

Nandigram Carnage

*CPM Bathes
in
Farmers' Blood*



Foreword

Nandigram has become a byword for Communist ruthlessness and highhandedness. Its party cadres in tandem with the Police and administration unleashed an attack on the poor farmers and villagers that resulted in death of nearly 20 persons and many went missing. The savage killing of innocent people in Nandigram has not only exposed the real face of Communist parties in India but also sparked an intense debate among the vigilant sections of the society on the hypocritical stand and brutal ways adopted by Communist parties on every important issue in the country.

Ever since the "Communist Party of Bengal" decided that the route to prosperity lay through mindless industrialisation, it became clear that tens of thousands of agricultural labourers and farmers would lose their livelihood.

Events in Singur (where the government has acquired 997.11 acres of land), and now at Nandigram (where 10,000 acres is planned to be acquired for a multi-product SEZ), have proved that the CPI (M) tried to take farmers for granted, crush the opposition and take over land through brute force.

The BJP and Trinamul Congress were the first to raise their voice in protest against the forcible acquisition of agricultural land in West Bengal. Trinamul Congress leader

Mamata Bannerjee launched vociferous protests on the streets of Kolkata and even went on 24 days hunger strike. BJP President Shri Rajnath Singh was the first national leader to visit West Bengal and lend moral support to the farmers' agitation.

Similarly when Nandigram violence rocked the nation senior BJP leaders Shri L K Advani and Smt. Sushma Swaraj were the first to share solidarity with the agitating farmers' and families of those who were killed.

We are publishing select articles penned by certain eminent journalists and columnists of the country in a booklet form to help the readers in appreciating the true picture of violence in Nandigram.

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Poet as Bengal's prophet

Chandan Mitra

The more I recall my childhood reading of Rabindranath Tagore, the more prophetic his uncanny perceptions appear. It is remarkable how in the most prolific phase of his creativity more than 80 years ago India's first Nobel laureate wrote poems and passages that have timeless applicability. Take his short poem, Dui Bigha Jomi, for example. It narrates the pathos of a marginal farmer who possessed just two bighas of land. One day, the local zamindar took it away from him, forcing the poor man out of home, hearth and village. Many years later, he returned to his abandoned homestead and overpowered by nostalgia trudged to the plot of land that once belonged to him.

It was an emotional reunion between an ordinary peasant and a piece of land he was passionately attached to. To wallow in reminiscences, he rested under the shade of a mango tree he had planted long ago. It had blossomed over the years and was laden with ripe fruits at that time of year. As he caressed his memories, two mangoes dropped beside him as if by way of loving recognition. Even as the hapless farmer tearfully acknowledged what he thought was a divine blessing, the zamindar's musclemen came swooping down accusing him of stealing their master's fruit. He was dragged into the landlord's house where fawning courtiers abused and humiliated the indigent farmer, charging him with shameless theft. The powerful man who had snatched away those paltry two bighas did not even recognise its original owner. As he was turfed out with dire warnings, the two mangoes forcibly seized, the farmer lamented to himself:

*Ei jagatey haye, shei beshi chaye/Jaar ache bhoori-bhoori,
Rajar hasto korey samasto kangaler dhan churi...*

Tumi maharaj, sadhu holey aaj/Aami aaj chor botey!

(In this world, alas, the greediest are those who have the most. The kings' nature is to rob the poor of whatever they possess...

What irony! The landlord is feted for honesty while I am supposed to be a thief today!)

This is precisely what is happening in West Bengal under the CPI(M)'s "dictatorship of the proletariat". The proletariat is the target of land grabbers, the wretched of the earth are fair game for slaughter by the state, for everything is justified to preserve the privileges of the dictators. Even as the so-called communists hobnob with migrant non-Bengali moneybags, property developers and crony capitalist interlopers, the State's fertile agricultural lands are being mercilessly seized for the benefit of industrialists, domestic and foreign. Is it any wonder that after the Singur experience, the farming community in East Medinipur's Nandigram has risen in revolt?

Predictably, the CPM is unfazed, determined to brazen out all shades of criticism. This is how communists always react for they seriously believe only they enjoy the monopoly of the truth. Introspection is not a word listed in the communist lexicon. This is how the character of World War II changed overnight. It was an "imperialist war" for the duration of the Stalin-Ribbentrop Pact, when Moscow tacitly applauded Hitler's marauding forces, kept silent on the repression of Jews, and immensely

The old adage that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it seems prophetic in the contemporary context too. While the West Bengal unit of the Congress has described the Nandigram incidents as "genocide" and demanded imposition of President's Rule, the party's High Command does not even dare to suggest that CPM even restore "Rule of law" in Bengal!

enjoyed the military discomfiture of the Allies. When the wily Hitler broke the deal and attacked the Socialist Fatherland, the War got converted into “People’s War”, to be waged in defence of “democracy”. Thus, the Quit India movement prompted Indian communists to openly act as informers against the Congress for the colonial intelligence.

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CPM’s defence of the indefensible actions of Bloody Wednesday (March 14) is a hilarious litany of concoctions. I heard them arguing with journalists in Parliament’s Central Hall last Thursday that the country ought to be grateful to the Buddhadeb regime for “retrieving” Nandigram for India! According to their convoluted logic, the region had been taken over by Naxalites and, believe it or not, “Muslim obscurantists”! Allegedly, between Left and Right radicals, all vestige of Government authority had been forced out of a cluster of villages. The mullahs led by the Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind, allegedly didn’t want family planning and pulse polio campaigns to succeed, while the Naxalites were attempting to create a Che Guevara style “liberated zone”.

So, West Bengal’s patriotic police, under the inspired guidance of CPM cadres steeped in Marx-Lenin-Buddhadeb Thought, braved the bullets of dangerous anti-national forces to accomplish the grand mission of Nandigram’s reintegration! That, in the process nearly 20 people were killed, scores grievously hurt, journalists forced to stay out of the cordoned area, were merely unavoidable collateral damage. What was not stated was that “recapture” had become essential for the land had been pledged to Indonesia’s Salem Group to set up a convenient chemical hub close to the Haldia port. They have already been allotted a sizeable amount of arable land near Kolkata for something called Mahabharat Scooters, slated to produce an unheard-of two-wheeler named Arjun! When Bajaj scooters are the world’s number one brand in the genre, why

should anybody in his right mind buy Arjun? Unless, of course, the party directs each member to become a salesman for ‘Red’ Salem, which is quite within the realms of possibility!

Levity apart, the most important by-product of the Singur-Nandigram outrages is that the CPM, with nearly three-fourth majority in the West Bengal Assembly, has suddenly forfeited the moral right to rule. As a student decades ago, I read a book titled Moral Economy of the Peasant with reference to farmers in Java, Indonesia. Its writer had aptly portrayed the strong sense of right and wrong that prevailed in rural society. Without being a historian or sociologist, Mahatma Gandhi had grasped peasant morality with exceeding perceptiveness. Which is why he succeeded in the face of British imperial might. When a regime loses the moral right to rule, as communists did in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, no amount of force can hold its edifice together. Right-wing dictatorships in Marcos’s Philippines and Reza Shah Pahlavi’s Iran, failed equally in the long run.

Bullets silence people but temporarily. Silently, Bengal must be recalling Rabindranath’s questions to God in anguish over the Jalianwala Bagh massacre:

Kontho amaar ruddho ajike, banshi sangeet-hara, amaboshyar kaara,

Lupto korechho amaar bhubon dushshopner toley,

Tai to tomay shudhai oshrujoley:

Jahara tomar bishayechhey bayu, nibhaechhey tobo aalo,

Tumi ki taader khoma koriachho? Tumi ki beshechho bhalo?

