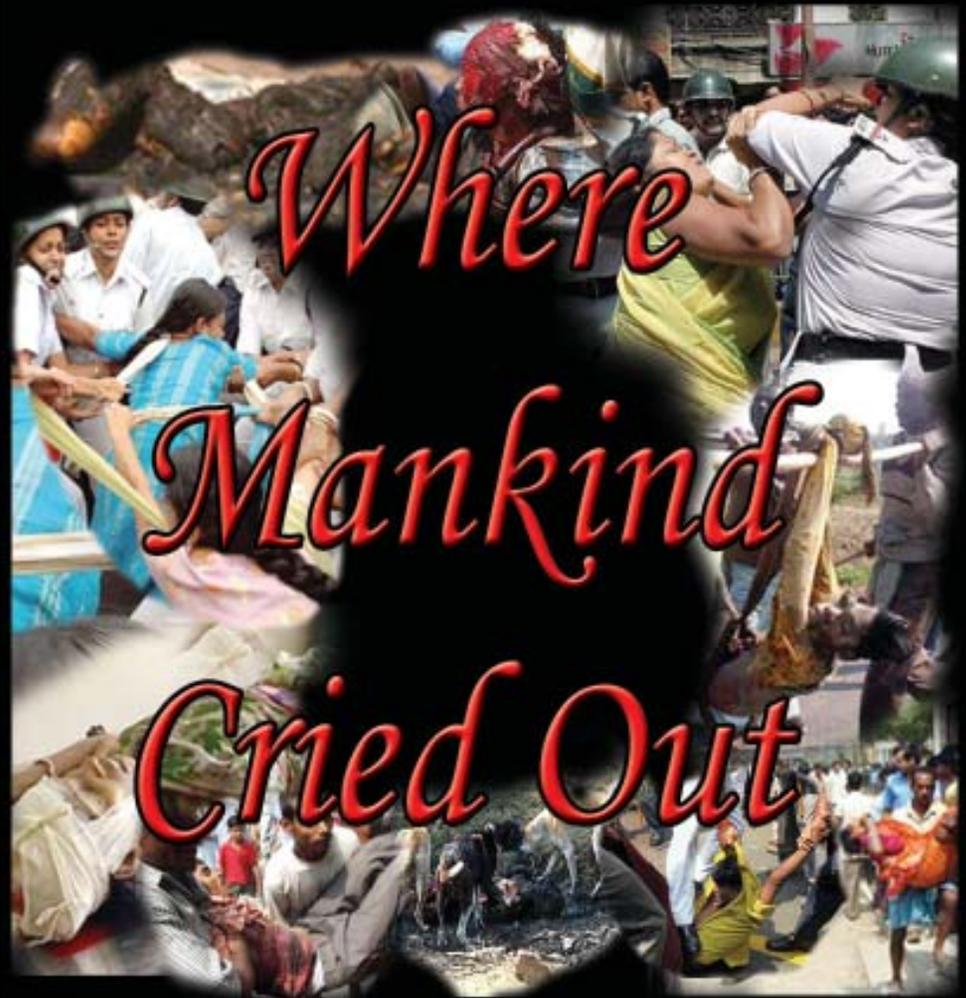


NANDIGRAM



*Where
Mankind
Cried Out*

Bharatiya Janata Party

From the Editor

The vocabulary goes bankrupt to truly and adequately express the extent of sins committed and continuing today by the CPI(M) in Nandigram. The universal condemnation the Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya has received from every quarter of the country and abroad should have made him volunteer to resign immediately if he were a sane, self-respecting individual. CPI(M) general secretary Shri Prakash Karat too should have acted likewise in the interest of his party and its future. But he went beyond what Buddhadev Bhattacharya said or did. CM has no match, if his negative points were to be counted.

From their conduct, one is reminded of an old story. A person went to another complaining that the latter's son urinates at whatever places he likes. But to his surprise, later, he found the father himself urinating in public in a more shameful manner. Those who used to sing eulogies for CPI(M) and chanted *lal-salam, lal-salam* dancing, painting, writing stories and poems for it are today cursing their own selves realising their own mistake to have fed a cobra with milk because anybody who had the least touch of human feelings could not have done what CPI(M) did brazenly in Nandigram. Their cadres crossed the limits of behaviour befitting a human being.

Smt. Brinda Karat, Suhasani Ali and Sarla Maheshwari, who normally provide glamour to news channels, have faded out of Nandigram news. They seem to have turned deaf towards the cries of women and teenage children forcibly raped in Nandigram. Teesta Seetalwad and the husband-wife duo of Shabana Azmi-Javed Akhtar adept at playing social and political histrionics in the name of human rights seem to be trying to shut themselves from the issue. Javed Akhtar's pen and poetry seem to have lost words, feelings and meaning. The guilty men of Nandigram and their protectors stand on the same pedestal. Those who were shouting from their housetops over events in Gujarat have sunk themselves in basements of shame over what happened in Nandigram

The Hammer and Sickle has ceased to be the election symbol of CPI(M); it has now become the weapon of crime against humanity. Together with the leftists the Congress too stands exposed. What a shame that to save their *gaddi* people in the Congress should seek the favour and support of those very people whose hands are bloodstained with killings, rape and looting. More so when they provide political shelter and protection to such criminal elements. It is a great sin and crime against democracy.

Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi had been adept at performing *nautankies* on the political stage. She has failed to perform one this time. She appears scared of the sharpness of hammer and sickle. Wherever and whenever a few people died in any part of the country Smt. Sonia Gandhi would try to be the first to rush to that place but on Nandigram she

continues to be unmoved, unnerved as if the innocent butchered, raped and maimed were not human beings but animals.

Nandigram should not be turned into a political arena. But CPI(M), unfortunately, has turned it so to settle scores with its opponents. West Bengal is the only State of the country which has been condemned and criticized by almost every judicious person, a governor and the intelligentsia. But hark the language of the leftists. State Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya says that they stand for an eye for an eye approach and the protestors had been "paid back in their own coin". Smt. Brinda Karat instigates women cadre to return violence with violence. Yechuri is concentrating all his energies in justifying whatever has happened in Nandigram.

In West Bengal – and more so, in Nandigram – the highest traditions of the country have been trampled down. Shamelessness has crossed all limits. Constitution appears to have been mauled. Instead of being the protector of the life and property of the people Administration itself has become the murderer and looter. Judges, governors and human rights activists are raising their voice of protest and giving vent to their feelings of anguish. The dance of death continues. The communists have become the tormentors, torturers and looters of honour of those very people from whom they sought support and who voted for them. Buddhadev is all in one — the modern Nero, a Hitler, a Stalin and a fascist incarnate. Every dictator, history tells us, meets his end one day. The leftists, particularly the CPI(M), have fallen from grace in the eyes of the people. What remains to be seen is when will the people smash the CPI(M) edifice in West Bengal with the power of their votes.

Through this booklet we have tried to present a collage of the sins and crimes of the leftist to make the pain and anguish of the people of Nandigram reach everyone in the country. We have endeavoured to make people understand what it means when the protector himself becomes the instrument of crime and injustice. The booklet is a collection of writings, editorials comments and reports from renowned writers, columnists and national newspapers and magazines. We have also included what the Leader of Opposition, Shri Lal Krishna Advani, said in Lok Sabha and Deputy Leader of BJP Parliamentary Party in Rajya Sabha spoke about Nandigram. Our effort is to present a true picture of the situation there.

We are sure that our effort will succeed in exposing those very people who are the perpetrators of crime and injustice against innocent people in the garb of projecting themselves to be their protectors. The real face of the leftists too will stand exposed. We were running against time to present this publication in as short a time as possible. In the process some mistakes could have crept in here and there. We hope the readers will bear with us.

PRABHAT JHA

GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM

Why Nandigram erupted?

BACKGROUND:

The West Bengal government decided that Salim group of Indonesia would develop a special economic zone at Nandigram. This would require the acquisition of over 14,000 acres of land. The special economic zone would be spread over 29 mouzas (villages) of which 27 are in Nandigram. **Probodh Panda, a CPI MP from the district has said that most of the land to be acquired is multi crop and would affect over 40,000 people. Social activist Medha Patkar had visited Nandigram on 7 December 2006 to protest against land acquisition.**

The Salim Group has sought around 35,000 acres of land for a series of ambitious projects. Apart from the special economic zone (which is a 50:50 joint venture with the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation) it has been assigned the construction of the 100 km long 100 m wide Eastern Link Expressway and construction of a four-lane road bridge over the Haldi River, from Haldia to Nandigram, has also been planned. The proposed bridge would provide a link between Haldia and the proposed chemicals SEZ in Nandigram. The Barasat-Raichak expressway and the Raichak-Kukrahati bridge, will connect Haldia to National Highway 34.

