

Tel. 23344918,23747435
23363692, 23747436
Fax: 23747483



COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

Central Committee

A.K. Gopalan Bhawan, 27-29, Bhai Vir Singh Marg New Delhi 110 001

Website: <http://www.cpim.org> email: cpim@vsnl.com

Report on Political Developments (Adopted At the January 02-04, 2007 Central Committee Meeting at Kolkata)

International

During the last three months, the situation in Iraq and West Asia has remained the focus of attention. The Bush administration faced domestic opposition to its Iraq policies in the Congressional elections. The execution of Saddam Hussein, internal strife among the Palestinians, the sanctions on Iran and the growing Hezbollah assertion in Lebanon are all pointers to the turmoil in West Asia. The US has been unable to stop either the DPRK or Iran on the nuclear issue. The Left forces maintained their advance through the electoral victories registered in Latin America. In Nepal, the comprehensive peace agreement with the Maoists represents a significant breakthrough for a democratic transition.

Iraq Quagmire: Impact on US

The situation in Iraq has spiraled down to an orgy of violence and sectarian killings. The month of October saw unprecedented violence and deaths of thousands of Iraqis.

The US lost over a hundred soldiers that month, the highest in two years. In December too, a hundred American soldiers died. The quagmire in which Bush has plunged the US in Iraq has had its strong impact within the United States. In the November Congressional elections, the Democrats won a majority in the House of Representatives after twelve years. They have also gained control of the Senate. The immediate fall out was the removal of Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defence.

President Bush had appointed an Iraq Study Group consisting of both Republicans and Democrats to suggest what should be done on Iraq. The Group recommended a phased withdrawal after handing over Iraq to Iraqi troops trained by the US. But the inability of Bush and his cohorts to come to

terms with a losing war is evident. After proclaiming victory two years ago, Bush now says: 'we are not winning, we are not losing'.

The reality is that the Iraqi government set up by the Americans will not be able to manage affairs without the US. It is a Shia dominated coalition that is allied to the Kurds. The Iraqi government looks up to Iran for support and will not accept any change in the balance of power vis-à-vis the Sunnis. Trapped in their own world of lies and deceit, the Bush regime is now considering, contrary to the Iraq Study Group recommendation, to infuse more troops into Iraq. It is expected that 20 to 30 thousand troops will be deployed to make a last ditch effort to eliminate the resistance in Baghdad and the central provinces.

The death sentence on Saddam Hussein through a farcical trial could not help Bush in the Congressional elections. Though Saddam and his co-accused had appealed, the judicial assassination was certain as the Al-Maliki regime was determined to pursue his execution. The confirmation of the death sentence by the Appellate Tribunal opened the way for a speedy execution. In a hasty manner, Saddam was hanged on December 30. The resistance in Iraq, particularly of the Baathist elements, will in no way be extinguished even after Saddam's removal from the scene.

It is widely recognized in the US now that the war in Iraq is lost and the only issue is to find a way out. All that the US occupation has achieved is the deaths of over 650,000 Iraqis, a figure published in the reputed medical journal Lancet based on a study conducted by a team from Johns Hopkins University. The threat of the break up of Iraq is real. Thanks to the Iraqi resistance, both Iran and Syria have earned a respite. After the events in Lebanon and the strengthening of the Hezbollah, the Bush Administration is unable to target and attack Syria as it wished to.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the Hamid Karzai regime finds itself increasingly beleaguered. The 40,000 Nato and American troops have not been able to prevent resurgence of Taliban activities in the southern and eastern region. In the Nato summit at Riga, the major European countries have expressed their unwillingness to send more troops. The Bush administration is paying the price for its utilising the "war on terrorism" to invade and occupy Iraq. Neither is it able to send more forces to Afghanistan nor get its Nato allies to stay and fight in Afghanistan.

Growing Rift in Palestinian Camp

The situation in Palestine is a cause for deep concern. After the Hamas government took office, Israel stopping paying the share of taxes due to the

Palestinian government, in an effort to starve the Palestinian people into submission. The conflict between the PLO and the Hamas aggravated. It has resulted in armed clashes and deaths which brought the situation in Gaza to the brink of a civil war. The Israelis continued their shelling and raids on Palestinian targets in Gaza. In the first week of November alone, nearly 70 people were killed. In one gruesome incident, through Israeli shelling, 18 civilians mostly women and children were killed in Beit Hanoun.

The conflict between the Hamas and the PLO after the former's victory in the elections has been growing. Due to the financial blockade, the Hamas has been unable to pay the salaries of government employees and security personnel. Clashes broke out between the PLO security forces and Hamas supporters and people have died due to the fighting. This is the biggest crisis faced by the Palestinians after the formation of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in Gaza.

In the struggle for ascendancy, the Palestinian Authority President has now called for fresh elections, a move stoutly opposed by Hamas. The Israelis hope to use this division for their own interests. The US and Israel are prepared to negotiate with President Abbas provided the ceasefire ordered on November 26 holds. A meeting of the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas was held on 23 December, the first of its kind. The effort of the Israelis will be to coerce the Palestinian Authority to accept the terms of a truncated Palestinian state.