(My voice is choked, my flute plays music no more; it’s dark like a prison cell in a moonless night. My world has dissolved under a nightmare. That’s why I ask with tears in my eyes: Those who poisoned the environment you created, extinguished the lamps you lit, have you forgiven them? Have you loved them?) ◆

(Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Bengal scores a self-goal

Swapn Dasgupta

There is an irresistible temptation to gloat over the CPI(M)'s ignominy over the cadre-directed police action in Nandigram which left 14 people dead and forced many hundreds to flee their homes. Always intolerant of criticism and political opposition, the party transformed a small corner

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of East Midnapur into a war zone. It did so not because it wanted to sweep away pre-capitalist obstacles in the path of industrialisation but because it wanted to re-establish its physical control over an enclave that had seceded from Red Bengal.

Those who maintain that this state-cum-cadre heavy handedness is not politics but terrorism are only partially right. For the past 30 years, the CPI(M)'s near-impregnable control over rural West Bengal has been based on sanctimonious populism enforced by coercion. The CPI(M) has created two classes of villagers: Those who are with the party (out of choice or compulsion) and those who

are the outcasts. In the heartland of rural Bengal (the border districts are an exception), where the CPI(M) majority is weighed rather than counted, it takes fierce, unflinching courage to flaunt a political affiliation which is not to the liking of the all-pervasive local committees. The CPI(M) not only preaches Stalinism; it practices it with brazenness in West Bengal. Under the smooth veneer of progressivism lurks a brutal party dictatorship.

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Nandigram was not the first in the bloody history of Communist movements and nor will it be the last. Yet, for the moment, it has become a euphemism for the smug arrogance of a group that pompously declares history is on its side.

And yet, gloating over Nandigram is painful. True, the CPI(M) has been put on the backfoot and the duplicity of the Congress leadership exposed. The Left intellectuals are in disarray and many have discovered their lost conscience. The debate over Special Economic Zones has merged into the national concern for the deepening crisis of agriculture

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throughout the country and triggered a populist backlash which will have a debilitating impact on the UPA Government. The Opposition NDA has rightly sensed an opening and drawn considerable strength from the Government's discomfiture - even if that involves parroting the likes of Medha Patkar. Amid this headiness, one minor point appears to have been forgotten - the likely impact of the Nandigram kerfuffle on West Bengal.

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Investment in West Bengal is certain to be the biggest casualty of the Nandigram violence and the controversy over Singur. The turbulence of politics has offset all the promise and hope that its Chief Minister held out during last year's Assembly election. Ratan Tata, if not the Salem group, must be ruing the day he decided to repose faith in West Bengal.

Other investors are unlikely to make the same mistake. West Bengal has yet again scored a self-goal. Together, the CPI(M) and its opponents have thrown the baby out with the bath water. ◆

(Courtesy : The Pioneer)

Maoists versus the Marxists

Gautam Siddharth

Why have the South Delhi Marxists got so fretful about the declaration by the Maoists of "liberated zone" in a handful of villages around Nandigram? What are the Maoists doing, if not following the Marxist ideology to the hilt? For, what else does Marxism propound if not, to paraphrase Paul Johnson, a crude proclivity to violence, an insatiable craving for power, an infantile delinquency in managing capital and a bizarre tendency to manipulate the lives of the very people it claims to represent?

Marxism, West Bengal's Men in White must surely know, even provides an intellectual basis for terrorism. Till they do not assume power, they unfailingly quote Marx who cried, "We are ruthless and ask for no quarter from you. When our turn comes, we shall not disguise our terrorism." Indeed, his followers, wherever and whenever they have usurped power describing it as "revolution", have inevitably proceeded to terrorise their own people with a cruelty rarely witnessed in human history. When they are out of power, their terror is aimed at gaining it. When they come to power, terror is the tool with which they perpetuate their rule.

The strangeness of Marxism, however, derives as much from its failure as it does from its initial success in mobilising supporters to its nebulous cause. Marxism appeals to primordial human fury, it infuses dangerous passions in the lives of those who have lost all hope and are delirious in an imperfect world. Marxism, in that sense, is an attempt to create order out of chaos through use of brute physical force, as if such a thing were ever possible. In the process, however, the

Marxists - and history bears witness - have created far greater disorder than the one they had set out to remove.

The Nandigram Maoists and the South Delhi Marxists come from the same place: The latter, with time and further edification, realise the necessity of change in their ideological make-up. They shrug off their straitjackets for designer labels. Many of them become valued speechwriters for successful CEOs of multinational corporations. There's no such relief for the Maoists who continue to plod the forests in dead patrol, in search of their mythical El Dorado, killing and getting killed in an atavistic, overriding desire for senseless revenge.

Marxism was a backlash against the abysmal depths to which capitalism had sunk in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Much of this antipathy towards capital was a result of Marx's own experiences, which were lived for very long - till Engels came to his financial rescue - in abominable conditions. A Jew descended from an impressive lineage of rabbis, Marx abandoned his religion to turn Protestant. If anything, he was the rebellious conscience of his own ancestry; a voice against the gross materialism of the Jews that afflicted much of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and which led to even more degenerate forms of violence, in shape of Nazi anti-semitism.

Marx - in a dialectical departure from Hegel, the German thinker who inspired Marx, and whose theory of value posited "the thought process is the creator of the real" - professed the "ideal is nothing more than the material when it has been transposed and translated in the human head". In other words, if at all an 'ism' can be associated with Marxism, it is crass materialism, accompanied with a typically apocalyptic vision of the world, symbolised by Marxist aphorism, "Death and judgement of capitalism is coming."

More than 120 years after Marx's death, destruction has indeed taken place but more of communism than capitalism; indeed, some of today's best communists are the world's worst capitalists. The Indian communists certainly qualify for the latter epithet judging from the way West Bengal has been reduced to an industrial wasteland after nearly 30 years of Left Front rule. And in a refined irony, when they did decide to reform, under West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, they are being scuppered by their own

misguided but highly organised country cousins who claim far greater loyalty to Marxism than the Marxists themselves, and are, for such reasons, that much more dangerous.

It will not be enough for the Indian Marxists enjoying the loaves and fishes of office to denounce the Maoists as the "enemies of the people" even as the Maoists use the same description for the Marxists. The latter will have to first acknowledge where they themselves went wrong, and they went gone wrong in claiming that the ends justify the means. This is because such an idea is essentially an anti-civilisational idea, a proposition of intellectual upstarts.

It's because of their justification of the crudest possible methods of social justice that several parts of the country are today tossed by violence in shape of Maoism. And so long such violence is taking place elsewhere, in Andhra Pradesh or Gurgaon or indeed anywhere else in the world, as my colleague Ashok Malik wrote on Friday issue of *The Pioneer*, it is okay, but when the same outrages surface in Marxists' home turf, the proponents of a violent theology become "enemies of the people". It's difficult to find parallels of such hypocrisy in politics anywhere in the world.

While the edifice of communism in the USSR and China was built on an obsessive work ethic that wantonly exploited labour, the Indian Left for years spawned its opposite: An anti-work regime that disgraced their own movement. Today, when they are restored with partial vision, they are finding themselves up against their estranged blood brothers, the Maoists. Is there justice or what? The Indian communists are only revealing their grave internal disorder that discredited the Left worldwide and helped Marxism turn from a flawed political doctrine into an ideological fossil. ◆

(Courtesy : The Pioneer)

Dripping Red

CPI(M) scripts and enacts a cold-blooded massacre at Nandigram

Jaideep Mazumdar

"Anarchy (as was stated to be prevailing at Nandigram) would not be tolerated and would be crushed with a heavy hand."