The group will also construct 10 small commercial hubs along the proposed expressway. Also on Salim's radar are a fish farm and a fish processing-cum-export unit in Howrah. The total investment is expected to be around Rs. 20,000 crore. The government will acquire another 5,000 acres for the Salim Group at Kukrahati in East Midnapore, near Haldia, to develop a township in addition to its proposed 5,000-acre project in Baruipur.

Important Person behind the Nandigram

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee: what began as a farmers' protest against land acquisition in Nandigram has turned out to be one of the biggest challenges for Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. Though the chief minister has shelved the plan for an Special Economic Zone in the region, the protests are continuing in Nnadigram. The agitations have put Brand

Buddha in a unique position where he is advocating industrialisation for the growth of the state.

Mamata Benerjee

The farmers' protests in Nandigram provided a new platform to Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Benerjee to surmise her place in the state's politics. Mamata has managed to form a solid opposition to Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. She is using the agitation plank to corner the CM and regain her mass base.

Bhumi Ucched Partirodh Committee

The Bhumi Ucched Partirodh Committee (BUPC) is an organization formed to counter the state government's move to acquire farmlands for a Special Economic Zone. Though the government has aborted the SEZ plan, the Trinamool Congress led BUPC is continuing its protest, pitching itself against the CPIM.

Timeline - Nandigram Violence

- March 31, 2006** – West Bengal government signs deal with the Salem Group of Indonesia for infrastructure development in the state. The development of an SEZ in Nandigram was part of the deal.
- January 3, 2007** – Violence began when police opened fire at angry villagers protesting acquisition of farm lands in Nandigram.
- January 4, 2007** – CPIM politburo demands amendments to laws on special economic zones (SEZ) after the violence in Nandigram.
- January 6, 2007** - The Bhumi Ucched Partirodh Committee was set up to resist the governments move to acquire farm lands in Nandigram.
- January 9, 2007** – After continued violence, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya orders to 'tear apart' the government order for an SEZ in Nandigram.
- February 11, 2007** - West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya distributes landownership papers to landless farmers in Nandigram.
- March 12, 2007** – Trinamool Congress leader demands President's Rule in the state after violence in Nandigram.
- March 14, 2007** – Fourteen people were killed after police clashed with villagers protesting land acquisition.
- March 15, 2007** – The Calcutta High Court orders a CBI probe into the killing of 14 villagers in Nandigram.
- April 29, 2007** – Violence returns to Nandigram when anti-land acquisition group and the CPIM men clashed killing one person.
- May 8, 2007** – Trinamool leader Mamata Banerjee softens her stand and agrees to participate in peace talks.
- May 24, 2007** – An all-party meet on Nandigram fails as Mamata Benerjee

walks out of talks.

- July 30, 2007** - The Trinamool Congress backed Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee calls a 12-hour bandh in the state.
- October 9, 2007** – CPIM calls a bandh after one party member was killed in Nandigram.
- November 6, 2007** – Fresh violence claimed two more lives when members of the CPIM and Trinamool Congress clashed.
- November 7, 2007** – Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expresses concern over the continued violence in Nandigram. March 31, 2006 – West Bengal government signs deal with the Salem Group of Indonesia for infrastructure development in the state. The development of an SEZ in Nandigram was part of the deal.
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Our view

Advani seeks discussion on Nandigram in Parliament

Terming the violence in Nandigram as shocking, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Shri L K Advani, has sought a discussion on the issue in the coming winter session of Parliament.

“We believe a discussion on the nuke deal is important, but no less important is a discussion on Nandigram and the plight of the farmers there,” Shri Advani told reporters at Kolkata before leaving for Nandigram. He said what had happened in Nandigram was shocking beyond words.

Advani, who led a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) delegation, said that the CPI(M) might be obsessed with international issue and the nuke deal, but as far the nation was concerned “we saw how the CPI(M) government, led by Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, has nuked the farmers in Nandigram and nuked the government of India”. The entire country, he said, was very much concerned with what was going on in Nandigram.

The senior BJP leader also expressed surprise that no Central minister or the state chief minister had visited the trouble-torn region. ■



NDA on a mission to seek justice for Nandigram

A delegation of the National Democratic Alliance visited Nandigram and adjoining Press Statement by Shri LK Advani, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha)

Kolkata, 13 November 2007 areas in West Bengal on November 13.

The delegation consisted of:

Shri LK Advani, Leader of the Opposition

Smt Sushma Swaraj, Deputy leader of the Opposition, Rajya Sabha

Shri Sharad Yadav, President JD(U) and MP (Rajya Sabha)

Shri Braj Kishore Tripathy, Leader of the Biju Janata Dal (Lok Sabha)

Shri Sukhbir Singh Badal, Leader Akali Dal, Lok Sabha

Shri Surinder Singh Ahluwalia, Chief Whip of BJP (Rajya Sabha)

Shri Anant Gude, MP Lok Sabha of Shiv Sena

Shri Sharad Joshi, MP Rajya Sabha, Swatantra Bharat Paksha

Shri Chandan Mitra, MP Rajya Sabha.

Shri Mukul Roy, Trinamool Congress MP (Rajya Sabha) joined the delegation from Kolkata airport.

Ours was not a fact-finding mission, because many gruesome facts of the CPI (M)'s reign of terror in that area are already known. Ours was a justice-seeking mission to press for justice for the victimised people of Nandigram and for those committed to peace and democracy in the State. We had earlier visited Nandigram following the massacre of innocents on March 14 this year. Shockingly not a single perpetrator of the violence 8 months ago has been punished so far. The situation has only worsened since



then as we found today. A pall of terror hangs heavy on desolate villages. Many have been forced to flee their homes; many homes have been razed or gutted completely by armed hooligans sporting the CPM tag.

The CPM has declared war not only on the people of Nandigram, but also on the Indian state. Under the Dhritarashtra-like impotence of the Sonia-Manmohan dispensation, the CPM has declared Nandigram a no-go area and established a Red Republic accountable to none.

Since the massacre of March 14 this year, CPM cadre have systematically targeted all those opposed to their Stalinist autocracy, killing scores of innocent persons, driving them away from their ancestral homesteads.

They have now let loose a reign of terror with their private army comprising history-sheeters such as the mass murderers of a similar carnage in 2001 at Chhota Angaria, other hired killers and armed goons enjoying protection of the police and the State Government shooting their way into villages, raping women and behaving like an occupation force. We heard horrific reports of mothers being hacked to death before their children for the temerity to participate in a peace march.

Shockingly, the Congress-led Government at the Centre, which pathetically clings to power on the CPM's life-support system, is helpless to even instruct the CRPF to enter CPM-held territory and restore rule of law. Even in insurgency-affected regions like the Kashmir Valley or the North-East, the CRPF has not been chased away by a private army. But this has happened in Nandigram.

Not only the CRPF, but also humanitarian agencies like the Red Cross that are not stopped even in wartime, have been prevented from attending to people injured and left to die on the roadside by brutal CPM goons.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattachajee's pretences of being a reformer and modernist have been thoroughly exposed by his support for brutal cadre action in Nandigram and the assault on intellectuals in Kolkata peacefully protesting against his party's atrocities.

Even the media was barred from going anywhere close to Nandigram; many of the entered the area for the first time in 12 days while accompanying us.. Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee's car was gheraoed by CPM cadre. She was heckled, threatened and prevented from reaching areas where her supporters were being mercilessly killed or hounded.



CPM State leader Shyamal Chakrabarty has jubilantly proclaimed that peace has returned, "terror" is conquered and the homeless (that is CPM cadre) are returning to reclaim their land. Indeed, he is celebrating the peace of a burning ghat. And why not? Since the party chief Prakash Karat has brushed aside criticism of the State Government's decision to give a free hand to the party's goons, triumphalism marks the response down the line.

Instead of responding with dignity to Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi's expression of anguish and pent-up pain, the CPM reacted with frenzy, accusing him of "overstepping" his limits. It is a matter of time before they demand of their captive Government in Delhi that he should be recalled.