This will not bring any lasting peace to the region. Unless Israel and US accept a two state solution with Israel's borders being the pre-1967 status, it will not be possible to solve the Palestinian problem.

Left ahead in Latin America

The Leftist surge continues in the electoral results in Latin America. In the Brazilian elections, President Lula got re-elected in the second round with a 60 percent vote. This was followed by the victory of Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista Front in the Nicaraguan elections for President. The United States tried its best to prevent Ortega becoming the President. It even threatened economic non-cooperation. The next important election was in Ecuador for President. Rafael Correa, the Left -wing candidate won with a 60 per cent vote against his billionaire rival. Correa has promised to close down the only US military base in the country. Finally on December 3, the Venezuelan Presidential elections were held. Chavez was re-elected with 62.8 percent of the vote. It was a resounding vote of confidence in the Bolivarian revolutionary process.

In Mexico, despite the fraudulent election and the swearing in of the right wing candidate for President, the millions who mobilized against this assault on democracy were testimony to the growing strength of the Left platform.

In Bolivia, President Evo Morales has adopted a radical land reform law which will lead to thousands of acres being taken over from companies and landlords and distributed to landless peasants.

DPRK nuclear test

The DPRK conducted a nuclear test on October 20. A few days earlier North Korea had warned that it would go ahead and test. In the past few years the Bush administration had targeted North Korea for declaring that it was part of an “axis of evil”. The United States called off the earlier 1994 agreement which was to provide North Korea with light water nuclear reactors. The United States stepped up its efforts to isolate North Korea economically.

It is in this background that the DPRK decided to go for the nuclear test and to assert that it is acquiring nuclear weapons to protect its sovereignty. While these circumstances have to be noted, the nuclear test was still an unfortunate step. It has heightened tensions in North East Asia and complicated further the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. China while stating that the test was uncalled for has said that it will continue to pursue the aim of de-nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. The US should not be allowed to pursue its aggressive policy on the DPRK. The way forward is to hold the six-nation talks as proposed by China.

The UN Security Council has imposed sanctions on North Korea. They pertain to North Korea getting any technology or material which can help its weapons programme. China has however declared that it is against any interdiction of ships and inspection on the high seas. Due to the efforts of China, the six nation talks resumed in December in Beijing. It stalled on the demand of North Korea that the sanctions imposed by the US on its bank accounts be withdrawn before talks on the nuclear issue could be held.

Iran

The US after relentless pursuit has managed to get a UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Iran. The sanctions are of a limited nature and falls far short of what the US wanted. Neither Russia nor China agreed to any sanctions which would affect the Iranian economy or sanction the use of force. But the US plans to impose additional sanctions. The response of Iran has been to announce that it is proceeding with the enrichment of uranium and that it is going to put in the 3000 centrifuges for the purpose.

Nepal : Significant Breakthrough

The comprehensive peace treaty between the Seven Party Alliance government and the Maoists was signed in November 2006. This represents a major breakthrough in the efforts to implement the 12-point agreement reached between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists in November, 2005. As per the agreement, there will be an interim constitution, an interim parliament and an interim government which will prepare for holding of the constituent assembly elections. The Maoists will be represented in parliament and in the interim government. The agreement on Maoist armed forces laying down their arms was also finalised. Maoist combatants will be kept at seven major locations and the arms will be deposited and locked up and they will be monitored by UN monitors. The Nepali army will also lay down an equal number of arms.

In the run-up to the formation of the interim government, some irritants have cropped up. The Maoists gave a call for a strike after the government made appointments of Ambassadors and other key personnel. This has been resolved after talks. The process of laying down arms and storing them is taking sometime as the UN personnel have not fully arrived and taken up their responsibility.

The momentum created by the popular movements against the monarchy has already marginalized the King and his powers are being taken away one after the other. The smooth transition to the interim government with Maoists participation will be a signal achievement. The Left and democratic forces in India must extend full cooperation to the democratic transition that is taking place in Nepal.

Bangladesh

The situation in Bangladesh deteriorated rapidly with the election timetable coming into operation. On the question of the Chief Advisor in the caretaker government who would run the administration during the election period, there were sharp differences between the outgoing Khaleda Zia government and the 14-party opposition alliance. In the month of October, Bangladesh witnessed large-scale political protests and violence in which 50 people were killed and another 2000 injured in clashes between the ruling and opposition parties. After the Chief Justice decided not to take up the responsibility because of strong opposition, the President himself, without any constitutional sanction, assumed the caretaker responsibility.

There are also charges about the partiality of the Election Commission which is packed with ruling party appointees. The voters list has been inflated by over 10 million. The 14-party alliance led by Sheikh Hasina initially threatened to boycott the elections to be held on January 22, 2007.

After agreeing to participate in the elections when certain steps were promised, the 14 party alliance finally decided to boycott the polls when H.M Ershad, the leader of an alliance party, was disqualified from contesting. All the candidates of the 14-party alliance have withdrawn. A call has been given for non-cooperation in the elections. The army is on standby in the district centres.

