of the major countries in South America and it is the third largest exporter of oil to the United States. Three years earlier, Hugo Chavez had won the Presidential election with a big vote. He had begun a series of measures to strengthen the independence and sovereignty of Venezuela and initiated limited land reforms and other pro-people measures. Last year in November, Chavez signed a package of laws aimed at reducing social disparities and targetting the oligarchic power of the vested interests. This earned the wrath of the United States and the domestic ruling classes, the big business, the church and the media which is controlled by the monopolies. A counter offensive began with mass protests and strikes. It was one of these protests on April 11 which sparked off the coup. Chavez was arrested under the orders of the army chief and taken to an undisclosed destination. A new interim president who was the president of the Chambers of Commerce was appointed. He immediately dissolved the National Assembly and all the laws passed by it.

The counter mobilisation by the people and the split in the army led to the unraveling of the coup. Chavez returned with the support of a big section of the armed forces and due to the popular mobilisation of tens of thousands of people in different parts of Venezuela.

Subsequently, the role of the United States in instigating the coup has come out. The Americans were pumping in funds through the National Endowment for Democracy which was set up by the US to promote "democracy around the world". Sections of the military officers were also in touch with the US agencies.

The toppling of Chavez would have been a serious setback to the progressive and anti-imperialist forces in South America. His friendship with Cuba was resented by the US. A rightwing regime in Venezuela would have taken serious anti-Cuban steps.

Chavez is more an individual leader without an organised Party and movement to back him. As such he has been more of a populist and certain decisions which he took were tactically wrong which helped consolidate the opposition.

However, the failure of the coup instigated by the USA is a significant event. It is for the first time that such a coup has failed in recent history. It is a big victory for the anti-imperialist forces.

Further Aggressive Steps by the US

The Bush administration is bent upon escalating the arms race and developing new weapons. In doing so it has already withdrawn from the ABM treaty and refused to ratify the biological weapons convention.

In a recent review of its nuclear policy called the Nuclear Posture Review, it has decided to adopt a more aggressive nuclear policy. The review calls for "Unilateral Assured Destruction" which means nuclear weapons countries like Russia and China will be targetted by offensive measures rather than by second strike nuclear forces. The Nuclear Posture Review goes even further. It explicitly lists Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq and North Korea as potential targets for the nuclear forces of the United States. This means that the United States will be prepared to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states too, if it feels threatened.

The review also puts forth a forty-year plan for developing and acquiring new nuclear weapons. It calls for new launch platforms in the air, sea and land to be deployed in 2010, 2020, 2040. It also calls for new low-yield and variable-yield war heads that would require further nuclear testing. All these would mean that the US is embarking on a policy of building new nuclear weapons, targetting non-nuclear states with its nuclear weapons and spark off a long-term nuclear arms race.

US-Russia Relations

It is in this context that the recent Bush-Putin agreement to make substantial cuts in their nuclear arsenals must be viewed. The new treaty is to be signed in Moscow on May 24. It provides for the US and Russia reducing the nuclear warheads deployed by two-thirds by the year 2012. From 6000 warheads of each country, the number will go down to between 1700 to 2200 each. But the important fact is that the warheads so dismantled will be put in storage and not destroyed. Russia had wanted the warheads destroyed but the US did not agree.

The reduction of the existing number of warheads deployed will actually lead to strengthening US superiority, since the US has already declared it is going in for a whole new generation of missiles through the NMD and plans to deploy new nuclear weapons platforms.

The agreement has been denounced by the Communist Party of Russian Federation which plans to move a no-confidence motion against the government on the issue. Further, Putin has agreed to Russia joining the NATO in a partnership through a NATO-Russia Council. By this, the way has been opened for NATO to expand eastwards by including most of the East European countries.

Both these measures clearly indicate the compromising role of Putin in accommodating US strategic interests.