The people of West Bengal, including sections of the intelligentsia that the CPM took for granted as their bonded brains trust, have come out on the streets to protest against this brazen stifling of democratic rights. That scores of cultural icons were bundled into police vans and held in the lock-up at Lalbazar for hours last Sunday shows the real face beneath the veneer of bhadralok genteelness that CPM projected all these de-

cedes.

The NDA commits itself to stand by the traumatised residents of Nandigram and the people of West Bengal in their darkest hour of suffering. The NDA will not rest till the CPM's conspiracy against democracy, freedom of speech and belief, and the Indian state is defeated. We are certain that the forces of evil represented by the CPM shall be driven out of West Bengal the same way as Communist dictatorships crumbled in the erstwhile Soviet Union and its East European colonies in the 1990s.

The NDA stands by all democratic organisations in West Bengal, which are fighting a brave battle to restore the rule of law and constitutional rights to the terrorised people of the State. The NDA pledges to raise this issue forcefully in the forthcoming session of Parliament and demand an explanation from the Union Government for its pathetic inaction. ■

Rajnath Singh demands dismissal of WB govt

Calling it a total "constitutional breakdown" in West Bengal, BJP president Shri Rajnath Singh has sought immediate dismissal of the CPI(M) Government against the backdrop of the violence that has rocked Nandigram. The BJP has accused CPI(M) workers of perpetuating violence in the already trouble-torn area.

Talking to reporters in Bangalore, Shri Rajnath said the involvement of armed CPI(M) cadre in land acquisition for industrial purposes would not send good signal across the country.

"The party cadre has rendered homeless several thousands of men, women and children, who are living under sky without proper rehabilitation and facilities. This is a serious matter and the Centre should take note of it," Shri Rajnath added.

Shri Rajnath Singh accused the Congress-led UPA Government at the Centre of lamenting about the plights of people in Nandigram without actually doing anything to sort out their problems. "If they (UPA) are so worried about the situation in West Bengal what is stopping them from taking action in this regard. Safety of the local residents should be the top priority," he said. ■

Nandigram exposes Left's ugly face : Ravi Shankar Prasad

BJP National Spokesperson Shri Ravi Shanker Prasad today said that the unending saga of cold blooded murder and mayhem being perpetrated in Nandigram once and for all conclusively exposes the true and ugly face of the left front government and its party cadres. Shri Prasad said that it has become a matter of serious concern for the entire nation



to witness the blatant and partisan manner in which the Left Front Government in West Bengal was refraining from conducting its responsibilities towards the citizens of the state and in reality actually encouraging its party cadre to continue with their atrocities against innocent farmers by forcibly intimidating them through violence.

The BJP Spokesperson went on to add that the BJP had on numerous occasions sought to expose the role of the CPM party and its cadre in Nandigram. Shri Prasad recalled the recent statement by BJP National President Shri Rajnath Singh who on 3rd November 2007 said that "On the one hand, the communists publicly express their concerns for China, but on the other hand, maintain a deafening silence on critical national issues such as the continuing massacres and saga of violence being propagated by the Naxalites and Maoists across an increasing red corridor within the country, or the ruthless crushing of peasants who are fighting to protect their rights and honor in Nandigram."

Shri Prasad said that the events in Nandigram only confirmed the widely held view of the general public across the nation that the democratic and administrative process in West Bengal had been overwhelmingly subverted by the lower level functionaries of the left parties to the extent that they had now become the final authority in deciding even the administrative course of action at the ground level. He said it was indeed unfortunate that the views of the Home Secretary of the State were being challenged by lower level party functionaries of the CPM and other parties. The perpetration of violence by partisan party cadres and the total breakdown of administrative and efficacy marks the nadir of the administrative democratic functioning and freedom.

The BJP Spokesperson highlighted the fact that now news reports were emanating that the Maoists had entered the fray and were trying to organize the villagers in Nandigram under "free people's zones". This

new development exemplifies a stark irony where the left parties on the one hand have always been sympathetic towards China and the Maoist ideology of the various violent groups within the country and on the other hand now need to evolve a strategy to protect the people of the state from being influenced by them.

Shri Prasad criticized Shri Prakash Karat's latest comments on the US and calling Pakistan a "supplicant" state at a function where he said that "look at what's happening to General Pervez Musharraf...if you compromise with national sovereignty, this will be the result." Shri Prasad said that neither citizens of the country nor any political party require such extreme insights about foreign policy and also how our national sovereignty needs to be protected.

The BJP Spokesperson further added that it was indeed ironical that Shri Karat had chosen to make these remarks while speaking at a function to mark the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution, while failing to emphasize that even the concept of Soviet Union and economy could not withstand the tests of time and had been completely rejected by the very people who propagated it's applicability for much of the 20th century. ■

Nandigram situation explosive : Rajnath Singh

BJP National President Shri Rajnath Singh has announced that a high level party delegation comprising Shri S S Ahluwalia, Smt Karuna Shukla, Shri Balbir Punj and Shri Ashok Pradhan would be visiting Nandigram over the next couple of days to make an on-the-spot assessment about the ground situation there.



Expressing concern over the explosive situation in Nandigram, Shri Rajnath Singh said that both the West Bengal Government and the Central Government had miserably failed in addressing the grievances of common people who had been left at the mercy of violent Marxist sympathizers. "My gravest concern is over the warlike situation which has cropped up in Nandigram. Hundreds of people have been driven out of their homes in the face of the unabated violence being unleashed by the CPI (M) cadres", he said.

Lambasting the State Government in West Bengal, the BJP President

said that the Marxian way of establishing a SEZ through unprecedented violence is unacceptable for any civilized society. “The violence in Nandigram has exposed the real face of the Left parties whose concern for the Aam Aadmi has given way to their gross insensitivity towards humanity. It has reaffirmed that the State of West Bengal is sitting on a virtual tinderbox. The people in West Bengal are already witnessing the worst kind of food riots in the history of Independent India. The overall situation in the state clearly reflects the complete breakdown of law and order and also the glaring incompetence of the Government in ensuring adequate food to the deprived and needy sections of society” he added.

Shri Rajnath Singh said that “the situation in Nandigram has completely gone out of the administration’s control. Many innocent people have already lost their lives and there is a widespread fear that this situation may turn even worse leading to unprecedented bloodshed in Nandigram”. He added that the BJP strongly expresses its solidarity with the farmers and villagers who are fighting against the injustice being meted out to them by the State Government.

The BJP National President demanded that all those men, women and children driven out of Nandigram and its surrounding areas by the armed goons must be safely restored to their homes and the current state of mayhem must immediately come to a stop. “The siege of Nandigram must be lifted at once and the centre should intervene to restore normalcy. The elements responsible for the killings must be brought to book and the injured and the dead be suitably compensated’, he added. ■

the Communist Party whether they would favour a similar action against the Maoists who are present in more than 250 districts of the country.

The deputy leader of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha hit back at the CPI(M) saying their pro-Muslim stand also stands exposed with the fact that several male members of the community have been killed or maimed and women raped by CPI(M) cadre in Nandigram.

“I met Seikh Akram and Seikh Jehangir who were shot at by CPI(M) cadre at a local hospital. The nurse there informed us that another Muslim woman who was raped had been shifted to a bigger hospital as she had sustained major injuries,” Sushma maintained saying cruelty can never be described as revolution.

The BJP leader also praised Governor Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi for speaking the truth and highlighting the plight of the people of Nandigram. She went on to describe as “unfortunate and dangerous” the Congress’ silence over Nandigram violence saying it appears both the UPA and the Left have reached to an agreement to remain silent and bail out each other from the crisis they were faced with.

Sushma said it would be wrong to link Nandigram violence with the Gujarat riots as in the latter’s case the State police swung into action from the very first day while the police were held hostage and CRPF stationed in barracks in the Communist-ruled State. ■

‘CPM control in wrong hands’

Cong silence over Nandigram violence dangerous, says BJP

The BJP has charged the CPI(M) with adopting different approach towards Maoists of India and Nepal. A day after it recommended invoking Article 355 or, if necessary, Article 356 in West Bengal,

Senior BJP leader Smt.Sushma Swaraj told reporters it was interesting to note that the West Bengal Chief Minister and the Home Secretary had opposite views about the presence of Maoists in the violence-torn Nandigram.