If the political crisis deepens there is a danger of the army stepping in and taking power. Such a move will have the backing of the United States but it will be a great setback for the democratic forces in Bangladesh and can have serious repercussions for India. The elections are being held in the background of the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalist forces which have been finding protection from the BNP, the growing intervention of the United States and the opposition boycott. The Bangladesh elections are being held when the legitimacy of the political system and parliamentary democracy are at their lowest ebb.

Sri Lanka: Undeclared War

The last three months has seen a steady escalation in the armed hostilities between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE. Some early successes of the army have emboldened the hawks in the Sri Lankan ruling circles. The LTTE has struck back causing growing casualties among the armed forces. In this expanding war, the Tamil people in the north and eastern region have become the victims of both aerial and land bombardment. Thousands are now living in camps. 26,000 have crossed the sea into Tamilnadu. Jaffna suffers acutely from lack of essential commodities and medicines.

The efforts for resuming talks made through the Norwegian mediators failed at Geneva with the Sri Lankan government refusing to meet the LTTE demand of opening the highway to Jaffna. The only positive development has been the agreement reached between the ruling party – the SLFP – and the opposition UNP. This is the first time that the two major Sinhala parties have come to an agreement to take a joint approach to the Tamil ethnic problem. The JVP's petition to the Supreme Court for demerging the north and eastern provinces was upheld. The demerger of the north and southern province and the continuing hostilities are major hurdles to revive the peace process and to re-establish the ceasefire.

The Central government has to continue with its efforts to see that the Sri Lankan government observes restraint and does not pursue the military option. It must also convey to the LTTE that any move to disrupt resumption of peace talks will meet with India's strong disapproval. The government of India should extend all efforts to provide succour and relief to the Tamil people in the north eastern region.

National

The period since the last Central Committee meeting in September has seen the BJP adopting a shrill communal platform confirming the trend of its falling back on a hardcore Hindutva agenda. During this period, the inflation rate has gone up and the continuous price rise of essential commodities is affecting the common people. The agrarian crisis continues to exact its toll with rural distress and farmers' suicides. The UPA government has failed to deal with this major problem given its neo-liberal framework of policies. The atrocity on dalits in Khairlanji aroused widespread anger amongst the dalits all over the country, highlighting the terrible oppression that they are subjected to. The Justice Rajinder Sachar report has revealed the disturbing condition of the Muslim community who suffer from acute deprivation and low socio-economic status. The legislation passed by the US Congress for the Indo-US nuclear agreement confirmed the widespread apprehensions that the United States would draw India into a strategic alliance on its own terms, inimical to India's interests.

The major success in the winter session of parliament has been the adoption of the Tribal Forest Act incorporating some of the major amendments. The December 14 General Strike drew in wide sections of the working class and employees numbering around sixty million. It was a clear signal to the UPA government that its neo-liberal policies will meet with strong resistance.

BJP: On the Hindutva Track

The BJP national council meeting at Lucknow has adopted a full-scale Hindutva agenda. The presidential address of Rajnath Singh harped on the building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution and the uniform civil code. The political resolution concentrated on condemnation of "appeasement of Muslims" and warning that this can lead to "a second Partition of India". Prior to this, the BJP had mounted a campaign on the execution of the death sentence of Afzal Guru, one of the accused in the parliament attack case. After the mercy petition was sent to the President, the order to carry out the sentence was suspended. The BJP and the RSS vehemently came out demanding the hanging of Afzal. The UPA government was condemned for being soft on terrorism for not executing the sentence immediately. They disrupted parliament on the issue for two days. The Sachar committee report on the status of Muslim minorities was another occasion for the BJP to charge the UPA government with "appeasement of minorities".

If in the monsoon session of parliament the *vande mataram* issue was raised to charge the UPA government of appeasing the minorities, in the winter session

of parliament, the hanging of Afzal became the basis to repeat the same charge.

The CPI(M) strongly opposed the communal angle given by the BJP to the Afzal issue. It rejected the argument that the UPA government was soft on terrorism due to minority appeasement. The BJP itself is exposed by its opportunistic stance, as the attack on parliament and other major terrorist strikes occurred during its rule. As for the fate of Afzal Guru, the Party maintained that the constitutional/legal procedures must be abided by. The President has to decide on the mercy petition. Till date 22 mercy petitions against capital punishment are pending. They include the death sentences on two persons in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. During L.K. Advani's tenure as Home Minister these two petitions were not disposed off. There can be no railroading of justice to suit the BJP's political agenda.

The BJP's right wing and regressive politics came to the fore during this period. The baiting of Muslim minorities, the opposition to dialogue with Pakistan, the attempts to raise anti-China feelings and the border dispute during the Chinese President's visit and the jingoism expressed on nuclear weaponisation are all features of this reactionary platform. Having failed in drawing wider support and taking on the UPA government on people's issues, the BJP ignoring its allies is now hell bent on recovering its traditional support base by projecting an aggressive Hindutva platform.