-West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya at a March 11 rally in Calcutta organised by the peasant's wing of the CPI(M).

The chilling words from Buddhadeb, with all their old Soviet punch, came to life two days later in troubled Nandigram. A 5,000-strong police force converged on this east Midnapore block-off-limits to the ruling CPI(M) in a two-month-long, sustained act of political defiance-to quell protesting villagers daring the might of the state machinery. Their land was at stake, about to be written away by the state to the Salim group of Indonesia to set up a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Predictably, things caught fire-literally. In the end, the police had gunned down 14 protesters, wounded 71. They were certainly aiming to kill-the bullets had all hit the dead above their waist.

For the CPI(M), it was nothing short of a gigantic tactical blunder, at all levels. For one, Nandigram is in no way subdued-if anything, the ground seethes with calls for revenge. And then there's the stain on their cultivated image of political morality. All hell broke loose at the Left Front meeting on March 15. The CPI(M)'s allies-CPI, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), Forward Bloc-erupted in

rage and contrition. Its own leaders were shocked by Buddhadeb's action. Said a furious Jyoti Basu, ex-CM and party titan: "This is no way to run a coalition government. Things are being decided unilaterally without consulting our allies in the Front. This can't go on."

For over two months, Nandigram has been a 'no-entry' zone for the state administration. CPI(M) cadres had all been driven out. Deep trenches were dug in all approach roads and bridges were damaged to prevent vehicular traffic. The March 14 drive was meant to reclaim Nandigram for the cadres, with police help-a show of state force, it was thought, would end the blockade. But it all ended in a mess of plucky protesters facing police bullets.

The administration claimed the police firing was "in self-defence". But nobody was convinced. It only deepened fissures within the Left allies over the SEZ issue. Even West Bengal governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi put it on record that he was filled "with a sense of cold horror". He also said he had been advising the state government against hasty action, based on reports of rising tension at Nandigram. Now, the Calcutta High Court has ordered a CBI inquiry into the incident.

It's now clear that many in the state government knew any bid to wrest control of Nandigram by the administration and the CPI(M) would be met with stiff resistance and could well spark off violence. Says PWD minister and senior RSP leader Kshiti Goswami: "I don't think those who planned the operation were unaware of the ground situation. They very well knew things would go out of hand and lives could be lost. They went ahead despite that. It was nothing short of barbaric." Adds senior Trinamool Congress leader Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay: "There was no way the people of Nandigram would have allowed the police and CPI(M) cadres to re-enter without any resistance. Everyone knew they would put up stiff resistance, and that blood would be shed if the police tried to bulldoze its way. That the government went ahead with its plans only showed it was ready to kill people."

CPI state secretary Manju Kumar Majumdar calls the police action "brutal and unprecedented" while Forward Bloc state secretary Ashok Ghosh even said Wednesday's firing has "irrevocably harmed" Left unity. Given such a potential risk

to its overall equations, which it could have well foreseen, why did the government go ahead with its plans? Buddhadeb told the state assembly a day after the incident that "no government could tolerate the absence of law in a part of the state for two months", indicating it was a planned action. In fact, on March 12, state home secretary P.R. Roy said massive police reinforcements were being dispatched to Nandigram. This was backed by a similar massing of CPI(M) cadres.

As this build-up continued over three days, reports trickled in of mounting tension in Nandigram-of the local farmers affiliated to an opposition coalition comprising Trinamool, fringe Left and Muslim groups preparing to put up resistance. Raj Bhavan sources told Outlook that the governor had, in fact, twice discussed the issue with the CM and urged him to avoid a showdown. "The governor specifically warned that things may spin out of control and lives could be lost," a senior officer privy to the events told Outlook.

The feedback from Nandigram, coupled with these warnings from the governor, proves the government was determined to go for a police crackdown, risking bloodshed. It had seen the fact that CPI(M) men, along with their families, were forced to flee Nandigram and take shelter elsewhere as unpardonable. Says lawyer and former Trinamool MLA Arunava Ghosh: "There was massive pressure on the CPI(M) state leadership from the party cadres in Midnapore to reclaim Nandigram. The party's setback at Nandigram, it was told, would set a dangerous precedent and could embolden opposition forces elsewhere to try similar tactics."

Even the CPI(M) unwittingly attested to this view when its leaders drew parallels between Nandigram and Keshpur, also in Midnapore, where the Trinamool had displaced the CPI(M) through violence a few years ago before the comrades re-stabilised control through brute force. But then Keshpur's clashes were purely political in nature. Nandigram is a different story altogether-the opposition to the CPI(M) is not political; it is over the highly emotive issue of land. Many within its own ranks feel the party has gravely erred in drawing this parallel between Nandigram and Keshpur.

The operation was seen as one needed to keep CPI(M)

cadres happy and allow them to stake control over the area. Says Goswami: "We (RSP and other LF partners) were kept totally in the dark over this crucial decision. I wonder, what's the point in remaining in the Front if crucial decisions are going to be taken unilaterally by the CPI(M) and the CM."

Meanwhile, the police firing hasn't cowed down the people of Nandigram. On March 15, they ransacked and tried to torch the Block Development Officer's office. The locals have vowed to drive out the police and the CPI(M) from the small pockets over which they regained control the day before. Clearly, we haven't heard the last of Nandigram's sordid saga. The ides of March don't bode too well for Buddhadeb. ◆

(Courtesy : outlookindia.com)

Rajnath demands judicial or parliamentary probe

BJP President, Shri Rajnath Singh has demanded a Judicial or Parliamentary enquiry into the unfortunate killing of at least four people and over 100 being injured in police firing in Nandigram on March 14 and has held the West Bengal Chief Minister Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his government responsible for this incident.

Shri Rajnath Singh said that it is a matter of grave concern that during the last three months due to high handedness of West Bengal Chief Minister, Nandigram has seen two major incidents of violence killing 10 people and the situation seems to be going out of control. A government which has no respect for farmers' sentiments and wishes to respond with police firing leading to unfortunate deaths has no moral right to continue. Government's job is to diffuse flash points, however the CPI-M government in West Bengal believes in contrary and is solely responsible for the incident.

It is ironic that at the time when people were dying in Nandigram, Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya disillusioned with his "Industrialisation Concept" went ahead with announcing of Singur- Tata project in the state assembly at that very time. It exposes CPI-M's real face towards the plight of farmers.

Nandigram : The Killing Fields

Subhro Niyogi and Saibal Sen

The idyllic pastures in East Midnapore's Nandigram, some 150 km from Kolkata, had been away from public glare for decades. All that changed on January 3 when farmers, angered by government plans to build a 10,000-acre chemical hub on their land, set police vehicles on fire. Police dispersed the crowd after firing in the air but this triggered a chain of events that catapulted remote Nandigram from anonymity to national centrestage.

What followed was an unprecedented war between CPM and its once loyal supporters. Villagers by and large opposed the government bid to set up a special economic zone. The Left Front had fought the last election under the banner 'Agriculture, our bedrock; industry our future'. When it came to implementation though, it pitted agriculture against industry.

The Left at the Centre has always been opposed to the concept of SEZs. It even pressured the UPA government to amend the SEZ Act. But the CPM-led Left Front government in Bengal pursued it with gusto. It was CPM that had given poor farmers land and landless labourers higher wages. And for three decades, they blindly voted for Left. Then, there was a sudden change. The government sought to snatch the land from under their feet. And they felt betrayed. "The only party we have known all our life is CPM. For years, we heard leaders spew anti-industry speeches. Now, there's a sudden turnaround. I don't understand it," said Deepak Mondal, a Nandigram farmer.