“Even if Maoists are present in the area, is this the way to deal with them?” Smt. Swaraj asked the CPI(M) claiming the party’s control has gone into the hands of “immature people”. She also sought to know from

**The loud echo
in Parliment**

NANDIGRAM – A TURNING POINT IN COMMUNIST HISTORY: ADVANI

On November 21 this year, taking part in the debate on Nandigram in the Lok Sabha, Leader of the Oppositio, Shri Lal Krishna Advani made very significant points. We publish important portions of his elegant speech.

Today morning, when I opened the newspaper and saw what the Prime Minister has said about Nandigram I felt that first of all I would like to thank him, to congratulate him that speaking on board the aircraft while going abroad, he had drawn the attention of the whole country and the Parliament towards the importance of this matter. In a way, his statement emphasises the fact that Parliament should have had a discussion on this matter. This is natural and necessary.

He has said that - "I sincerely hope that the State Government will be able to take necessary steps to restore confidence in the people through the effective deployment of security forces. I appreciate the spontaneous outpouring of grief and anguish over the issue as expressed by artists and intellectuals in Kolkata. I hope the State Government will take note of this." The Chief Minister has also given a response; the party may have given some other response. It will be clarified here whether the ruling party there is satisfied with the response of the Chief Minister or whether it is satisfied with what its spokesperson has said. But I will try to completely follow the guidelines laid by you (Speaker) with regard to this discussion.

I would like that this discussion should not used to used merely to trade charges against each other but to see what can be done to ensure that this kind of situation does not arise again any time, anywhere. It is a matter of great concern. On visiting Nandigram, I think, everybody should instinctively feel like this. It is not an ordinary happening. What has happened there did not take place just in October or November. This thing has been going on there for months. Whatever has happened there

began at the start of the year and I myself had gone there in the month of March and this time again I went last week. Both times my colleagues from the various parties of the whole NDA accompanied me. But this time, there was a great difference in that that when I had gone there in the month of March, then lots of people used to come and meet us, talk to us and openly tell us about what had happened, how it had happened, what tortures they were subjected to. This time there was such an atmosphere of terror that if anybody came to meet us, members of his own family stopped him from doing so. From the Upper House, Sushmaji had gone with me and when women came to meet her and told her about the rapes committed, and then one woman's son took her away asking why she was doing this?

Don't tell your name; don't let any TV or press personnel photograph you. This atmosphere of terror I witnessed this time made me realize that this time the matter had become very serious. I would describe in brief how this happened. Like I said, I don't want that this discussion should become an occasion to blame one another. I would also say the same to my colleagues too. Many Left Front party men come and ask me that please don't say Left. You name the CPM, don't say Left. Members of different parties of the Left alliance are telling me so.

I will come to the point while I welcome the Prime Minister's statement, I would also like to mention that from the first day, that is the day before yesterday, I had my first talk with the leader of the house on Monday when we had all gathered at the Central Hall to offer flowers to Smt. Indira Gandhi on the occasion of her birth anniversary. I told him that NDA has decided that we will move an adjournment motion in the Parliament on Nandigram which we did and the Speaker himself had said that an adjournment motion can be moved in respect of the failure of the Central Government, it cannot be in respect of the failure of a State Government. I had said that it is right and drafted it accordingly and given it to the Speaker. I don't know whether it will be admitted or not. How many members will support it or not in the Parliament. But I also told my colleague Malhotraji to tell the Speaker that we don't insist on any division. We are not insisting on division on adjournment motion. Our only insistence is that Nandigram should be discussed in the Parliament. The discussion can take any form.

I am satisfied at the fact that the stalemate which had arisen yesterday and the day before has now ended and I am starting discussion on this topic.

Mr. Speaker, obviously I will day that when it was stipulated that at no cost will Nandigram be mentioned during this debate, then I had said that if Nandigram won't be mentioned at any cost then there is no way

that this stalemate can end. I am glad that Nandigram has been mentioned in whatever way it might have found mention. I would have liked it to be different. We are not discussing only SEZs. What has happened in Nandigram goes far beyond the issue or different view points on the question of SEZ. We have had discussions on SEZ but it had to be discussed in Parliament therefore some element was sought to be found whether by bringing CRPF, whether by mentioning SEZ but the endeavour was to discuss without mentioning Nandigram, be it the naxal problem facing the country or the farmers' problem in the country, then I said that if this is how it is to be done, it is no way to end the stalemate. I am therefore happy, and I want to express my gratitude to all who have contributed in the formulation of this draft.

If no discussions were held in this Parliament on Nandigram, then not only in Nandigram, not only in West Bengal but in many parts of the country many people would have felt that something as big as the Nandigram incident can happen and there is no discussion on it in Parliament. They do not understand the rules. But the fact is that if this discussion had not taken place, it would have lowered Parliament in the esteem of the people of the country. Therefore for the prestige of the Parliament it is necessary that if this type of incidents happens anywhere, there must be discussions on them and the discussion must be thorough. Nobody should say that Nandigram word would not be included in it, and here it is being said that if this word is included, we would not accept the motion.

I would like to say this much that this Parliament would like to arrive at the truth and we refer to truth as "Shiv." And to reach "Shiv" once has to pass "Nandi."

Whether it has been the Ayodhya incident, the Godhra incident, the Gujarat riots, all-party delegations have been sent by the Parliament. There was no need to go anywhere during the 1984 riots but all party delegations have gone to these three places. Therefore my suggestion would be, which I will repeat at the end, that this time an all-party delegation should go to probe the whole truth about Nandigram.

When we went there we saw that there was a higher secondary school there which had been converted into a refugee camp. The villages were totally desolate. These were deserted. Some elderly people were living there. After meeting them, whatever they knew they told us. They said that people have run away out of fear and many of our people are in the refugee camp in the Nandigram town. We went to the refugee camp there. There when people first saw that members of the Parliament have come, then many women came rushing. There must have been eight to ten women, they clutched our feet and started crying that we only want to

know if our husbands are alive or not. We just want to know whether our husbands are alive or not. It was such a spectacle that I felt literally miserable.

I told them that I have come. They immediately made an impromptu platform and asked me to speak. Somebody brought a microphone. I spoke over it. It became the public meeting. But it was there that I promised them that with these happenings, I can tell them that I have come on behalf, as a Member of Parliament along with my other colleagues. We are certainly going to raise this matter in Parliament and talk about it; and through Parliament, tell the State Government that it is their duty to ensure that these queries whether their husband is alive or not, is he there or not, these should be properly tackled and answered. It happens that in the meanwhile, other things have happened. I will admit it today that ordinarily any State matters are not discussed in the Parliament. If it is an ordinary law and order State problem then discussions on it are not justified. But I would like to mention why it is justified in this case, why even the Prime Minister had to say that there should be a discussion in the Parliament. It has been mentioned, I have not quoted. But I was astounded when I first saw the Governor's statement.

According to Shri Ashok Mitra, when he consented to become the Governor, he wanted that the leadership of the CPI(M) should be prepared to have him. He has now become the enemy. This is the word that has been used.

Sir, there are three statements from various dignitaries. One is, of course, the Governor's statement. I am not quoting him. He said that the happenings in Nandigram are totally unlawful and unacceptable. Then, the second one is the judgment of the High Court of Kolkata, which goes on to say that the firing took place on 14th March – this judgment has come last week – is unconstitutional and unjustified. What it has said in the body of the judgment, I do not want to quote. The third statement is this. When the CRPF has been invited to help in Nandigram, it was said that our answerability would be over, they would handle Nandigram. According to the CPI(M) there, it was the Maoists who are indulging in violence, though the Home Secretary of West Bengal came out with a statement that there is no Maoist, there is no Maoist literally there.

Sir, the DIG of the CRPF says that he has been given one week now. Sir, he has publicly said: "I have been called here; I have been invited here; I have been asked to deal with the situation in the Nandigram, whereas I am getting no cooperation from the State Government, from the State Police Authorities".

Sir, if I were to quote, he said: "I asked the SP two days ago to provide me a list of wanted criminals, but I did not get it. I do not know why he is

doing it. I have worked as an SP, and I have never seen such behaviour.” These are the words of the CRPF officer.

High Court calls it unconstitutional, Governor calls it totally unlawful, CRPF, whom the State Government requested the central Home ministry to send, the head of that CRPF says that he is getting no cooperation there. Is it not a serious situation on which the Parliament should think?