US Double Standards on Free Trade

On the economic front, the United States has shown more proof of its arrogant and unilateral approach. The US is the most vocal about free trade and compelling the rest of the world to accept this principle. However, it is equally blatant about its double standards in this matter. Early this year, the United States in order to bail out its steel industry imposed a 30 per cent tariff on steel imports. All the major steel exporting countries have vehemently protested against this protectionist measure. But Bush has rejected all these protests.

He has followed this up by signing a new Farm Bill 2002 which provides huge subsidies to US farmers. By this, an estimated \$ 190 billion will be spent over ten years which is \$ 83 billion more than the current subsidies. It increases by two-third the payment for grain and cotton farmers, most of them belonging to the big farmers.

In the WTO, the United States vigorously opposes subsidies given by the third world countries and Europe to the agriculture sector. In Doha too it pushed through such a stand. But the new law gives a bonanza to the US farmers particularly the richer sections. It has evoked vehement protests from Europe, Brazil and other countries.

Another example of the US's unilateralism is its withdrawal from the agreement to set up an International Criminal Court. The United States sets up war crimes courts when it suits its interests as the ongoing trial of Milosevic in a war crimes tribunal illustrates. But in order to prevent its soldiers and officers being hauled up for any war crimes, America refuses to give jurisdiction to any international court for this matter. Therefore, it has refused to be party to this agreement and has withdrawn from it.

Rightward Shift in Europe

The Presidential elections in France led to Le Pen, the extreme right wing leader of the National Front coming second in the first round and qualifying for the final round. Incumbent President Chirac came first. The socialist candidate, Prime Minister Jospin was eliminated having come third.

This success of Le Pen came as a shock to most of the French people. The failure of the socialists in government and the growing fears of law and order and immigration were played upon by Le Pen to gain support. However, the massive popular mobilisation to stop Le Pen led to his rout in the final round with Chirac winning 82 per cent of the vote and Le Pen 17 per cent.

The French election is part of the shift to the Right in Europe. There is the rightwing Berlusconi government in Italy which came to power last year which includes far-right forces. In Austria, Denmark, Sweden and recently in Portugal, right wing forces or coalitions have won elections. Even in The Netherlands, an anti-immigration party whose leader Fortuyn was assassinated polled the second largest votes in the

parliament elections. The rightwing Christian Democrats won the elections. The social democratic parties which earlier were in office in these countries followed policies which were not different from those of the rightwing parties. There has been growing disenchantment and alienation which has been cashed in by the Right. Further, in the post-September 11 period, the climate of fear of terrorism and xenophobia have helped the right-wing forces.

At the same time some of the countries are witnessing important struggles of the working class and other sections. In Italy there was a march organised by the trade unions against the change in labour laws on March 23 in which a million workers participated. This was followed by a call for general strike on April 16 which saw a complete shut down in Italy the like of which has not been seen in the past 20 years. These struggles are mainly defensive in character and do not yet signal a counter-attack on the capitalist offensive.

East Timor independent

East Timor finally became an independent state on May 19, 2002. After centuries of Portuguese rule, this tiny island was occupied by the Indonesia in 1975, in a flagrant aggression which was tacitly approved by the US. After a prolonged struggle and heavy loss of life, the East Timoreans have after a spell of UN administered rule gained full independence. The Fretilin leader, Xanana Gusmao, has been elected President. With this event, yet another liberation struggle which was active in the last quarter of the twentieth century has achieved success.

South Asia

Pakistan: After announcing that elections will be held and democracy restored in Pakistan, Gen. Musharraf manoeuvred to consolidate his position and remain as President. A referendum has been held by the military regime to approve his continuing as President for another five years. All the major political parties boycotted the referendum. Reports show that despite all the efforts by Musharraf and his regime, the polling was low and people were not enthused by the referendum. Rather than strengthening Musharraf, this has exposed his weak position.