Bewilderment gave way to anger when police used force. Mondal walked out of the CPM fold and into the camp of

Bhumi Uchched Protirodh Committee (BUPC). Modelled on the lines of *Krishi Jami Bachao Committee* that was set up in Singur to oppose takeover of farmland for the Tata small car plant, BUPC drew little support initially. The CPM brushed it off as a rumour.

"Till December, CPM leaders kept assuring us that our homes were safe. How were we to know that the Left government would try to snatch homes of people who have been voting for it for three decades?" said S K Mustafa, once diehard CPM. Entire villages switched sides. Overnight, the fledgling land acquisition resistance committee became a force to reckon with. *Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Hind*, that claims 'secular' credentials despite its minority base, lent its support to the resistance. "Jamiat had fought for the motherland during Independence. Now we are fight for Nandigram," says Jamiat leader Abdus Samad.

Sheer coincidence perhaps, but freedom fighter Matangini Hazra had launched a similar movement in this very region in 1942 and carved out '*Swadhin Tamruk*' from British rule. She held fort for three months before falling to police bullets.

On January 7, armed CPM men launched a strike to stamp out resistance. Three BUPC men and a CPM cadre were killed in the gunbattle. The attack backfired. BUPC ranks swelled. Trinamul Congress jumped into the fray. Congress and BJP leaders rushed in.

Forced on the backfoot, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee admitted the land identification notification had been issued in haste. "Just tear the notification to shreds," he said. At a public meet in Heria, he tried to salvage the situation. "If people of Nandigram don't want industrialisation and progress, it will not happen. We will shift the project elsewhere," he said.

The bigwigs at CPM headquarters hauled up party MP and local supreme Lakshman Seth - widely believed to be the mastermind of the Nandigram battle. They assumed that resistance would peter out with time. But that was not to be.

"I will give up my life but won't budge an inch," says S K Khushnabi. That's the sentiment that everyone echoes, from 16 to 60-year-olds. Their threats of self-sacrifice weren't

hollow.

Seth managed to impress upon the CPM high command the need for police action. "How can agitators live beyond the purview of law?" he argued. And Bhattacharjee hinted at the impending offensive at a rally organised by the CPM peasants' wing. "Homes are being looted and torched. Women are being raped. This government will not tolerate such lawlessness," said the chief minister.

Three days later, 5,000 policemen and an unspecified number of CPM cadres walked in with guns, axes and hatchets. At least 14 people were killed and scores injured. The 'triumph' lasted barely 24 hours. In an unprecedented show of grit, thousands of villagers marched into the villages two days after the killings and reclaimed the lost villages. CPM cadres and police ran for cover. The second strike had boomeranged as well. The resistance movement had grown stronger and more resilient.

CPM claims the protests are politically motivated. "Criminals are creating trouble in five *gram panchayats*," says party general secretary Prakash Karat. Yet, everyone is aware that these dissidents were staunch CPM supporters till three months ago.

Historian Sumit Sarkar dismisses Karat's allegation. "During my visit in January-end, I met hundreds of people who were against the SEZ. They felt their land was threatened," Sarkar says.

The farmers of Nandigram had witnessed land acquisition on the other side of River Haldia and the plight of the evicted. Moreover, many residents of Sonachura - now a war zone - had been displaced by the Jellingham Project without proper compensation.

Now, they are on the warpath, checkmating CPM with its own rhetoric: *Hei smahalo dhan ho / Kaste ta dao shaan ho/ jan kabul aar maan kabul / Aar debo na, aar debona / Rakte bona dhaan moder praan go* (Song by Salil Chowdhury: Paddy is our life. We will protect it with all our might). ◆

(Courtesy : *The Times of India*)

Set the Left right

Antara Dev Sen

Nandigram is a horror story. Police gunning down protestors is unpardonable in any democracy, but it is particularly horrifying when farmers are killed by sanction of a people's government that was swept to power, and kept enthroned for 30 years, by these very farmers. Last week, the Bengal government that had done more for poor and landless peasants than any other state government shot dead at least 14 farmers and injured more than 70 in Nandigram as their police fired at protestors fighting to save their livelihood and future. Most were shot above the waist-some in the back-not standard procedure even when firing in self defence. There is talk of party cadres masquerading as cops. Whipped by outraged friends and prancing foes, the CPI(M)-led Left Front government has agreed to stop land acquisition for industrialisation in Nandigram. Rapped by his mentor Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has apologised. But it can't diminish the shame and horror of the shootings.

The CPI(M) has a history of violence against dissenters. After violence in Nandigram in January left six villagers dead and 11 missing, Bengal rose in rage, the Left Front seemed ready to crumble and Bhattacharjee swiftly offered a touching apology. He promised a 'land map' that would, among other things, identify non-agricultural land fit for industry. Nandigram focused attention on land alienation and the plight of farmers in a state that had once snuffed out its industries and was now hungry for industrialisation.

The temporary peace was soon shattered as villagers threw out thousands of CPI(M) cadres and locked the government out for three months. The police were trying to enter the village "to restore administrative control", said the CM. Since

last year, intelligence reports had warned of arms being cached in Nandigram, and agitators from elsewhere were gathering there. Besides, the Trinamool Congress, the Naxals and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (Nandigram has 80 per cent Muslims) were busy channelising the anger of affected farmers. So why couldn't the Left counter it through dialogue? They had a splendid 40-year track record of land reform. From attempts by the United Front government of 1967 through the Left Front's spectacular Operation Barga launched in 1978, sharecroppers had been given legal tenancy rights, excess land from rich landlords had been redistributed to poorer farmers and local governments had been put in place. Farmers were educated about their rights, tenancy rights of sharecroppers were made hereditary. All this raised awareness. The landlords lost family property and got just 25 per cent of the produce on their remaining land, while the sharecropper got 75 per cent. Now, as Singur and Nandigram were marked for industry, landlords were eager to sell at a good price their bothersome land that offered little. The sharecroppers would be hit the hardest. They would only get 25 per cent of the selling price as one-time compensation. The literacy level in Nandigram is 29 per cent and jobs in the petrochemical industry would not come easy. Besides, a large segment of sharecroppers here are apparently illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Traditionally, Left Front gets the Muslim vote and Nandigram was an excellent opportunity for others to break the monopoly.

CPI(M) needs accountability to prevent future Nandigrams. It needs to break free of cadre raj. Farmers' issues need to be examined in the context of human rights. The CPI(M) needs accountability to prevent future Nandigrams. It needs to break free of its cadre raj and focus on democratic principles. For once, the Left has a say in national policy and has stuck to its commitment to secularism, pluralism and the poor. For the sake of itself and Indian democracy, it cannot afford to patronise murderers. ◆

(Courtesy : The Week)

'Robbery of the Soil'

Dhanpat Ram Aggarwal

Singur has become a symbol for mindless acquisition of agricultural land in the name of industrialisation. Trinamool Congress leader Ms Mamata Bannerjee launched a protest against this forcible acquisition. BJP President Shri Rajnath Singh joined the agitation and rushed to West Bengal. He was arrested by the Police on his way to Singur. The issue of Singur has opened a Pandora's box and exposed the insensitivity of Government towards farmers cause. We are publishing for our readers the edited version of an article published in 'Swadeshi' which presents the real face of West Bengal Government.

Prime fertile agricultural land is being forcibly acquired from peasants in Singur, West Bengal. This is happening in a country where agriculture has been called the backbone of the Indian economy. For decades the country has followed the slogan of 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan'. But now the government is singing the song of Jai capital-Jai capitalism. This is happening when Indian agriculture is in crisis; farm productivity is stagnating and declined and the country is facing acute shortage of food grains.