Sir, I visited Nandigram, and many of the Press people, Media people accompanying me said that ‘this is the first time that we have been allowed to go to Nandigram. Otherwise, it was out of bounds for us.’ I was surprised to hear that ‘this is because Advani has friendship with the Chief Minister.’ This kind of a comment coming from the ruling party surprised me. I did not expect this because I have had and I have tried, as the Home Minister, to maintain good relations with all the Chief Ministers in the country including many in the Congress party. That does not matter anything. I have good relations with them. Even now, I have good relations with him also. And, I was happy to find that his response to the Prime Minister’s comment on Nandigram was different from the party’s response. He said: “I appreciate what the Prime Minister has said.”

So, these are matters about which I have only this to say that the CPI(M) must look back at the entire Nandigram episode. How it happened? When you try to convert the party into a substitute for Government, then things go out of hand. I remember, when I first visited Nandigram, the same thing was again and again mentioned that it is his people who wore police uniforms. I do not know.

An MP’s name was mentioned. It was said – ‘It is they who fired on us while we were doing Puja. The Muslim ladies there were reciting Quran’. At that time, firing took place on them and they said that they were not policemen really, they were party men, party cadres in police uniform.

Sir, the High Court says in its operative part: “The action of the police department to open fire at Nandigram on 14th March, 2007 was wholly unconstitutional and cannot be justified under any provision of the law”.

Now, a statement of this kind, the statement given by the Governor of West Bengal and lastly the statement made by the DIG, CRPF are there. I said to the Governor when I met him along with my colleagues: “Is this not sufficient reason why you should send a formal report to the Central Government as to what has happened in Nandigram? You have your inputs on the basis of which you have yourself said.” In fact, this is not the first time that he said it. He said it for the first time in March itself, that “I have a feeling of cold horror”. These are the words that he used on visiting Nandigram, a feeling of ‘cold horror’.

He said: “This time, the Diwali all over the State has been dampened because of Nandigram incidents”. I said : “You owe it to the Central Government and to the country to send a detailed report to the Central Government as to what are your inputs which have made you to make this

public statement and on the basis of that you can recommend that in this situation, the Constitution empowers the Central Government to issue directions to the State Government under Article 355 and if those directions are not followed to correct the situation in Nandigram, then the Central Government is fully justified in invoking Article 356”. ... (Interruptions)

Sir, this was something that I said to the Governor which I am repeating here in Parliament. The hon. Minister of Home Affairs is here. I would like to urge him to consider this that the situation should be improved. What is happening there? The Governor said ‘I am in touch with the Central Government.’

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Minister of this State says, “We have paid them back in their own coin.” You look at the history, when I entered Parliament for the first time, the Marxists used to tell me that today we rule over Europe and a time will come when in the same way as the sun never set in the British Empire, the Communist empire too would be such that sun will never set there. And look what has transpired. Today it has vanished from the whole world.

The 20th Congress of CPSU, in which Khrushchev had delivered his lecture Live Bursting Hard, just remember how your empire ended in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Speaker I was a member of this Parliament and Mr. Dhillon was our Speaker in the Parliamentary Delegation, I had gone to Czechoslovakia under his leadership in 1972 and the kind of aggression Moscow committed in Czechoslovakia and the Dabchick episode ended everything there. These are the turning points in our history and it seems to me that the types of turning points caused by these things, be it the Dabchick episode, Khrushchev’s lecture or the Tiananmen Square in China, Nandigram is going to be the turning point in the history of the Communist Party of India. This will be a turning point in the history of the Communist Party of India. Only three – four islands remain now.

I will reiterate that the Parliament should get official information regarding Nandigram. Government should also get official information. To this end first an all-party delegation should be sent to Nandigram from here and then I will tell them that meanwhile the Government should decide what it can do in this matter. Specially the directions given by the High Court – to pay compensation for those who have been killed, to provide justice to the women who have been raped, all these directives should be followed and alongwith it the Governor should be summoned here and on the basis of the first hand knowledge obtained from him, the Central Government should take necessary action.

I think that on this basis you should first invoke Article 355 and if they do not follow it, then Article 356 should be invoked. ■

Censure CPM's Govt in West Bengal: Sushma

In the Rajya Sabha, on November 22, 2007 Deputy Leader of BJP Parliamentary Party, Shrimati Sushma Swaraj initiated the SHORT DURATION DISCUSSION on the proposal to set up SEZ in Nandigram, West Bengal and consequent large scale violence. A synopsis of her speech:

Nandigram was burnt in the flames of violence when this winter session of Parliament started. Therefore, we demanded in the very beginning for discussion on Nandigram. But our friends from CPI (M) objected to it on the pretext that it is a simple subject of law and order related to the State. I want to ask that an incident, on which the whole the country is agitated, the intelligentsia of West Bengal is forced to come on roads, the

Governor considers that the incident is unlawful and non-acceptable, the Kolkata High Court declares the incident un-constitutional and unjustified is that a simple issue of law and order situation of the State? I am thankful to you (Hon'ble Chairman), that you understood the gravity of the subject and allowed us to have a discussion on it.

Today we are discussing the issue of SEZs being set up in the country. Its domain is very wide. But, today the issue of SEZs with reference to Nandigram is only limited to the point that whether agricultural land can be acquired for setting up of industries? And if the farmers oppose it, and agitate against it, is it fair to make use of violence to drive away them and to kill them? Nandigram has become the victim of violence thrice in a period of one year. I have visited Nandigram representing my party on all the three occasions. Therefore, what I shall say will be a statement of an eye-witness.

At first violence broke out in Nandigram in the month of January and I visited Nandigram alongwith a delegation of three members of my party. At that time the Centre of Violence was Sonachuda village. The whole village, the women, children and old people were on the road. The movement of Nandigram crossed the boundaries of caste, creed, sex and age. At that time they were not frightened. They had only one desire to save their land. They told us that they have constituted " Bhoomi Uchchedh Pratirodh Samiti" and all the villages have become its member to save their land. They were saying only one thing that they will give up their lives, blood and even chastity but they will not give up their land at

all. In that incident a boy of 13-14 year was also killed alongwith other two people. At that time the Chief Minister of Bengal gave us an assurance that the notification of land-acquisition in Nandigram will be withdrawn. But violence broke out again within two month on 14th of March, in which the Government confirmed the killing of 14 people. This time, a delegation of NDA visited Nandigram and I was a member of that delegation also. The centre of incident was again Sonachuda.

About 1000-1500 people came to meet us this time. A youth there told us that a bullet was fired on his brother in his presence but he could not receive his body from the police, and he even does not know, whether his brother is alive or dead. These people said that the police came but no ambulance was there alongwith the police. The people told us that on that day they were celebrating the birthday of Gaurang Mahaprabhu and were chanting devotional songs. All of a sudden police arrived and started firing on the people.

Comrade Sitaram Yechury has sent an open letter to all the MPs which is a bundle of lies. In this letter he stated that police was attacked. The police had gone there to repair the road. If this is the truth, I want to know from him that if the police was attacked, whether even a single officer was killed or injured. A fact finding committee, including two retired judges have asked the same question in their report "Nandigram and Singur – by Justice on Trial" whether the police ever goes to repair the roads?

After that we visited Tomluk hospital and hospital at Nandigram. Some of the women present there told us that they were gang raped by the police. The Medical Superintendent also certified the fact. People told us that hundred of people were killed and their bodies were thrown in the rivers.

After seven months, violence broke out in Nandigram again in a planned way. This time, the violence broke all the previous records.

On 13th November, 2007 I again visited Nandigram alongwith a delegation of N.D.A. This time, the centre of violence was Adhikaripada and Satangabadi. This time, the whole village was under the cover of fear and nobody was ready to come out of his house and talk to us. When I persuaded an old woman to speak, her daughter-in-law stopped her from speaking and said that if she spoke then, they would kill her. Women in refugee camps were praying to us to find out their husbands.

On this incident our CPM colleagues say that these are violent Maoist people. They have come here and captured the area. Our people went there to re-capture.

During this discussion I want to put some questions to the CPM's orator and the Hon'ble Home Minister. My first question is: Are the Maoists

there in the real sense? But the Home Secretary of West Bengal says that not a single Maoist is there. I have no information about a single Maoist present there.