Musharraf is struggling to retain his hold. The measures taken against fundamentalists have been more of a formal nature. These forces are still active. The recent terrorist attack in Karachi which killed 11 French engineers shows that the fundamentalist forces which have strong links within the establishment are far from suppressed. The United States is putting pressure on Musharraf to conduct joint military operations in the North West Frontier Province adjoining Afghanistan where the Taliban and other Al Qaeda elements are reported to have taken shelter. A section of the Pakistani military is against allowing the US armed forces to conduct operations within Pakistan. Musharraf is trying to balance between the American pressures and the hardline elements within his regime.

Nepal: The Maoist insurgency and their widespread attacks are being met with increasingly coordinated counter operations by the Nepalese armed forces. As a

result, thousands have lost their lives in these battles. The Nepalese government has sought US military assistance to combat the Maoist forces. The US administration is planning to give \$ 20 million as assistance. The Indian government is also providing arms and other equipment.

The tactics adopted by the Maoists of relying purely on armed actions will not succeed. It will only lead to severe repression and strengthening of the King and the armed forces. The emergency laws were used to suppress democratic and trade union rights. The CPN(UML) and other progressive forces in Nepal have called upon the Maoists to stop the fighting and asked the government and the Maoists to resume talks which were broken earlier.

The US has found an opportunity to intervene in Nepal. This must be seen in the context of the direct and growing military presence of the United States in the Indian subcontinent.

Sri Lanka: The LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, held a widely publicised press conference where he conveyed his readiness for a negotiated settlement while not giving up the basic demand for Tamil Elam. Under Norwegian mediation, the stage is set for talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. This is to take place in Thailand after the fulfillment of certain steps in May. The LTTE has demanded that an interim administration be formed of the North-Eastern provinces. The agreement has a clause which more or less accedes to the LTTE the right to control the administration. There is a great desire for peace among the people in Sri Lanka including the Sinhala sections. With this, the LTTE is poised to make gains. The North East interim administration to be set up will be under its control. Prabhakaran has also held talks with the Muslim Tamil leadership, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and come to an agreement with them. What the LTTE aims for is de facto control of the North East, whatever the final outcome of the negotiations.

The CPI(M) has been consistently advocating that a solution to the Tamil problem has to be found within the framework of Sri Lankan unity and by providing meaningful autonomy to the Tamil people. The Party opposed the request of the LTTE for facilities in India during the period of negotiations. Given the record of the LTTE, it will be harmful to allow it to function in any manner from India.

At the same time the Party did not support the resolution moved by the AIADMK government in the Tamilnadu assembly which calls for the extradition of Prabhakaran and in the eventuality of the Sri Lankan government's inability to do so, requesting it to allow Indian troops to be sent into Sri Lanka to apprehend Prabhakaran who is the main accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

Our Party's stand is that the legal procedures in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case should continue. But in the context of the peace moves in Sri Lanka, no step should be taken which will disrupt the possibilities of negotiations. At the same time, the LTTE should not be allowed any access to India given its role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and other terrorist activities. The ban on the it should continue.

Myanmar

In Burma (Myanmar), the military government released Aung San Su Kyi from her 20-month house arrest after prolonged negotiations facilitated by a UN envoy. Su Kyi has announced that she is free to travel around the country. However, the National League for Democracy (NLD) is still not free from restrictions. The government has released some of the NLD leaders in prison and allowed some of its offices to reopen. However, it remains to be seen whether the easing of restrictions will lead to the restoration of democracy. A similar agreement in 1995 broke down and Su Kyi was put under arrest in 2000.

National Situation

Gujarat

The Political Resolution of the 17th Congress had taken serious note of the state-sponsored violence against the minorities after the gruesome attack on the train at Godhra. After 75 days of continuing violence, more than a lakh are in refugee camps. Many people belonging to the Muslim community have also left the state to take shelter in neighbouring areas. The resolution on Gujarat of the Party Congress had demanded the immediate removal of Narendra Modi as the Chief Minister, effective steps to check the violence and bring the persons guilty of serious crimes to book.