Singur's land, coated with silt from the Hooghly and Damodar rivers and their tributaries, is extremely fertile. To say that it is single-crop is to blatantly distort the truth. What doesn't grow here - paddy, jute, potato, cauliflower, pumpkin, brinjal, cucumber, so many types of greens and vegetables! About six to 12 crops grow on Singur's highly productive fields. Paddy and potatoes, grown here, are the finest crops.

There are five cold storages, five deep and 27 mini tube wells in the locality, a clear indication that the land is well irrigated.

Agriculture based Singur's economy

Singur's economy revolves around agriculture. Not only the landowners, a sizeable population of Bargadars, wage-labourers and sharecroppers, mostly belonging to deprived sections and castes and Adivasis, depend on the land for their livelihood. Land is so vital for Singur's residents that if it goes their survival will be at stake. So, when the government is taking over their land, they are putting up a stiff resistance.

No matter what the government claims and the media propagates, records show that less than 27 percent of the 11,000-odd landowners have till date voluntarily given up their land. Those who have acquiesced are either absentees or have done so out of fear or coercion.

The Left Government is acting like a bunch of hypocrites under the influence of corporate 'spirit'. The Singur issue is a bag full of contradictions. First, the same leftists who had all along been talking about land reforms, are now giving away a multi-crop, fertile agricultural land to Tata, for a small car project of Rs.1000 crore. Secondly, the Left Government who has always preached about welfare of farmers and fenced their state with barbed wires from the 'barbaric' capitalists is acting like an agent of Tatas.

Meanwhile, the Land and Land Revenue Department, invoking the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (suitably amended in 1984), have taken over 997 acres required for the Tata factory. This land has been declared as khas (vested) and is being sold to the West Bengal Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation for handing over to the newly formed company, Tata Motors. It is the clear violation of law; State can acquire land only if it is in the public interest, which is certainly not true in Singur's case.

Under pressure, because of a massive public outcry, the government agreed to raise the compensation amount to 52 percent of the market price of land and, to persuade landowners to sell their land, announced special incentives to those who would do so on their own.

In the dead of night on 25-26 September, in a pre-planned move, it let loose a reign of terror on thousands of unarmed

demonstrators at the BDO office in Singur town. It was the first day cheques were being handed over to those who had agreed to part with their lands and the demonstration against this had begun in the morning. By the afternoon, several cases were detected in which those who had already sold off their land to others, but the mutation process was not complete, were being given cheques, denying the present legal owner. Protesting such illegal deeds by government officials, the demonstrators sat on a dharna at the BDO office. They even 'gheraoed' the District Magistrate for a brief period. The firebrand leader of the opposition party in the state arrived with her troupe and she, too, joined the dharna. Soon after midnight, power was cut off and a huge police force, reportedly under the influence of alcohol, mercilessly thrashed men, women and children with lathis. The leader of the opposition party, also a Member of Parliament, was manhandled and, with her sari torn to shreds, packed off in a police car to Kolkata. Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee argues that more than 550 farmers have not consented to the government's land acquisition move.

As an outcome all this, prices of land in all these locations have gone up by leaps and bounds. Brokers and real estate agents, who are by no means very reliable sources for such information, say the increase has been 100 per cent to 200 per cent. This surge in prices are inducing farmers to sell their lands but what will ultimately happen to them after selling their only source of livelihood is an open question to be seriously debated.

Can government acquire land for private good?

Government can take away private property without getting the consent of the owner for using the same for public good, say the government wants to build a road or a railroad or suchlike, and they need to get a certain amount of land for this purpose. The government can just seize the land, at a compensation that it decides.

Now, what is happening in Singur is scandalous because the poor farmers who are being forced to give up their land are made to do so not for a public project, like a road or a dam or suchlike, but for a private one. The government is effectively taking away land from poor farmers, and handing

it over to a private company, in this case, Tata Motors.

From Leftists to Nationalists

It is now, no more a question of leftist or rightist, it has given birth to nationalist. Normally, the likes of Patkar, Mahashweta Devi and Roy would have been behind the Bhattacharya government. But the latter is now pursuing a path diametrically opposed to what the Left upholds. Medha Patkar, she has had to take on an anti-leftist position because the Tatas have the full backing of the Marxist West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya. It is the same with the Akademi award winning Bengali writer Mahashweta Devi, who is known for her Naxalite (Maoist) sympathies. And if these two icons come together, can Booker prize winner Arundhati Roy be far behind? So, she too has led a demonstration in front of the CPI-M office in New Delhi over the Singur issue.

But what is curious is that these aggressive votaries of Left find themselves today on the same platform as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Rajnath Singh and convenor of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) George Fernandes.

Rarely has there been a more variegated collection of personalities battling for a single cause. Politicians in search of relevance, perennial do-gooders, Marxist and Maoist revolutionaries, writers on the far left of the political spectrum, rightwing leaders - all have assembled together to oppose the West Bengal government-sponsored automobile project of the Tatas in Singur.

De-industrialisation of West Bengal during left regime

According to a rough estimate, 65,000 units fell sick or were closed in these three decades owing mainly to labour unrest under leftist rule since 1977. West Bengal which was second most industrialised state till 1960s, slipped to the eighth position during left regime.

Loss of food security

The President and the Prime Minister are harping on the need for a second Green Revolution, to which the Left parties expressed support but cannot answer, how in West Bengal, with some 1.5 lakh acres set for industries, will this revolution be possible. If the annual rice yield falls by nearly two lakh

tonnes, there is bound to be a food shortage even in a normal year.

Despite demands for a White Paper by the opposition, the government has not issued any comprehensive document on acquisitions. As per Kolkata-based media reports, at least 125,176 acres of arable land in nine districts have been demanded by investors and entrepreneurs and for much of it, acquisition notices have already been served. This excludes demands for some 2034 acres by a dozen Indian companies.

Plight of Farmers

Only about one-third of the farmers' annual income comes from agriculture and two-thirds from non-agricultural pursuits. More than half of West Bengal's farmers are in debt, the average yearly debt per family being Rs. 5,237. Most of them have land-holdings less than one acre. Mounting debt compels them to give up land or become landless labour. Nearly 58% of India's population is still dependant on agriculture for livelihood. More than half of this, however, owns smallholdings of less than 1 hectare while only 2% of the agriculturists own more than 10 hectares of land. The absolute landless and the near landless (those who own up to 2 hectare of land) account for as much as 43% of the total peasant households.

The problem with the CPI-M is that it has never sought to engage political opponents and civil society in discussions on the way forward for the state. Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee may well be a focused individual, but he bristles at even well intentioned criticism.

Bengal needs sage minds to resolve the many issues that are linked to Singur; to attempt to wish them away with a lament that Bengalis have a death wish when it comes to matters linked with industrial progress, as at least one apologist for the establishment has done, is farcical. It is not perhaps too late yet for Singur, or indeed to address questions relating to land-use in a mature, sensible fashion. This issue is not about individuals, not even bull-headed ones like Mr. Bhattacharjee and Miss Banerjee. It is about prescriptions for growth and progress that must be palatable to the people of the state. ◆

The *Sangram* CPM lost despite Stalinist brutalities

In a shocking display of strong-arm tactics adopted by the Marxist government of West Bengal, thousands of State Policemen, backed by CPM cadre, opened fire on the farmers of Nandigram protesting against forcible acquisition of their agricultural land by the State Government for a Special Economic Zone Project. This utterly shameful, seemingly pre-planned act which killed many and left many more injured took place in broad daylight on March 13, turning the green fields of Nandigram into killer fields.