My second question is: How CPM and Congress think about the Maoists? They say it is a socio-economic problem. So far as our Party is concerned, we are against the Maoist ideology. We are also against the methodology of Maoists working. But it is a fact that today more than 150 districts of the country are affected by the Maoist violence. DIG of CRPF is feeling helpless there and you say that every thing is OK there. What happened in Kolkata yesterday? You say that the situation has come under control of the administration. Situation cannot come under control there. As per the statement of the Hon'ble Home Minister in the Lok Sabha, that "No body will be uprooted, but, the report says that uprooted people, who are in refugee camp, one CPM Head Master is uprooting them. Your directions are being violated. I would like to say that it is your duty to save the people. So I demand that Article 355 will not suffice. So now impose 356, impose President Rule and do justice to the sufferers and give them compensation. The culprit may be panalised without being considerate.

I would conclude by requesting that Government should bring a censure motion condemning the Audiogram incident and it should be passed unanimously. ■

It exposes CPM duplicity

SHRI KHARABELASWAIN (BALASORE)

In Lok Sabha

The poor people, who were attacked in Nandigram, were asserting their fundamental rights to hand on to their property and to prevent their farms from being seized. When the Chief Minister said that there is no question of setting up of an SEZ in Nandigram, why was there a clamour in forming a Bhumi Ucched Partirodh Committee? Why was it not disbanded? That was the question.

I would just put two simple questions to you. Is it not a fact that in the month of last January, the Haldia Port Authorities had issued a notification for the acquisition of land? Is it not true? Is it not true that it was withdrawn later on? Is it not true that when the Chief Minister was asked the same question by the media and Press, he said, tear it up; throw it away.

Now, Shri Prabhunath Singh has also said the same thing. He also mentioned the letter written by one of the Principal Secretaries of the West Bengal Government to the Government of India. Is it not true? Then, why do you say that there was absolutely no intention of setting up of a SEZ in Nandigram? It is totally untrue now to say this because that suits you; it suits the CPI(M).

Sir, Shri Gurudas Dasgupta has left the House after speaking. He quoted .Shri Advaniji saying that it is not the Left Front but it is only the CPI (M), who is at fault. He has challenged him to name as to who said that. But he did not. He is a very decent person and he is after all the Leader of the Opposition. He cannot do so. I am doing so. I am naming him. Shri Abani Roy, the General Secretary of RSP, who was with me during the interview in the Lok Sabha Television, when I accused that it is the Left who is attacking the poor people. He said: "Do not say that, say only the CPI (M). We are against it." Go and check the video cassette and you would see as to what he had said and as to whether it is correct or not. I am not naming it. Do not say that it is the Left, which is doing it. Is the Forward Bloc doing that? Is the RSP doing this? Is it not a fact that Shri Kirti Goswani, who is the Minister belonging to the RSP in the West Bengal Government, also declared that he would resign from the Ministry? Is it not a fact? Maybe some individuals like Shri Gurudas Dasgupta are

with the CPI (M). But except him or one or two persons like him, nobody is with the CPI(M). It is only the CPI (M) who has attacked the people and it is not the Left Front.

I am coming to the next point, Previously, it was called a Lal Durg. They did not allow anybody to enter into Nandigram. At that time, it was only the CPI (M) and Left and nobody else. There was absolutely nobody there. They did not allow anybody - neither the Trinamul Congress nor anybody. They did not allow anybody to enter inside. But when some of the people from the same Left Front found that their land is now going to be acquired by the Government forcibly, then, they objected to it. They became CPI(M) rebels. For the first time, I also went with the delegation; Shri Advaniji did not go at that time. At that time, Shrimati Sushmaji went there and led a delegation in the first week of last January. I was the member of that delegation. Let me tell you that there is not a single, not even one decimal of land which is not cultivable. Sir, 10,000 acres of land is only cultivable and arable. I could not even believe that this arable land is going to be acquired forcibly by the Government of West Bengal. They say that they are the messiah of the poor people, of the proletariat.

They are just acquiring the land forcibly. Who are they being supported by? It is the Confederation of Indian Industry, the CII. It is supporting the West Bengal's Communist Party Government and saying that the land should be forcibly occupied; otherwise, no industry could be set up throughout!

The Leader of the CPI (M) Party, Shri Acharia himself brought forward a Calling Attention Motion against the Kalinga Nagar firing in Orissa. At that time, he asked why did the Orissa Government fire and kill those people. He further said that action should be taken against the Government. But now, he says that there is nothing wrong with the West Bengal Government. You can ask him whether he himself brought forward the Calling Attention Motion or not. When something happens in Orissa, it is wrong, but when the same thing happens in West Bengal, it is absolutely right! That is the dual policy that the CPI (M) persons always adopt and they are adopting it now also.

Why did this happen? It happened because those people who are majority in number and who belonged to the CPI (M) became rebel and they had the lands. It is the tactics of finishing of the opposition - they burn the houses, rape them, throw them out of the place. They adopt this technique for the last 30 years and when they became rebels, they adopted the same tactics against their own party people and they threw them out. I agree that they threw them out already; it is true that they were thrown out 11 months before.

But my basic point is this. You want that you should bring them in.

But how? Is it not the responsibility of the State to bring them in? Is it the responsibility of the 'cadre' to do it? They said that the police could not enter inside Nandigram. What does it mean? It means that the CPI (M) Government has failed; the State has failed; the State is incapable of protecting the people of this country, the people of West Bengal. That is what they themselves said.

I am telling that the CPI (M) is so capacious. I can show it from the 'India Today', in what way they entered. You can see it - the red brigade with red scarf with mouths closed. It is all red and they went inside The Chief Minister of West Bengal is saying in a Press Conference that he is a Communist; he cannot go beyond his Party; they paid back in the same coin! And he talks of 'us' to refer to their own Party people and 'they' to refer to the people belonging to other Parties. He says 'us' and 'they'. The Chief Minister of West Bengal is saying like this. This is the language the Chief Minister is using. So, what happened? They had a military-type of attack; a multi-pronged attack was just made from three sides - from every side 200 people or marauders came; and they over-ran it. Why did they over-run it? Some people, just a night before, went to the Police Station and told the Police that they would attack, that they should not come, and that they should not intervene. So, the Police sat silently and they did not come at all. From four districts, they recruited the people; people came with firearms and with everything. They outnumbered Bhoomi Uchhed Pratirodh Samiti people by ten to one. They are so numerous that they totally outnumbered. That is the reason for which there was no encounter. They virtually did it. It is the people's army. So, I will make an appeal to you. Whenever India is going to fight another war with any other country, send the CPI (M) cadre! They are so-capable.

When there is a fear of attack from China, we are always saying that they are coming into the Indian side. It is the CPM cadre who should be sent to China border to fight with the Chinese Army. This Red Cadre should be sent to Arunachal. So, the Red Cadre should fight with the Red Army of China. They are so capable of doing this They should also be sent while fighting with Naxalites. Why are we just debating this thing? The basic thing is most of the people in this country do not know the character of CPM. What is its character?

CPI(M) is a Party which emanated from CPI who supported Joseph Stalin who massacred 20 million people in Russia. That is the Party to whom they supported. When CPI was divided into CPI and CPM in 1963, the CPM was created because they supported China which attacked India. So, for supporting China to attack India they divided their own Party and came to power. All those people who are in West Bengal, Delhi and Mumbai, think that probably the leaders of the CPM, who are graduates

and post graduates from Jawaharlal Nehru University, are probably very liberal and are democrats. Their heart probably is at the right place. They are probably thinking like that.

I am putting a very basic question. Let the country, the CP(M) or the House know the distinction between the cadre and the police. Is there any distinction? Is there any distinction between the enemy of the Party and the enemy of the nation? Or, are they same? Is there any distinction between the rule of law and the rule of politburo? The politburo is more powerful than the State and it is the politburo, when Shri Jyoti Basu was offered the Prime Ministership, which refused saying that he cannot become the Prime Minister of the country.

Congress people know it better than me that about two months back the General Secretary of the politburo was almost on the verge of pulling down the rug from under the feet of the UPA Government. The UPA Government was just going to fall not because of the CPI (M) Chief Minister objecting to it but because of the General Secretary of the politburo who is more powerful.

So my point is that the people of this country should understand what the CPM Party is. It is totally a totalitarian Party. It is totally a Stalinist and authoritarian Party. They do not have any respect for any democratic principles or any democratic centre anywhere in the world. They have just been finished totally all over the world.. Shri Advaniji said, they are left only somewhere in a very small island State, Cuba and they are in West Bengal. The Chinese communist themselves say that they are no more communists and that they are the capitalists. They also say that they are the followers of America.