Mangalore Communal Violence

The consequences of such a rabid communal stand can be seen in the communal violence, which erupted in Dakshin Kannada district in Karnataka. For nearly a week Mangalore and the surrounding areas like Ullal were gripped by violence. The Hindu Sena and the Bajrang Dal conducted a series of provocations prior to the riots erupting. The trouble was engineered by charges of cow slaughter and attacks on Muslim shops and establishments. Two persons were killed, both Muslims, and a large number of houses and properties destroyed. By and large it was the RSS outfits who were on the offensive.

In the last assembly elections, the BJP had won all the assembly seats in the district. The communal violence in Mangalore must be seen in the context of the BJP being in the state government in coalition with the JD(S). Prior to the Mangalore incidents, the BJP had demanded that the RSS be allowed to take out a procession to the Baba Budangiri shrine. The whole atmosphere in Karnataka which is the southern state with the maximum BJP influence can get further communalised given the BJP's presence within the government and outside.

Indo-US Nuclear Deal

During the monsoon session of parliament, the Party had played a leading role in ensuring that the Prime Minister clarify the framework in which the Indo-US nuclear cooperation agreement is being finalized. The last Central Committee report had noted that the content of the US legislation has to be closely watched so that the next step in the campaign to prevent any compromise of India's vital interests is taken forward.

The Party was of the opinion that the terms and conditions set out in the proposed US legislation, would harm the development of India's nuclear technology and compromise its independent foreign policy. The US Congress has finally adopted the legislation which will provide the exemption for the US administration to have a bilateral agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation with India. But the provisions of the US law are violative of the assurances given by the Prime Minister in his August 17 statement in parliament. The final US legislation has modified some of the language and tone of the earlier legislations. But if we assess the entire legislation on the basis of the Prime Minister's statement, it is found that the following areas are still problematic. They concern (i) full civilian nuclear cooperation and what the Prime Minister termed as "removal of all restrictions on all aspects of cooperation and technology transfers". (ii) Annual certification by the US President which is now termed as annual reporting. (iii) Instead of a India-specific additional protocol with the IAEA, the US law calls for a modified additional protocol meant for non-nuclear weapon countries. (iv) There has been a shifting of goalposts in terms of two new provisions concerning (a) in case of the US canceling its obligations, it had promised to help facilitate alternative fuel supplies from friendly countries and the nuclear suppliers group. This is now restricted to conditions of market failure and does not cover deliberate US termination. (b) it was earlier agreed that the US would help build a strategic fuel reserve to help running our reactors for their life term. The final act now explicitly bars any reserve other than normal operating reserves required to run the reactors. The US law continues to harp on India's foreign policy being "congruent to that of the United States". There are numerous references to India's role of cooperation and support to the US efforts to isolate and sanction Iran.

Under these circumstances, the UPA government's argument that the country should wait for the final bilateral agreement to be enacted (the 123 agreement) is unacceptable. It is evident that the US administration is bound by the provisions of the US law while negotiating the bilateral agreement.

In order to meet the growing criticism in India, President Bush has issued a statement spelling out the areas in which the executive can exercise its prerogative without being bound down by the US Congress. This again is a subjective interpretation. If a new President assumes office in 2008, he or she

can decide to abide by the provisions of the law. A Democratic President is more likely to be moved by proliferation concerns and demand fulfillment of all the terms set out in the US law.

The debate in both houses of parliament on the US legislation made it clear that the majority in parliament (that is all the parties except the UPA partners) are against proceeding with the bilateral agreement on the terms set out by the United States.

The Party will have to mount a campaign against the dangers inherent in the Indo-US nuclear agreement. The government should be compelled not to proceed with the bilateral agreement without clearing the extraneous terms and foreign policy implications of the agreement. As stated by the Party in July 2005 when the joint statement was first signed, the nuclear agreement should be seen in the context of the wider strategic alliance that the US wants to bind India to.

Chinese President's Visit

The visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to India marked an important step in the developing relations between the two countries. After the talks between the two sides, a 10-point strategy and 13 agreements were signed. The importance of the relations between the two countries at the global level was also indicated when the joint statement talked of the role of the two countries in the “emerging multipolar world”. The agreements were in the field of agriculture, tourism, science and technology, energy, space and civil nuclear energy. The trade between the two countries is targeted for \$ 40 billion by 2010; it has already touched \$ 20 billion in 2006.

Prior to the visit, there were attempts to create anti-China feelings through a section of the media and by the BJP. The Chinese Ambassador's statement regarding Arunachal Pradesh being claimed by China was used for raising suspicions about China's intentions. Much was sought to be made about China wanting to build a dam to divert waters of the Brahmaputra in Tibet, which the Chinese clarified, was only a proposal of some academics. Another concern raised was that Chinese President would sign a nuclear cooperation agreement with Pakistan during his visit to Islamabad. No such agreement was signed. Despite the problems of the past, a section of the Indian ruling classes realise that cooperation between the two big Asian countries – the fastest growing economies – has immense potential and can play an important role in world affairs.