As the police and CPM cadres were jointly perpetuating their orgy of violence and mayhem, the media was barred from entering Nandigram reviving memories of the Emergency Era

This act of brutality unparalleled in independent India shocked the whole country generating widespread protest in Kolkata and calls of bandh from Trinamul and BJP. Both houses of Parliament were rocked as agitated BJP and Trinamul Congress members forced an adjournment in the Rajya Sabha and staged a walk-out in the Lok Sabha. The BJP and Trinamul MPs stormed the well of the House and shouted slogans alleging that the Nandigram incident was a repeat of the "Jallianwala Bagh" outrage perpetuated by colonial British rulers.

The BJP took a very strong stand against this State sponsored atrocity. Leader of the Opposition, Shri L.K.Advani spoke to Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Home Minister, Shri Shivraj Patil requesting them to seek a report from the West Bengal Governor on this violence. Shri Advani called it one of the most unfortunate events since

Independence. BJP President Shri Rajnath Singh demanded a judicial or parliamentary probe into the police firing. He said the State Government had lost the moral authority to continue in office.

This unprecedented and inhuman act on the part of the Buddhadev Bhattacharya government even caused fissures within the Left Front prompting leaders of CPI, RSP and the Forward Block to criticize the police action. They alleged that the government planned the move keeping them in the dark.

This unparalleled incident outraged the West Bengal Governor, Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, who in a virtual indictment of the West Bengal Government expressed "a sense of cold horror" at the incident questioning the need for such spilling of human blood. It also shocked President APJ Abdul Kalam who said that he would instruct the government to take "remedial action".

Later at Shillong Raj Bhavan the President, questioning the use of force for land acquisition for industrial purposes, told media persons that "unless they (farmers) agree to give their land, it should not be taken."

High Court orders CBI probe

A Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court, on March 14 directed the CBI to immediately probe into the matter taking prompt cognizance of the petition moved by the National Alliance of People's Movement and some lawyers.

But the most shameful and shocking is the silence maintained by the Congress over this incident, exposing it to the charge that it was gagged by the Left's support to the UPA. The Congress Central leadership practically turned a blind eye to this horrific happening to the extent that Union Home Minister, Shri Shivraj Patil, in his brief statement on the Nandigram incident in Parliament not only gave a clean chit to the State Administration, he even endorsed this heinous act of the CPM Government.

As always, the Congress was playing politics over dead bodies. It has refrained from condemning the killings. Surprisingly, Smt. Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, who lose no time in visiting places where violence has taken place, in an ugly effort to save their UPA government by not doing anything to annoy the Left Front

on whose support it subsists, did not even think it necessary to visit Nandigram.

Subsequently, a total Bandh was observed in West Bengal on March 16, in response to the call by BJP and Trinamul Congress. This was a spontaneous expression of anger and disgust on the part of the public, cutting across party lines as even the 'Babus' at Writer's Building and the State Secretariat chose to stay away in large numbers for the first time in the history of West Bengal.

In an unprecedented wave of support, the people of West Bengal, extending from Darjeeling to Kolkata, expressed solidarity with the battered people of Nandigram by observing the Bandh in totality including the IT sector, which had previously opposed all Bandhs. Even small pan-cigarrette kiosks, in small lanes and by-lanes, remained closed.

Jallianwalla in Nandigram

On March 17 Shri L.K. Advani led a nine member fact finding team of the NDA to Nandigram to assess the situation, covering a stretch of 440 kms during his tour. He was the first political leader to enter Sonachura after this carnage and was accompanied by NDA convener Shri George Fernandes and other BJP leaders including Smt. Sushma Swaraj.

Women were raped too

Villagers have been looking for some people who came in on 14 March disguised as policemen to rape and murder women. They chanced upon Sahadev Pramanick (30), who had raped at least two women. The CPI-M activist from Gangra, Sonachura, left the village after the first spell of violence in January and sought refuge in a party camp at Khejuri. Last evening, whilst trying to sneak into Sonachura along with four accomplices, he found himself captured. Pramanick admitted to two rapes, including that of a 13-year-old girl. "At least 17 girls were raped inside a deserted house near Bhangabera on 14 March when police opened fire near a bridge. The victims were dragged into the house of Shankar Samanta by CPI-M cadres," Pramanick said. Samanta had been burnt alive by villagers on 7 January and his dwelling since then lay vacant. (Source: The Statesman)

As soon as his cavalcade stopped at Sonachura, men, women and children thronged to narrate their plight and recall the torture at the hands of the CPI (M) and the police. Deeply moved he said "I just can't believe that such barbarism and atrocity could be inflicted on the people by its own government in Independent India."

Comparing the incident to the Jallianwala Bagh carnage, he said "history will never forget Sonachura and never forgive Marxists for what they have done." ◆

(Courtesy : Kamal Sandesh)

Buddhadeb not, but Governor shocked

Even West Bengal Governor Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi said the use of force in Nandigram could have been avoided. In a statement the Governor asked: "Was this spilling of human blood not avoidable? What is the public purpose served by the use of force that we have witnessed today?"

Expressing "a sense of cold horror" at the incident, he said: "Force against anti-national elements, terrorists, extremists is one thing. The receiving end of the force used today does not belong to that order."

"I leave it to the conscience of officials responsible to atone for the event in the manner they deem fit. But I also expect the government to do what it thinks is necessary to mitigate the effects of this bitter March 14, and to do it visibly and fast," he said.

Shri Gandhi hinted that he had been advising the government on the issue of public opposition to the acquisition of land for industries, saying, "What I advised government over the last two days, as I received inputs of rising tension in Nandigram, government knows. It is not my intention to enter into blame-fixing. But I cannot be so casual to the oath I have taken as to restrict my reaction to a pious expression of anguish and outrage. "I trust the government will not only go into whys and wherefores of this tragic occurrence but will also ensure that it leaves no room for a repetition of the kind of trauma witnessed today."

NDA urges President Kalam to visit Nandigram

The NDA sought President of India Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam's intervention on the Nandigram killings, urging him to use his good offices to direct the UPA government to invoke Article 355 so as to put pressure on the West Bengal government to restore the people's confidence. An NDA delegation led by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Shri L K Advani called on the President on March 22 and asked the president to undertake a visit to Nandigram to make an on the-spot assessment and reassure the people of the area. The delegation included BJP President Shri Rajnath Singh, Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha Smt Sushma Swaraj, Shri S S Ahluwalia.

Respected Rashtrapatiji,

We Members of Parliament belonging to the National Democratic Alliance hereby implore you to renew your kind attention to the horrific situation prevailing in and around Nandigram in West Bengal's East Medinipur district. As you are aware, the State police in cahoots with armed cadre of the State's ruling party unleashed a reign of terror on hapless villagers on March 14, 2007.

In the indiscriminate firing by the police and party cadre, the death of 14 persons and serious injuries to 35 have been confirmed by officials. At least 50 others are recuperating at various hospitals with different degrees of injury. The fact that while police have admitted to firing only 20 rounds, the

number of dead and those injured by bullets far exceeds that figure is conclusive proof of the active participation of the cadre of the State's ruling party in conducting this murderous campaign.

GROUND REALITIES: Rashtrapatiji, a delegation of NDA Parliamentarians led by the Leader of the Opposition Shri LK Advani visited the affected villages on Saturday March 17. They returned traumatized by what they saw and heard. At Sonachura, one of the most affected villages, a crowd of around 10,000 gathered to relate their woes to this delegation. One villager wept bitterly while narrating how a police bullet pierced his brother's body. While the injured man was being carried back to the village by his family policemen forcibly snatched him away. He has not been traced yet anywhere in the area and even a thorough search of local hospitals proved futile.