The National Human Rights Commission confirmed the gross violation of human rights in the state and the failure of the state government to protect the lives of citizens belonging to the minority community. The NHRC demanded that the investigation into the major crimes be handed over to the CBI and special courts set up for the trials.

The Narendra Modi government showed no remorse about what happened and brazenly sought to justify its role. It is in such a situation that the People's Front gave a call for countrywide action to condemn the violence in Gujarat and to demand the removal of Narendra Modi, on April 17. Rallies and demonstrations took place all over the country. Similar actions were taken by the Congress and other opposition parties.

The events after the Party Congress further confirm the heinous role played by the state administration. The Modi government refuses to acknowledge the heinous rape of women. The sexual violence against women and attacks on children were on a scale never seen before. Any effort to organise peace meetings or protests were met with intimidation and attacks. The incident at the Sabarmati Ashram when a peace meeting there was attacked and the media assaulted brought home the real situation in the state before the entire country.

The people sheltering in the relief camps were not provided any real assistance by the state government. Any attempt by them to return to their homes was met with renewed attacks. The compensation offered by the state government is shockingly meagre. Paltry amounts are being disbursed to those who lost their houses and means of livelihood.

Vajpayee's notorious speech in Goa where he condemned Muslims as not able to live in peace with others has completely shattered whatever image he had as a "moderate" within the RSS combine. The BJP national executive brazenly defended Modi's role and called for assembly elections, a patently disruptive move to cash in on the communal polarisation.

When parliament convened, Gujarat dominated the proceedings. The opposition demanded a debate under Rule 184 in the Lok Sabha and rule 170 in the Rajya Sabha which entails voting. For ten days, the government resisted the move leading to stalling of the proceedings. Finally, it was compelled to accept the demand. The debate in both houses put the BJP state government in the dock and exposed the role of the Centre.

During the Rajya Sabha debate, the government decided to support the opposition sponsored resolution which urged the government to invoke Article 355 in Gujarat to restore peace and normalcy. It resorted to this tactic to avoid a defeat in the house. It sought to argue that the steps being taken, like sending K.P.S. Gill as an advisor is in line with Article 355. Article 355 requires that the Central Government give specific written directives to a state government which is faced with internal disturbances. The implication being that this is necessary given its failure to tackle the situation. Article 356 is the follow up clause which would be invoked as a consequence of the failure to deal with the situation.

With reports from Gujarat coming in of continuing violence particularly in Ahmedabad, where in the course of five days in the first week of May more than 30 people lost their lives, the Polit Bureau decided that it was necessary to demand the dismissal of the Gujarat state government and imposition of President's rule. In 1992, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Party for the first time declared support for the use of Article 356 to dismiss the four BJP-led governments who worked to defy the law and the Constitution at Ayodhya.

Similarly, use of Article 356 was warranted as there is an extraordinary situation in Gujarat. The Modi Government has acted brazenly to subvert the secular principle which the Supreme Court has declared to be a basic feature of the Constitution. Since independence, there has been no state government which has so brazenly and openly supported largescale pogroms against the minority community and subverted the state administration to prevent it from discharging its constitutional duty towards a section of citizens because of their religious affiliations.

The happenings in Gujarat have come as a grim and shocking reminder of what the BJP-RSS combine is capable of. As the Political Resolution of the 17th Congress points out, Gujarat is the precursor of what the RSS and the Hindu communal forces want to impose in the rest of India. The Party warned the country that this is not a communal riot but a systematic plan to eliminate the minorities or make them accept a second class ghettoised existence. In order to meet this challenge it is necessary to go amongst the people in a big way. We must expose that this is what is meant by Hindu Rashtra of the BJP and the RSS. A powerful campaign for communal amity and to draw the correct lessons from Gujarat has to be conducted.

Such a campaign must go down to the people in the villages, bastis, localities and towns all over India.