Economic Situation

The government is proclaiming a 8 per cent GDP growth for three successive years as a big achievement. It claims that it is the first time that such sustained

growth has been achieved. However, the GDP growth rate does not reveal the true picture as the pattern of growth is lopsided and uneven. Agriculture has registered less than 2 per cent growth. The profits of the corporates have soared with the tax concessions and subsidies extended to them. Employment generation remains at a low level.

The growth is resulting in the rich becoming super rich. According to the Forbes Asia second annual list, of the 40 richest Indians the number of billionaires doubled from the previous year to 27. The collective net worth of the 40 richest Indians went up from \$ 61 billion to \$ 106 billion. According to another survey, India registered the second fastest growth of 19.3 in the number of high net worth individuals. In contrast, even official statistics show that 300 million people are poverty stricken by the international standard of earning less than \$ 1 a day. Rising unemployment, collapse of the public distribution system leading to loss of food available for the poorest and growth in regional disparities exist within the 8 per cent GDP growth rate.

The UPA government has decided to launch a revamped Garibi Hatao programme from April 1 2007. The revised programme lists farmers support, food security, housing for all, labour welfare, development of backward areas and e-governance which have been added to the earlier list which contained among other items, education for all, health for all, slum improvement, protection of environment and so on.

A notable omission is the implementation of land reforms which existed in the previous 20-point programme. None of the good intentions set out in the Garibi Hatao programme will be fulfilled unless the government stops the pursuit of the neo-liberal policies and the conscious promotion of the interests of the big business.

Agrarian Issues

The National Farmers Commission has submitted its final report to the government. Most of the recommendations made by the Commission are relevant and will help to address the problems faced in the agrarian sector. Among them are provision of one acre of land to every landless labour household, wherever possible; reduction of interest on loans to farmers; universalization of PDS; setting up of a price stabilization fund to protect farmers from fall in prices; fixing of institutional credit and the rate of interest at below 4 per cent; and the development of a minimum support mechanism which can speedily respond to exigencies.

So far the government has shown no urgency in taking up the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission. The kisan movement has already taken up these issues for campaign among the people during the recent countrywide jathas that it conducted.

Seed Bill

The Seed Bill proposed is a retrograde step as it takes away the right of the peasantry to produce, sell, exchange and barter farm seeds. The bill if enacted would have led to the production of seeds of all varieties coming under the perpetual monopolistic control of domestic and foreign seed companies. The prices of seeds would shoot up and there are no provisions for adequate compensation to the peasantry if they suffer crop loss when they use spurious seeds supplied by traders. There were no restrictions on the use of transgeneric variety of seeds and draconian powers are given to seed inspectors.

The Standing Committee of parliament on agriculture has suggested major modifications. They include: (a) farmers should be excluded from the purview of the legislation and their right to produce, sell, exchange and barter ensured. (b) Farmers variety should be entirely excluded from the legislation in the seeds bill. (c) There should be restrictions on the use of transgeneric seeds. (d) The compensation provided should be on the lines of protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act 2001 through specially designed arbitration tribunal/compensation committees constituted by the government. (e) The duration of registration period for any variety of seed should be reduced to 10-12 years for different varieties of seeds. The provision to register should be deleted as it will give permanent monopolistic rights to seed companies. (f) The power of seed inspectors should be restricted and they should be able to exercise their powers only in the case of branded seeds.

The Party must mobilise support for bringing these major and some other minor amendments in the Seed Bill before it is adopted in parliament. This is an important issue concerning the basic rights of farmers and the future of Indian agriculture.

Rising Inflation

The prices of essential commodities have increased in the recent past. The annual rate of inflation is between 6 and 7 per cent. The sharpest rise has been in the case of foodgrains and food articles. The prices of pulses have risen by nearly 33 per cent between January and November 2006. One of the major culprits for this price rise has been the forward and futures trading in foodgrains and essential commodities. The standing committee of Parliament has come out with recommendations for major amendments in the forward trading act. So far the government has refused to consider these changes.

The policy of allowing big private companies entry into the grain trade has led to the failure of procurement by the Food Corporation of India.

Procurement declined by nearly 40 per cent compared to last year and wheat stocks fell by 20 per cent to less than 7 million tonnes.

The fight against price rise must focus on two levels. Firstly the demand to check futures trading and open entry to private players in grain trade; secondly to strengthen the public distribution system and ensure adequate supplies for distribution.

Petrol and Diesel Prices

In order to curb the price rise it is necessary to bring down the petrol and diesel prices which have been hiked five successive times since the UPA government came into office. The Party raised the matter of reducing the June 2006 increased prices in the light of the reduction in the international oil prices. Since there was a \$ 10 a barrel reduction, the Party demanded that there should be a Rs 4 reduction in petrol prices and Rs 2 in diesel. The matter was also raised in the UPA-Left coordination committee. Subsequently, the government reduced the prices by Rs. 2 and 1 per litre for petrol and diesel respectively. This is not adequate. After reviewing the international oil prices in the coming weeks, we should again raise the demand for more reduction.