The delegation was told by people in various villages that on the fateful day, congregations had been organized on the fields where Hindus installed idols of Lord Gauranga and Muslims read passages from the Quran to pray for the safety of their lands, which they feared would be forcibly acquired by the State Government for setting up a SEZ. Villagers said the police and CPI(M) cadre attacked them at these prayer meetings. It was unanimously alleged that the police and party cadre fired on fleeing villagers, including women and children, with the intent to kill. That all the dead and injured received gunshots above the waist testifies to the murderous intentions of the attackers.

The delegation also visited the Nandigram Grameen Hospital and the Tamluk Government Hospital where it met a large number of injured persons. The team was astonished to learn that, in complete violation of the police blue book, no provision was made for ambulances or the fire brigade. The injured were ferried to hospitals on bicycles, cycle-rickshaws and even shoulders of other people, resulting in long delays between injury being sustained and the start of medical treatment.

RAPIST POLICEMEN: Even more shocking were allegations of rape by uniformed police personnel. At one village, an elderly lady alleged that policemen brutally raped

two young women, before her eyes. At another place, the delegation was informed that uniformed policemen chased a woman who ran into a cowshed for shelter. But the frightened woman was eventually located and raped inside it. Another woman who had been injured in the violence was allegedly raped even while she was unconscious. Since no FIR was registered, the hospital did not conduct a medical examination. When a complaint was finally registered and medical examination ordered, 48 hours had passed making it difficult to establish this heinous crime perpetrated by the supposed guardians of the law.

OUR APPEAL: Rashtrapatiiji, you are aware of the current political realities that have effectively curtailed the Government of India's willingness to step in and restore the rule of law in a State run by a major ally of the ruling UPA. It is a tragedy that while the State's Governor Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi responded to his conscience and publicly expressed his anguish at the bloodshed and you too, Sir, obliquely critiqued forcible land acquisition, and the Calcutta High Court ordered a CBI inquiry, the Parliament of India was prevented from discussing one of the worst instances of state terror since Jalianwala Bagh.

Sir, in view of the terror that still prevails in Nandigram with hundreds missing from their homes, and the morbid fear of men in uniform that has gripped villagers, we appeal to you to press upon your Government to invoke the relevant clauses of Article 355 of the Constitution and:

1. Direct the Government of West Bengal to immediately stop the spiral of violence in the area, especially by removing marauding bands of ruling party cadre from the disturbed villages.
2. Take all effective administrative steps to restore a sense of security and confidence among the people.
3. Order the withdrawal of the State police from the affected region and replace it with Central para-military forces.
4. Ask the State Government to withdraw the notification for acquisition of land and categorically assure the people that the no land will be acquired from farmers in this area.
5. Direct the West Bengal Government to establish a special

thana in Nandigram with the specific purpose of registering FIRs and noting complaints about police and CPM cadre atrocities, charges of rape, reports about missing persons and other such grievances. This special police post must be instructed to register all complaints without asking complainants to procure written permission from the CPM local committee, which shockingly, is the norm in many parts of West Bengal.

6. Ensure disbursement of adequate compensation to the families of the dead and injured.

Rashtrapatiiji, the entire country admires your empathy with ordinary, voiceless people. They in turn look to you as a source of inspiration and succour. The people of Nandigram are waiting for your reassurance, your healing touch, to overcome the trauma of violence to which they have been subjected. We appeal to you to spare a few hours at your earliest convenience to visit the affected villages and comfort the terrorized people there. It will bring a bit of cheer to their lives and restore their faith in a system that has been so unfair to them. We are confident you will consider this appeal favourably. ◆

Blood on the soil

Barkha Dutt

The images of the bloodbath at Nandigram are haunting - a young woman's dead body being rolled off a rickety vegetable cart, her green sari soaked in blood; an old man's head draped in bloody bandages, his arm outstretched for help that never came; a policeman mercilessly thrashing an unarmed villager. This looked like a one-sided battle.

But the grim emotional dimension to the West Bengal violence does not necessarily help in answering the questions at the heart of the debate. Is this Brand Buddha's fall from grace? How much of the trouble is because of the Chief Minister's own bungling and how much of it is him being offered up at the guillotine by rivals within his own party? And most importantly, which side does the conflict between farms and factories leave you and me on? Does this herald the end of India's much-hyped SEZ scheme? And more to the point, should it?

Mishandling is too benign an adjective to describe the

The dry and unapologetic response of the state government after this week's killings has only made matters worse. The Marxists want us to believe that the violence was fomented by outsiders. But wasn't it a top-level party meeting that sanctioned sending in thousands of policemen? If it was indeed CPI(M) cadres on the ground that went for the kill, and not the police, isn't it still the party that has to take the responsibility?

callous clumsiness with which the state government has treated the opposition to the Indonesian chemical plant in Nandigram. Two months ago, after the first outburst of violence, the Chief Minister conceded that an unauthorised notice by the Haldia Development Authority had fuelled rumours and unrest. The notice had merely asked the local administration to explore options for land acquisition. But as Nandigram erupted and became a war zone, the Chief Minister went on record to say the notice had been mistakenly issued and he had asked the district magistrate to "tear it up". This was in January. So how does the state government explain that in March, 60 days later, the notification had still not been officially withdrawn? And if it had, as the Chief Minister insisted in the assembly, why did the villagers believe otherwise?

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For once, the CPI(M) has to step out of its traditional role as the self-righteous adversary; this time it can't ask the questions, it has to answer them... ◆

(Courtesy : The Hindustan Times)

Editorials

Buddha must go

CPM to blame for massacre

Wednesday's (March 14, 2007) terrible massacre of villagers protesting against attempts by the CPI(M)-led Left Front Government to forcibly acquire land for a Special Economic Zone project at Nandigram in West Bengal deserves unqualified condemnation and more. This was no routine exercise of authority by the administration to maintain law and order. It was pre-meditated mass murder far worse than the midnight killings of January, a crime in which CPI(M) thugs and the Marxists' handmaidens in police uniform were complicit partners. The firing by the police and Marxist cadre, laying to waste human lives, was uncalled for and grossly disproportionate to the alleged provocation. There can be no justification for such planned slaughter and what followed. Images of policemen mercilessly beating up wailing women trying to retrieve the dead and the wounded from Nandigram's blood-soaked fields may fetch the tail-wagging personnel of West Bengal Police praise from their Marxist masters in Writers' Building and Alimuddin Street, where the CPI(M)'s State headquarters are located, but this recorded evidence of inhuman brutality has exposed them for what they are: Hoodlums who have no shame in sullyng the uniform they wear. The real story of the terror unleashed in Nandigram and its shocking fallout will never be known as mediapersons have been prevented from visiting the killing fields.

It would, however, be unfair to blame the police alone for the horrific blood-letting witnessed on Wednesday morning. They did what they were directed to do by a

morally-bankrupt and criminally insane Government whose arrogant Marxist leaders, including Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, have lost all sense of right and wrong. It is a Government that has become blind to the plight of the people over whose destiny it presides. It is a Government that has become deaf to the pitiful cry of those whom it seeks to disinherit in the name of development. It is a Government that has sold its soul to industrial groups like Salem whose unsavoury and anti-people track record would find sanction only with our Comrades who are quick to preach rectitude to others but are loath to practise it themselves. It is a Government that can no longer distinguish between dharma and adharma. It is a Government presided over by individuals whose hands are stained with the blood of innocent men, women and children.