In view of the Gujarat situation, after the Party Congress, the Party conducted a campaign against the communal danger and to protest against the violence in Gujarat. In West Bengal, an intensive campaign has been undertaken. Campaigns have also been conducted in Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and other places (details are given in the work report). But given the enormity of the communal barbarism in Gujarat and the continuing efforts to conduct a hate campaign against the minorities in other parts of the country, a much more intensive campaign is required.

In this connection the National Platform of Mass Organisations has given a call for a fortnight long campaign in June. This must be taken up seriously in all states. The Party must commit all its resources to make this campaign successful. We should be able to reach maximum number of people to take to them the message of defence of secularism and how it is vital for the well being of the country and the unity of the people.

Apart from the NPMO, the Party must independently and alongwith other Left and other democratic and secular forces be able to project the need for secularism and to counter the threat of the Hindutva forces.

Alongwith the anti-communal campaign, the Party has been active in raising funds for relief work in Gujarat. The details are given in the work report. The collection of funds for relief must be completed by June 15.

The events in Gujarat have had their impact on the national political scene. Within the NDA except for the Shiv Sena, Samata and the MDMK, all other parties voiced the demand for Narendra Modi's removal. The TDP which supports the NDA government was most vocal in this respect. Prior to the vote, Ram Vilas Paswan quit the cabinet and left the NDA. However, when it came to voting on the resolution in the Lok Sabha all the NDA partners fell in line, except the National Conference which abstained. The TDP after criticising the Modi government walked out instead of voting against the government.

Budget

The budget presented on February 27 was overshadowed by the violence which erupted in Gujarat. Under pressure from the BJP itself the finance minister had to make some concessions to the middle class such as raising the standard deduction and reduction in the increased rate of cooking gas. However, these minor concessions do not meet the real problems being faced by the ordinary middle class people and small savers. The continuous cuts in the rates of interest on savings and bank accounts have hit them badly. The budget measures have further worsened the plight of traditional industries affecting lakhs of workers, particularly women workers. The announcement made by the finance minister on continuing the thrust of privatisation of PSUs and the demand that states must follow the central prescriptions if funds have to be released have to be vigorously opposed and fought back.

The privatisation drive continues with Maruti being handed over to the Suzuki company with the government diluting its majority stake. The IPCL has been handed over to the Reliance with 26 per cent stake, facilitating the establishment of a monopoly position for the Ambanis in the Petro-chemicals sector.

The Patent (Amendment) Bill has been adopted in Parliament. This amended Act brings the law in line with the WTO provisions. In the Rajya Sabha while the Left and other opposition parties pressed certain amendments and forced a division, the Congress extended full support to the bill. This once again illustrates the basic position of the Congress in support of globalisation and liberalisation. The Congress-led UDF government in Kerala has launched an all-round attack on the people, the public sector and public services. This exposes the Congress policies which have to be vigorously opposed.

16th April PSU Strike

It is in this background of the privatisation offensive that the 16th April public sector strike assumes significance. The strike call was given by all the central trade unions except the INTUC. It was joined by nearly 1.5 crore employees. All the bank employees' federations joined the strike. The entire insurance sector was also on strike. The port and dock workers strike was successful. The coal mine workers also observed a complete strike. Most of the public sector units in Bangalore and Hyderabad were closed. The state government employees in several states joined the strike along with their demands. In many places, the local INTUC unions joined the strike.

In West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, it was possible to organise a state wide general strike in support of the public sector workers.

While the momentum created by the public sector strike should be taken forward for wider industrial action, it is also necessary to work towards building up a powerful movement of all sections of the working people and go towards a series of protest actions culminating in an all India general strike which will draw in the working class, peasantry, agricultural workers, women, students and youth. For this purpose, the NPMO has to be activated. The first step is being taken with the Gujarat/anti-communal campaign after which the NPMO should chalk out a plan of action for fighting back the liberalisation/privatisation policies and to beat back the offensive of the communal forces.