Lastly, I would talk about the role of the Congress Party. What is the Congress Party doing? Except only one Minister, Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, nobody spoke a word. The Congress Party in West Bengal is behaving like 'B' team of CPI (M) and because of them only, the CPI(M) Party is now in power. There are about 30 to 40 aspirants of Chief Minister in this Congress Party. They are also having a very good friend in Kumari Mamta Banerjee and because of them, they are winning. If there is any Opposition Party in West Bengal, it is the Bharatiya Janta Party. There is no other Opposition Party in West Bengal. We are the only Opposition Party and we will show them in future whether we would come to power or not

Lastly, I would say that their citadel has already started crumbling. The ex-Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Justice Chittodas Mukherjee; ex-Chief Justice of Orissa High Court, Shri Sushanto Chatterjee; and ex-Justice of Calcutta High Court, Justice Bhagwati Prasad Banerjee all have condemned the CPM Party severely. Shri Anjan Dutta whose name was

also short listed for getting the Nobel prize in Economics, is now on hunger strike for the last two days. Let them say who is Shri. Mrinal Sen; who is Shrimati Mahashweta Devi, Ms. Aparna Sen, Shri. Srishendu Mukherjee, the writer, Shri. Shyamal Mitra, the actor, Shri. Kaushik Sen, the artist, Shri. Shekhar Ghosh, Shri. Gautam Ghosh, Shri. Subhabrata Bhattacharjee, Shri. Samir Aich, and Shri. Kabir Suman? They are all intellectuals and they are all against them. Now their citadel is crumbling. I would appeal to the very good people of West Bengal to throw the CPI(M) Party into the Bay of Bengal so that the country could be saved. ■

Left failed to protect minorities

Syed Shahnawaz Hussain

In Loksabha

A lot of politics is going on the incident of Nandigram. I would not do anything that may further vitiate the atmosphere of Nandigram nor this House. There are certain rights assigned to minority under Article 30 of our Constitution which everybody should honour. I appeal to our Congress brethren that if they fail to take any action against the incumbent Government of West Bengal in regard to Nandigram incident, in spite of fact that they are running the Government with help of Communist Party, the muslims will not make any difference between the communist and Congress Party.

Our Constitution provides for the protection of weaker section, backward, dalit and minorities. Therefore, if atrocities are committed on them we will definitely oppose it. So far they have treated the minorities as vote bank, whereas we have always treated them as a respected citizen of this country. In view of that it becomes our duty as an opposition to oppose if any atrocities is meted out to them irrespective of there religion. I, therefore, request you to kindly use your position and provide succour to the minorities, dalits and backward class people of Nandigram. I also request you to ask the Central Government to take care of the situation prevailing there. ■

Media narrates the harrowing tales

BENGAL : NANDIGRAM ATTACK

Between Metaphor And Reality

CM Buddhadeb counted himself one with his artist friends. But now, even they are horrified.

For Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, the unkindest cut has come from people he considered his close friends. Filmmaker Mrinal Sen, poet Sankha Ghosh, writer Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, painter Samir Aich, they have all suddenly become his staunchest critics. For, they are all shocked with the way the soft-spoken Buddhadeb has handled the Nandigram issue.

The disenchantment among the so-called intelligentsia—writers, poets, playwrights, painters, actors and so on—started soon after trouble broke out in Nandigram in January this year. The March 14 killings only accentuated the matter. Buddhadeb's inaction and defence of the indefensible in the Rizwanur case made matters worse. The 'recapture' of Nandigram followed by the police lathicharge and arrest of a number of the culturati at a peaceful protest last week proved to the proverbial last straw for Buddhadeb's friends.

Mrinal Sen, who was part of the protest rally in Calcutta, admits he's "disillusioned and angry" with the CM and the CPI(M). Film director Goutam Ghose was outraged over the distinction made between CPI(M) cadre ("our men") and BUPC activists ("they"): "I'm aghast at this statement. It was uncivil on Buddhadeb's part". Filmmaker Sandip Ray says the situation in Bengal is "worse than the Emergency". Playwright Bibhas Chakraborty says Buddhadeb has become a "fascist" while painter Jogen Choudhury is "horrified" by the CM's stand. Danseuse Mamata Shankar called the CM a "pathetic liar".

The protest rally also included film personalities Aparna Sen, Anjan Dutt, Rituparno Ghosh and Parambrata Chatterjee, sculptor Sanatan Dinda, litterateurs Mahasweta Devi and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay. And about a lakh of others. The massive turnout has stunned even the CM, say sources. Ironically, when Aparna Sen and a few others announced a few

days back that they'd boycott the ongoing Calcutta Film Festival, Buddhadeb had said derisively: "Compile a list of such people and hang it in our house." The list of is now far too long to be compiled.

The CM, who dons the mantle of poet, writer and is often quick to remind people of his lineage (he's the nephew of revolutionary poet Sukanta Bhattacharjee), counts the leading lights of Bengal's culturati as part of his inner circle. The circle's been breached now.

"Buddhadeb now defends what his armed cadres have done in Nandigram. He can't be trusted anymore." —poet Sankha Ghosh, a close friend of the West Bengal CM

(PTI) ■

Recall with horror

By Hari Vasudevan

The Bolshevik Revolution, whose 90th anniversary coincided with Nandigram, owed its success to compromise with its core objectives, intolerance and, above all, state-sponsored terror

November 7, 2007 was the 90th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. This was the "October Revolution" of October 25 by the old Russian (Julian) calendar, when the Bolshevik Party (from March 1918, the Communist Party) came to power in the territory of the Russian empire.

In the early 21st century, this signal moment in the Russian Revolution — which transformed it into a socialist revolution and began the long history of the Soviet state — is less and less a focus of attention. But its consequences dominated much of the 20th century. Other aspects of Soviet history are cause for comment. Among standard bearers of Communism, the quest for social equality, based on a rejection of private property and glorification of Soviet industrialisation, that is, the policies of the Soviet state, continue to be important.

This is a singular change. In the course of seven decades, the October Revolution was celebrated with pomp in the former Soviet Union and its satellites, stretching from Kaliningrad on the Baltic to Vladivostok on the Pacific. Communist parties the world over asserted the importance of the revolution. The revolution raised the status of Vladimir Lenin from controversial polemicist and cantankerous political figure to a household name as a leader and thinker of note.

In the mid-1950s, at the time of the Bulganin-Khrushchev visit to India,

the revolution was publicly adored outside the USSR — in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and large parts of Africa and Asia, especially China. Visitors to the Communist world of the 20th century would recall celebrations where cities were festooned with gigantic banners that said “Long live the October Revolution”, “Glory to Lenin”, “Long live the Soviet Union”, etc. Why the status of the October Revolution has altered so drastically is easy to see — and it is a brutal verdict on political memory of Communists and non-Communists alike. Certainly, it is linked to the collapse of Soviet Communism, which saw in October a beginning, if very little else.

Equally important, the Revolution has become a singular embarrassment. For, much to the discomfiture of non-Communists or anti-Bolsheviks, whose writing has dominated the history of Soviet Russia since the USSR’s disintegration in 1991, this was no instance of a coup where Russia’s populations (including her various nationalities) were forced by self-avowed democrats and socialists to accept a regime that denied their fundamental rights. It was not an indication of the waywardness of Communism — as the history of Stalin’s regime later was to be — but an instance of what people could do if their demands and requirements were ignored.

Equally, the failure of capitalists to control the socialist revolution — if only by kindness — was an indication of the poverty of global capitalism generally. Capitalism gave up the struggle against Bolshevism by early 1919 — and Russian capitalism specifically — which quickly found a home elsewhere in Europe.

True, there are shades of “Communist Autocracy” in the events of October 25. The revolution originated in a Bolshevik uprising against the ruling Provisional Government in the Russian capital of Petrograd (wartime St Petersburg). It was an uprising planned from October 16, 1917, against the backdrop of a failed war, massive civil deprivations and the chaos of the era of the Provisional Government and Dual Power that followed the February Revolution that toppled the Tsarist order.