Atrocities on Dalits

The brutal rape of two women and the murder of four members of a dalit family in Khairlanji in Bhandara district of Maharashtra is the most recent glaring instance of the atrocities perpetrated on dalits. A shocking aspect of the incident was the way the police did not register a case till two weeks after the crime was committed. The outrage caused by the incident led to big protests by dalits in Nagpur. This was met with police repression and firing which led to the death of two people. The Congress-NCP government in Maharashtra failed to respond in time with the home minister even blaming the naxalites for engineering the protests. The dalit protests spread throughout the state.

It is in this background that the report of the desecration of Ambedkar's statue in Kanpur became known. This had an instant reaction among dalits in Maharashtra who were already inflamed by the Khairlanji atrocity. Dalit protests were reported in different towns of Marathwada, Nagpur etc. There were attacks on public transport and trains. In the ensuing clashes with the police two people were killed in police firing and over 60 were injured.

Our Party took up the Khairlanji issue and demanded a CBI enquiry. This was acceded to by the state government. It is important, as decided by the Party Congress, that the Party intervene and take up issues of dalit oppression and build up movements in defence of the rights of the dalit people.

Sachar Report

The Justice Rajendra Sachar committee to study the social, economic and educational status of Muslims submitted its report to the government. The committee has collected comprehensive data which shows that the socio-economic status of Muslims is below that of SC/STs in many areas. The report shows that in small towns (with population between 50,000 and 2,00,000) the per capita monthly expenditure of Muslims is less than that of SC/STs. It reveals that across the states of Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the expenditure by Muslims per month is less than that of the SC/STs. The Committee makes a strong case for boosting the community's share in jobs and educational institutions. It calls for the "formulation of appropriate programmes to address the economic and educational backwardness of the community." It however, does not recommend reservation quotas for Muslims. Among the various recommendations made by the Commission are the setting up of a Equal Opportunities Commission, reform of madrasas and their affiliation to higher education boards in states, bringing all districts where Muslims make up more than 25 per cent of the population under the purview of the government's 15 point programme for minorities.

The finding of the report that in West Bengal the percentage of Muslims in government jobs is only 4.2 per cent as compared to their share of the population of 25.2 per cent is a cause for serious concern. Under the Left Front government, land reform implementation has benefited the Muslims in the rural areas but the historic legacy of educational backwardness and employment opportunities for the Muslim community has not been overcome. Apart from the proposal for a sub-plan for the Muslims, the Party and the Left Front should formulate concrete plans for expanding educational and employment opportunities for Muslims in West Bengal.

Land Issue: Singur Project

The acquisition of land for the Tata Motors project at Singur became a national issue after the Trinamul-BJP and a motley crowd of naxalites, NGOs and social activists began protesting against the land being taken over for the project. Out of 997 acres allotted for the project, consent letters from landowners for 952 acres was received. The opposition sought to portray that fertile prime land is being handed over to the Tatas. The reality is that the bulk of the land is single crop. As in all projects concerning taking over of land there was opposition and resistance among some of the affected persons. But this was exaggerated and given anti Left Front government overtones by a combination of forces. The issue acquired a national impact when persons like Medha Patkar from outside went to join the protests. The efforts by the outside protesters and the attacks provoking the police and the lathicharges were utilised to portray that the protesting local people were facing severe

police repression. The industrial policy of the Left Front government, the primacy it accords to protecting agriculture, food security and the farmers interests were deliberately distorted and an agitation whipped up which culminated in Mamata Banerjee's hunger strike. The Chief Minister offered to hold talks with the Trinamul leader appealing to her to call off the hunger strike. After 25 days, the hunger strike was called off after the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister sent letters offering to talk on all issues.

The actual terms of compensation for all landowners, bargadars and the schemes for rehabilitation show up the false propaganda of the Trinamul-ultra Left-NGO combination. The facts about the Singur project must be propagated by the Party all over the country to counter the anti-Left Front government propaganda.

The Singur issue came to the fore in the background of the widespread apprehension in the country about how agricultural land will be taken over for the Special Economic Zones. A deliberate attempt has been made to mix-up Singur with the huge take over of land involved in some of the large SEZs in other parts of the country.

The Left Front government has announced that it will formulate a scientific land use policy. It is important that in the ongoing proposals and projects in West Bengal, norms are worked out and established which strike the right balance between the needs for industrialization/urban development that protect agriculture and food security and the rights of the farmers and the rural poor.

Assam & North East

There has been a recrudescence of Ulfa engineered violence. The twin blasts in Guwahati led to the death of 14 people. Earlier, after the Centre announced a unilateral ceasefire before Independence Day, the talks were being held between the People's Consultative Group on behalf of the Ulfa and the Centre. The cycle of violence and the effort to disrupt normal life has once again affected the people. The Ulfa should realize that targetting innocent people will only isolate it further from the people and lead to its loss of credibility as a political force. It is necessary on the part of the Central Government to initiate measures to resume talks. Recently, the state chief minister has announced that safe passage can be given to the Ulfa leaders who would participate in the talks.

The Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee report on the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has recommended the repealing of the Act. The Committee was set up in response to the widespread agitation in Manipur against the draconian powers given to the army in the Act. The Central Government should act on the Jeevan Reddy Committee Report. It should

replace the AFPSA with a suitable law which can enable the army to be deployed in disturbed areas to combat insurgencies while doing away with the draconian features that existed in the AFPSA.

Winter Session of Parliament

The Party and the Left had decided that priority should be accorded to two legislations, the women's reservation bill and the forest tribal bill in the winter session. In the case of the women's reservation bill, the effort should be to see that it is introduced in the winter session of parliament. As for the forest tribal bill, the effort should be concentrated on getting the government to accept the major recommendations of the joint parliamentary committee. These concerned (a) changing the cut off date from 1980 to 2005; (b) to include not only tribals but traditional forest dwellers; (c) raising the ceiling of 2.5 hectares of land; and (d) the rights of gram sabhas. Because of the efforts made both within and outside parliament, the tribal forest bill has been passed with most of the major recommendations of the parliamentary committee being incorporated. The cut off date has now been shifted to December 2005; all non-tribal traditional forest dwellers have been included in the bill; the ceiling of 2.5 hectares of land has been increased to 4 hectares; the role of gram sabhas in the process of identification of beneficiaries has been strengthened. Some other provisions have been amended which would strengthen the rights of the tribal and the traditional forest dwellers.

The Party had always called for campaigns to get the tribal forest bill adopted in the last few months. The passage of the bill is an important victory and the Party and the mass organisations associated with the tribal people must popularise the gains made through this legislation.

A meeting of the UPA-Left parties was called prior to the parliament session to decide on the introduction of the women's reservation bill. Since all the parties represented conveyed their opinion that the bill should be brought in its original form without delay, the RJD President, Laloo Prasad also stated that the bill can be introduced in parliament. However, a few days later because of the criticism mounted by the JD(U) and other elements, the RJD backtracked. In such a situation, the bill could not be introduced though the decision had been announced. We have to consult with the parties committed to the legislation on how to proceed so that the bill can be brought in the budget session of parliament.

On UPA Government

Since the June meeting of the Central Committee in Hyderabad, we have sought to engage and struggle with the UPA government to halt some of the more harmful policy measures that they propose to take and to veer them around to fulfilling some of the commitments made in the Common

Minimum Programme. In two rounds of discussions in the UPA Left Coordination Committee in October and November, the Party and the Left succeeded in checking the move to push through the Banking Regulation Amendment Act and the Pension Fund bill. On the other hand, we succeeded in getting the tribal forest bill adopted with major amendments. During this period, we also succeeded due to the pressure mounted by us in reducing the petrol and diesel prices to a limited extent.

The government however, continues to push for privatisation and outsourcing in various spheres. The decision to handover 100 post offices to franchises is one such measure which has to be resisted. The government is intent upon passing the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority bill which in its present form would lead to privatisation of pension funds. Our struggle to stop privatisation of pension funds is ongoing. The government proposes to bring a new Insurance Bill through which it plans to raise the FDI cap in the insurance sector from 26 to 49 per cent. This will have to be firmly opposed.

The government intends to bring a legislation for entry of foreign universities and educational institutions to operate in the country. The ministry of commerce which is committed to education being a service to be imported under the GATS agreement argues that Rs. 20 to 25 thousand crores are required in the next five years and beyond for higher education. Hence, this requires FDI in education. It has also argued that high quality graduates required for economic growth will not be available within the limits of the present educational system. Foreign universities and educational institutions will be allowed to set up their branches abiding by UGC and other regulations. The HRD ministry wants that reservation quotas and other regulations be enforced on the foreign education providers.

For the CPI(M), the issue is more basic. The country has developed and sustained a higher education system with its own resources. It is possible to raise the resources for the expansion of higher education within the country. Academic and educational collaboration and exchanges cannot be shunned. Foreign educational institutions should be able to collaborate with their counterparts in India. But the setting up of foreign private universities and institutions which are free to charge international standards of fees and with curriculum which is not under Indian regulations cannot be allowed.

At present even private universities have no legal sanction. They are running as deemed universities, a recognition accorded by the UGC. Opening up to foreign private universities would entail the setting up of private Indian universities. Thus the floodgates would be opened for further weakening and dismantling the public education system in higher education.

The Party has to firmly oppose the proposed legislation to be brought in parliament. It has to work out an alternative proposal for linking up the foreign educational institutions with the Indian educational system.

Health

The UPA government has not come out with any policy on statutory price control for essential drugs. Even the Pranab Sen committee's recommendations regarding price regulation have not been taken up for consideration. All that has been done is for the pharmaceutical companies to announce under repeated prodding by the government that prices of 886 medicines will be reduced. This however, is an eyewash since most of the top selling brands and the medicines most prescribed are not included in the list. With the steadily rising prices of essential drugs a majority of the people are not able to access these drugs. The Party has to push for price control of essential drugs and the government should announce its policy regarding this.