New Financial Scam

The series of scandals affecting the financial and banking sector continues unabated. The latest is the Home Trade Company scam. Hundreds of crores of rupees from cooperative banks were put into this dubious company which has now collapsed. The Nagpur Cooperative Development Bank and many other cooperative banks have lost hundreds of crores by investing in this dud company and thereby the savings of thousands of people have been wiped out. A shocking case connected with this scandal is the swindling of Rs. 93 crores of the Seamen's

Provident Fund. The entire episode is a serious warning of how liberalisation and deregulation of the financial sector is causing havoc. The proposal to put provident fund money into capital and stock markets will lead to such scams as that which hit the Seamen's Provident Fund.

POTA adopted

After the POTO legislation was voted down in the Rajya Sabha, the government convened a joint session of Parliament, the third time in history, to get the law adopted. The adoption of the POTA marks a new onslaught on the democratic rights of citizens. It is in tune with the BJP-led government's aim to use the "terrorism" plank to suppress dissent and target the minority community.

BJP: Losing Ground

After the defeat in the four assembly elections, the BJP continued to suffer electoral setbacks. It was routed in the Delhi Municipal Corporation elections with the Congress getting a huge majority. In the Corporation elections in Shimla also the BJP lost badly.

It is in the face of this erosion of support, that the national executive session of the BJP held in Goa decided to fall back on its Hindutva agenda. Criticism that the Party is losing its distinctive character due to the dilution of its Hindutva agenda was forcefully made at the session. The strident stand of support to Modi and going to the extent of calling for assembly elections in Gujarat was also part of this trend. The other aspect of the session was the criticism of the budget measures which many blamed for loss of middle class support.

In the present situation, the BJP is prepared to disregard the views of its allies in the NDA to protect its Hindutva following. This also explains the stand taken by Vajpayee in his public speech criticising the Muslims and more or less justifying what happened in Gujarat as a consequences of the Godhra attack.

Uttar Pradesh: BJP-BSP Alliance

After more than two months, the BJP came to an agreement with the BSP and the formation of the government. Before this, the Governor had refused to call the leader of the Samajwadi Party to form the government as the largest single party in the assembly. Under the agreement arrived at after hard and protracted bargaining, Mayawati is the Chief Minister and she has retained the crucial home and finance portfolios. The Speaker's post has gone to the BJP. Thus, for the third time an opportunist alliance between the two parties has been forged. The BSP leadership has once again displayed cynical opportunism by joining hands with the BJP at a time when the Hindutva forces have perpetrated the worst pogroms in Gujarat. The only difference is that the BJP is in a much weaker position and unable to strike a hard bargain. After the Gujarat events, criticism within the NDA and in face of isolation, the BJP decided to give in to Mayawati's tough posture. The BJP leadership wanted to get the support of the 13 MPs of the BSP in the Lok Sabha and the support for the presidential elections too.

The dalit base of the BSP is jubilant at their leader becoming Chief Minister again, while the BJP rank and file are sullen. The widespread feeling among them being that the BJP leadership has sacrificed the party's basic interests for short-term gains. Given the conflicting caste base of these two parties, the upper caste base of the BJP is unhappy. Mayawati can be expected to go full steam ahead with measures to consolidate her mass base and this will come into conflict with the BJP's interests, making the coalition's future uncertain. In all likelihood, this will be one more short-term arrangement.

Tripura

The NLFT extremists have intensified their attacks in the recent period, keeping in view the forthcoming assembly elections, which are scheduled for early next year. It wishes to create disturbed conditions and inter-community tensions to try and alienate the people from the CPI(M) and the Left Front. A total of 10 CPI(M) members and 22 activists of the various mass organisations were killed in a series of attacks in the recent period.

The Congress party's opportunist and harmful alliance with the INPT, a wing of the NLFT has to be fully exposed before the people. The Left Front has announced a nine-point charter of demands on which a campaign and mass movement will be conducted over the next two months.