Such a Government has no right to be in power. It must go. For all his bluster about leading West Bengal into a brighter future through rapid industrialisation, Mr Bhattacharjee has proved to be an utter failure and his policies have resulted in unmitigated disaster. He is solely to blame for the shameful misuse of state power to further an agenda whose beneficiaries are not the people of West Bengal. The moral responsibility for Wednesday's massacre is his, and his alone. If Mr Bhattacharjee has even a shred of decency, he should resign from his exalted office to which he has brought nothing but indelible infamy. That would be an honourable thing to do in the wake of a mind-numbing dishonourable deed. If he decides to brazen it out, as his party has decided to do, then he and his Comrades must be prepared for a counter-revolution and its unhappy consequences. This time the people of Nandigram, Singur and countless other places will be in the vanguard. And only the dumb would underestimate their anger. ◆

(Courtesy : The Pioneer)

Blood in Nandigram

The brutal face of Marxist rule

THIS is the way a policy cookie crumbles when the police unleash a reign of terror, as they did in Nandigram where at least 15 people, including women and children, were claimed in the firing. Along with the people who fell to police bullets, good sense, economics and politics, too, have been blown by the CPM-dictated crackdown on the protestors. Without doubt, it is the CPM, more than the Left Front it leads, that is responsible for the horrific bloodletting in the site of contention that Nandigram has now become. Therefore, it is not surprising that the CPM is under fire from its coalition partners, including some ministers.

In the first place, where was the need for a 5000-strong police force to be sent to Nandigram? More outrageous is that this uniformed terror was lent more muscle by the CPM cadres mobilised for the onslaught against the protesting people. The presence of armed police and cadres in such numbers is not administrative enforcement of order or even a deterrent. It looks premeditated, the intimidation being a calculated effort to provoke and escalate unrest as a pretext for unleashing unbridled violence. In spite of the presence of the police and cadres, and the lathi-charging and teargassing, if the protesting people could not be dispersed, the CPM should have understood the force of resistance it was facing and defused the tension by retreating from the scene. They could also have shot in the air and used water cannons. Instead, the police went on a killing spree.

For a party that never tires of proclaiming it represents 'people power', and had itself been at the receiving end of

police brutalities in the 1960s and 1970s, such a response to protest is nothing short of barbaric state-sponsored violence. Hardly surprising then that Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi has unsparingly condemned the violence and publicly questioned the use of such blood-chilling force. The West Bengal government must be made to answer for this atrocity even as the CBI, on the order of the Calcutta High Court, probes the police violence. ◆

(Courtesy : The Tribune)

Amnesty International expresses concern over Nandigram violence

Amnesty International India is concerned at reports that at least fifteen people were killed in police firing in Nandigram which has been the scene of protests for the last few months against possible displacement due to a new chemical project in a proposed Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Amnesty International India is concerned about excessive, disproportionate use of force by the police forces, which have sought to enter the areas of ongoing protests in Nandigram.

In this context, Amnesty International India reiterates its demands that the Government of West Bengal:

-order an impartial and independent inquiry into the excessive use of force at Nandigram now and the violence in Nandigram in January, promptly make the findings public and prosecute those accused of violence;

-ensure that all state officials, including police personnel, who are suspected of being responsible for human rights violations, including excessive use of force, are prosecuted;

-ensure that activists and other individuals engaged in peaceful protests in West Bengal are able to do so without fear of violence, harassment or false accusation of involvement in criminal activities.

Shame, CPI(M): Find politics for industrialisation

We condemn the brutal killing of 12 people by the police in Nandigram. The incident highlights political failure in West Bengal - both state inability to engage the people in a dialogue and an aptitude for violent coercion against dissenters on the part of the CPI (M).

It also highlights the urgency of evolving a democratic method of transforming traditional habitats and occupations for the purpose of setting up modern industry. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya is right to proclaim his determination to go ahead with the Tata car project at Singur. But it would be a gross mistake for him to close his eyes to the political culture his party has wrought in West Bengal that seeks resolution of disputes by force and violence. How does he account for CPM activists sealing off all access points along a 30-km radius around Nandigram, even as the police carried out the bloodbath?

That clashes over 'acquisition of land' for the proposed SEZ have occurred in spite of the chief minister announcing the withdrawal of the land acquisition notification and offering to shift the project elsewhere if Nandigram did not want it is, indeed, galling. For the CPM cadre, which has worked on the principle of 'occupying' and 'holding on' to areas, retreat is never an option. It sees the LF government's amenability to popular demands as an erosion of its influence and prestige.

The party has been sustaining its cadre network by dispensing patronage. This is yet another reason why the CPM cadre finds it difficult, as it has in Nandigram, to yield to

popular pressure, and give up its forcible control over areas in the state. An all-pervasive political culture of coercive violence, which precludes any attempt to evolve consensus through dialogue, has been its inevitable result. The government's failure to engage the Nandigram protestors in negotiations, and its decision to send a 5,000-strong police force to deal with them, as if they were occupier-enemies, are symptoms of this crisis of democratic politics.

In fact, that is precisely why the question of development in West Bengal has come to be posed as an opposition, between agriculture and industry, and not in more inclusive terms of sustainable income growth and full employment. ◆

(Courtesy : The Economic Times)



Singur becomes a nasoor for Left Parties

West Bengal is the State where Communist parties have been calling shots for nearly three decades. They have managed to hold power for such a long time by tactfully politicising the entire State machinery. There is a big misconception among a large section of the society that it is the communist ideology that has found favour with people. The fact is that they feel exasperated with the current misrule. They are now raising their voice against the present state of affairs in the State. The case of Singur gives us a fair idea of how the administration there is doing injustice to farmers and poor people by forcibly acquiring their agricultural land on the pretext of industrialisation.

Singur has now become a nasoor for the Communist regime, thanks only to the insensitive and neo-capitalist mindset of its present leadership in West Bengal. Those who took to the streets were brutally beaten up and put behind bars. Trinamul Congress leader Ms Mamta Banerjee has been vociferously opposing the Tata Project in Singur. Communist Parties in Bengal tortured her, physically and mentally, in every possible way to force her to withdraw her agitation. But her agitation has managed to grab the attention of every pro-farmer activist and leader. The Singur issue hit national headlines when BJP President Shri Rajnath Singh decided to lend moral support to this agitation of farmers. He immediately rushed to Kolkata on the evening of December 3 after getting the news of three protestors being killed in police firing.

Next morning he left for Singur. State BJP President Shri Sukumar Banerjee, party General Secretary Shri Rahul Sinha and many other State leaders accompanied Shri Singh. The people of West Bengal welcomed Shri Singh at many places on his way to Singur. His cavalcade continued to swell in numbers with more than five dozen vehicles. On reaching Dankuni Toll Plaza Shri Rajnath Singh was arrested along with the State BJP leaders and taken to a nearby Guest House by the West Bengal Police. After completing the formalities the Police released Shri Singh.

BJP President immediately took a turn and reached Kolkata where Ms Mamta Banerjee was sitting on a hunger strike in protest against Singur case. Ms Banerjee gave a warm welcome to Shri Singh and was more than happy to see him coming all the way to Kolkata and give her moral support in her fight against anti-farmer policies of Communist Parties in West Bengal.

Addressing the gathering Shri Singh said , " Ms Mamta Banerjee is not alone in her struggle against the Left misrule as BJP is there to support her all the way. The Left front Government that boasts itself as a well wisher of proletariat is ordering lathicharge over small farmers."

Coming down heavily on the State Government Shri Singh said if the Government was so much concerned about industrialisation then why thousands of industrial units were shut down during its regime. "The Government is playing with the lives of hundreds of farmers by taking away their fertile lands in the name of industrialisation", said he.

Shri Singh urged the Tatas and the Left Front government to shift the small car project to an alternative site in the interest of farmers. "I am appealing to the Tatas and also to the Left Front government to consider a site alternative to the agricultural land in Singur for the small car project," he said.

BJP President also informed the audience that the Supreme Court had decided to take up the PIL of Singur farmers for hearing after two weeks. Shri Singh also blasted the Congress for its hypocritic stand on Singur.