UP Assembly Elections

In the September Central Committee meeting, the Party line for the assembly elections in Punjab, Uttarakhand and Manipur were decided. For the Uttar Pradesh elections, it was decided that the UP state committee should discuss the matter and the PB can then take a final decision. The UP state committee met in October and then subsequently in December. The PB meeting in November discussed the report of the UP state committee and endorsed the following electoral line to be adopted:

a) The BJP, though it is not a major force, is trying to create a communal polarisation by raising Hindutva issues. If there is any chance for the BSP to form a government with the support of the BJP, it will attempt to do so after the elections. If the BJP gets even 60 to 70 seats, such a possibility exists. Therefore, the Party calls for the defeat and isolation of the BJP and prevent it from coming into government.

b) The record of the Mulayam Singh government has created discontent among different sections of the people. The law and order situation, privatisation drive and taking away of farmers lands without adequate compensation etc has caused alienation among different sections of the people. In such a situation, the Party will not have an electoral alliance with the Samajwadi Party. At the same time, the Party will not join any combination that will be targeting the SP.

c) The CPI(M) will contest a limited number of seats where it has a presence and appeals to other secular parties to extend support to its candidates. In the seats where the CPI(M) is not contesting, the Party will extend support to

the candidates of other secular parties including the SP which can defeat the BJP.

JD(S) Split

The President of the Janata Dal (Secular) Dewe Gowda and his son H.D. Kumaraswamy have facilitated the BJP's participation in the Karnataka government. This was a step totally contrary to what was professed and practiced by the party. This has led to the division in the Janata Dal (Secular). The Kerala unit of the JD(S) opposed the Karnataka unit's stand. They were supported by some of the socialist elements in the party like Surendra Mohan, Mrinal Gore and others. The division has led to an open break with both sides expelling the other. A new JD(S) leadership has been constituted with Surendra Mohan as President.

CPI(M) and Left Unity

In the recent period, there have been differences in political understanding and other conflicts of opinion with the CPI in various states. In Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and even in states like Kerala and West Bengal, there have been divergent views and clashing opinions. In Andhra Pradesh, the CPI has been with the Congress in the local body elections and in the bye-elections. In Punjab, though they have agreed to a joint platform with the CPI(M), they are also associating with Mangat Ram Pasla's splinter group. In Tamilnadu, there have been instances of their fighting seats allotted to us during the local body elections. Their secretary has also publicly attacked the CPI(M) on the Singur issue. Keeping all these in mind, it is necessary to have talks with the CPI leadership to sort out some of the issues and to see that both the parties relations improve.

Rajasthan Farmers Struggle

From October the farmers in the Ganganagar and Bikaner districts resumed their agitation demanding implementation of the December 2004 agreement with the government relating to the supply of water. The *sangarsh samiti* consisting of farmers, traders and workers mobilised people for the struggle, which was carried on for two months with tenacity and courage. They were met with brutal repression. In the course of the struggle two persons, a man and a woman have died due to the injuries by severe police beating in the lathi charges. More than 200 were seriously injured. The army was deployed in the affected areas. Main leaders of the movement were jailed. The BJP-led government has been exposed as a viciously anti-farmer, anti-people government by its handling of the agitation.

14th December General Strike

The countrywide strike call on December 14 was a big success. It is estimated that six crore employees and workers joined the strike. The strike was total leading to a total shut down in states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. A partial shut down was witnessed in Assam, Jharkhand and in some districts of Karnataka. An important feature of the strike was the participation of state government employees, telecom employees and postal department employees. Unlike the previous general strike, there was a complete strike in all ports and docks. The strike was total in the oil sector including the refineries. All the public sector banks and insurance were completely paralysed. The strike in the steel sector was partial, while the strike was total in four zones of the collieries and partial in two others.

The strike indicated the discontent and anger against the UPA government for its failure to reorient policies in favour of the working class and the working people.

Conclusion

In the coming period, the Party will have to focus on the forthcoming Union Budget and strive to see that the UPA government allocates resources in a manner which will meet some of the major commitments made in the Common Minimum Programme. The issue of resource mobilisation and allocation of resources will take centre-stage again.

The Party will have to mount anti-imperialist campaigns taking into account the US-Israeli aggressive manoeuvres in West Asia; the efforts of the US to draw India into its strategic alliance. The military collaboration measures, wherein large-scale US weaponry is to be bought, will have to be highlighted and opposed.

With the BJP's aggressive stance based on the Hindutva platform, the Party should vigorously expose the BJP-RSS combine and its communal politics.

Given the continuing price rise, problems of unemployment and of the rural poor and farmer's distress, the Party should take up these issues and conduct struggles. The movement for strengthening the Public Distribution System and fulfilling some of the important recommendations of the National Farmers Commission should be taken up.

February Campaign

The Central Committee called upon all its Party units to conduct a campaign from February 1 to 8 on the following issues:

- i. Steps against price rise
- ii. Steps to be taken to provide relief to farmers and the rural poor due to the agrarian crisis
- iii. Strengthening of the Public Distribution System
- iv. Extension of the Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- v. Introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill and legislations for agricultural workers and the unorganized sector workers