Jammu: Terrorist Attack & Response

The terrorist attack in Jammu on a passenger bus and the army residential quarters is one of the most gruesome incidents of the terrorist attacks so far. More than 30 people have been killed many of them women and children belonging to the families of the army jawans. The attack was timed during the visit of the US assistant secretary of state, Christina Rocca to Delhi, a tactic adopted by the extremists to draw international attention to their activities and demands.

This recent outrage has shocked the entire country and in parliament there has been a united condemnation. Just as after the December 13 terrorist attack on parliament there are demands that military action be resorted to against targets in Pakistan. Since December 13, for four months now there has been a full scale deployment of armed forces on the entire 1800 mile stretch of the border and the LOC. Troops which were involved in internal security duties in J&K were also pulled out for this border deployment. The Party has been calling for demobilisation of the troops from the borders.

We had advocated that pressure should be mounted politically and diplomatically on the Musharraf regime to take strong action against the extremist outfits based in Pakistan. After the January 12 speech of Musharraf, some steps were taken like the ban on the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed in Pakistan. But these

organisations are operating under different names. The Musharraf regime is unable to crack down and suppress the fundamentalist forces given the fact that they have support within the establishment. The recent bomb blast in Karachi in which a number of French engineers were killed shows the capacity of these forces.

Any limited strike will lead to counter strikes and escalation into a full-fledged war with the danger of a nuclear confrontation.

The United States which is completely backing the Musharraf regime and with whom the Vajpayee government is closely allied is not exercising sufficient pressure for a crack down within Pakistan. The double standards adopted by the Bush Administration in its declared fight against terrorism has been starkly exposed.

In such a situation there should be a three-pronged approach --- stepping up diplomatic and political pressure on the Pakistani government to take effective steps against the extremists; effective steps to strengthen the political process in Jammu & Kashmir and offering autonomy as the basis for negotiations; and heightening vigilance and security measures to check hardcore extremists -- to help meet the situation.

This has been the stand taken by the Party in the recent debate in parliament. The Vajpayee government in its response to the attack asked the High Commissioner of Pakistan in India to leave the country within a week. The United States is mounting maximum pressure on India to avoid military action as it does not want its military operations in Afghanistan and the bordering areas with Pakistan disturbed.

Presidential Elections

The Presidential elections are to be held in July. The BJP is against the re-election of K.R. Narayanan to the post of President. The NDA adopted a resolution authorising the Prime Minister to select the Presidential candidate after consultations with other parties. Our Party alongwith the Left have expressed the view that the best choice in the given circumstances will be K.R. Narayanan. The Congress party is also of the same view. However, given the electoral arithmetic in the presidential poll, the TDP and the AIADMK hold the balance. It is reported that Chandrababu Naidu prefers Vice-President Krishna Kant to take over the Presidentship. In such a situation much will depend on how the BJP decides to move. It will not put up a BJP man in order muster support from the NDA partners and the TDP.

The name of P.C. Alexander, the Governor of Maharashtra, being floated as a nominee, is not acceptable. Our Party has publicly expressed preference for K.R. Narayanan. It has been in consultation with other parties to see whether a majority can be rallied for his candidature.

Conclusion

The immediate task of the Party in the coming days is to continue the campaign on the real threat posed by the Gujarat events for the country's secular fabric, national unity and the unity of all sections of the working people. The NPMO campaign

must be made a success; the Party's independent campaign must be continued and also steps to mobilise other secular democratic forces on a broader platform.

The Party must actively intervene and build up movements against the impact of the economic policies and the attacks on the people's livelihood being mounted. Various state governments whether they belong to the BJP, the Congress, the AIADMK, TDP etc are pushing through measures which are adversely affecting the people in various ways. We must be able to independently and through united struggles fight against these policies.

The US penetration and influence is growing in all spheres. We must continuously campaign against the growing imperialist intervention in India and the neighbourhood.