The planning of the uprising culminated in the events of the 24th and 25th, when, alarmed at the seizure of the premises of two Bolshevik newspapers and the dispatch of pro-Government troops to take over telephone and telegraph offices and protect the Winter Palace, the seat of Government, reprisals were ordered by the Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee. Supporters set out to seize major places of Government importance and arrest the ministers. Late in the day, the cruiser Aurora shelled the Winter Palace. Other vessels sailed down the river Neva, Petrograd’s main waterway, and took over various military points. By nightfall, the city was under the committee’s control and the Ministers

had surrendered.

But this act came at the end of a long period of small-scale rural insurrections and the defiance of official policy on factory management — clear signs of the unpopularity of a regime that was slow to organise elections to a Constituent Assembly and one that had no base in popular will, at a time when “democracy” was an obsession in town and country.

The Bolshevik action, moreover, was legitimised by the only popular assembly of the time, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, when it assembled in Petrograd on October 26 — in an event that shows no signs of gerrymandering and intimidation, unlike the assemblies that brought Hitler and Mussolini to power in the decades that followed. And, if the uprising itself sparked off sporadic violence, it was also succeeded by the organisation by the Bolshevik Government of elections to a Constituent Assembly.

But, if close scrutiny of the October Revolution provides no substantial grist to the anti-Communist mill, the same history is an embarrassment to today’s Communists. For, success in the Revolution came to the Bolsheviks only because they were flexible in their policies — especially on the peasants’ demands for land control. This is a legacy that Communist regimes in China and West Bengal, beleaguered by rural opponents to state sponsored capitalist industrialisation, are not happy to recall.

Bolshevik success was bought through compromise with leaders of peasant resistance in the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, with whom, as Lenin pointedly said in the Soviet meeting of October, the Bolshevik party was not always in agreement. Due to their pressure, following October, a Land Code was promulgated which unreservedly passed control of the soil to the tiller. The consequence was the rapid disintegration of initial opposition to Bolshevism, and the collapse of the imperial army, whose majority peasant contingents quickly returned home to participate in land redistribution.

Unfortunately, this aftermath of the October Revolution — when flexible nationalisation, broad ranging elections to a Constituent Assembly and land redistribution were the rule of the moment, as sporadic resistance to Bolshevism gave way — was the Indian summer of Russian democracy. Facing an inflexible peasant leadership in a country that was 80 per cent peasant, and attempting to cope with a disastrous urban economy in the early months of 1918, the Bolsheviks moved to establish an urban tyranny. The hallmark of this was the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 and the promulgation of the Constitution of 1918, which over-represented town over country by 500 per cent.

By March 1918, when Bolshevik Russia signed a peace treaty with

Imperial Germany, the phase of the Russian Revolution associated with intolerance, urban tyranny and civil war had begun. The legacy of October had been given an unceremonious burial. The consequence was the Civil War and a time of terrible famine.

These are lessons that today's Left forces would do well to remember.

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(Courtesy: Pioneer,)*



The Marxist Horror Story

By Swagata Sen and Satarupa Bhattacharjya

*Nandigram has become the byword for state-sponsored terror in Indian communism's trophy state.
The reformist chief minister loses his sheen as he shows no sense of remorse.*

Nobody can beat the Indian Marxist in sub-rural horror. And no dialectical triangulations by the suave apparatchiks at AKG Bhavan in Delhi can be a distraction from the bloodlust in the countryside, where the armed struggle never ends. On Diwali night in Nandigram—which would go down in the hoary history of Indian communism as the site where the Bengal CPI(M) unravelled itself—the “red army” abandoned firecrackers and set the enemy houses on fire in celebration. Official statistics—11 dead and more than a hundred wounded in a week—may not reveal the full magnitude of the Marxist bestiality, but fear and the total collapse of civic authority do.

On November 11, when CPI(M) “liberated” the villages that were being controlled by the Trinamool Congress (TC)-led Bhoomi Uchedh Pratirodh Committee (BUPC)-save land committee in Nandigram, it was only another chapter in the politics of vendetta that CPI(M) has been practising to bloody perfection for the past many years. In the biggest administrative failure of the West Bengal Government in recent years, the whys and hows have been buried under a clamour of voices. Some people, of course, see justice in the Marxist action. Then there are thousands who are on the run, without any hope of being able to return or rebuild their homes. On November 13, CRPF personnel were allowed entry to the area

after a week-long detention on the national highway that leads to Nandigram. By then, CPI(M) had taken control of the troubled territory.

Unrest had been brewing in Nandigram since the last week of October. In retrospect, it was a carefully-executed plan by the masterminds at Alimuddin Street. The police would be asked not to enter the area and CPI(M)'S special cadres would then storm the *muktanchal* (open zone) of BUPC and take charge. The leaders in Kolkata couldn't afford to fail this time. So when Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya made his first public statement, there was no apology, no remorse in the voice of the man who once marketed himself as the human face of Indian communism. He said in uncharacteristic defiance: “They (Trinamool Congress people) have been paid back in their own coin. Our people were desperate. If hellish peace exists in Nandigram now, did the last 11 months have heavenly peace?”

Almost everyone who was not a Marxist condemned the savagery, beginning with Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi. TC chief Mamata Banerjee, whose political advantage in Nandigram comes to an end with this takeover, has been touring the area on a motorbike. Even CPI(M)'S own allies, especially RSP, are debating whether to walk out of the Government, with state PWD Minister Kshiti Goswami threatening to resign. Intellectuals have already declared war on the Government. Historian Sumit Sircar says, “Even as a Marxist, I can't help criticising the atrocities, the repression, the attempts to grab peasants' land without adequate compensation. I don't think the salvation of the state lies only in industry, and if industrialisation happens, it should happen with the consent of the people, not by persecuting them, burning their land and raping and killing them.”

Bhattacharya and his colleagues, meanwhile, are pulling out all the stops in defiance. The chief minister blamed the Maoists and said his party cadres took matters into their own hands when the Centre refused CRPF help earlier. Now the Government has to deal with a fresh wave of refugees who are too scared to go back home despite CPI(M) assurances that they will not be harmed. Most of them have no homes to return to.

What Bhattacharya cannot discount is the fact that the situation in the last 11 months has been of the state Government's own making. Last November, he announced that 27,000 acres of land, would be required for the Salim Group's SEZ in Nandigram. This would have meant rehabilitating entire villages, and the Government didn't have any clear plan on compensation. But it wasn't overly worried because Nandigram was primarily a Marxist stronghold. Marxist MP from Haldia, Lakshman Seth, announced on January 3 that Bhangabera, Sonachura and Garchakraberia villages would have to hand over their land for the proposed SEZ. TC,

which had been trying to get the locals on its side, took advantage of the situation and formed BUPC along with members of the Jamait-e-Ulema. BUPC blocked access to two panchayat blocks and cordoned off the area, packing the CPI(M) cadres off to neighbouring Khejuri, separated from Nandigram by a canal. On March 14, Bhattacharya sent a huge posse of police force to regain administrative control in Nandigram. Firing on a gathering of villagers, the police killed 14 people, women and children included. There has been an uneasy calm since then.

CPI(M) then drew up a plan. Late October, Bhattacharya said he had sought the Centre's help and asked for CRPF deployment in the troubled areas. Meanwhile, cadres prepared to regain the lost ground. Last week-end, the police were asked to stay away from Nandigram and CRPF was detained outside the area till the cadres completed their work. CRPF is trying to restore peace but the profusion of red flags tells a different story.

It is a story as old as the communists in power. Even before they completed their first five years in the Writers' Buildings, the Marxists had mastered the art of violent repression. Towards the end of 1970s, CPI(M) cadres had massacred hundreds of tribals in Morichjhapi, Sunderbans, calling them "illegal settlers". Over two decades have passed since CPI(M) cadres burnt to death 17 Anand Margis including a woman in Kolkata. Thousands were killed as the Marxists took over the anti-Naxal campaigns from the previous Congress government. In the last 30 years of the Left's uninterrupted rule, few cm inquiries have succeeded in actually convicting those accused of heinous crimes. The March 14 killings were the result of people's resistance to forceful acquisition of land for industrialisation.

In party General Secretary Prakash Karat's words, CPI(M) had "waited for 11 months". The siege of

Nandigram materialised last Saturday as Karat and his counterpart from CPI, A.B. Bardhan, sat down for lunch with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi in Delhi. As CPI(M) cadres went about killing villagers, burning and looting homes and shops in Nandigram, Karat continued his diatribe against US imperialism from the comfort of the prime minister's residence, the crispy autumn sun adding to the halo of this drawing room revolutionary. While the images of murderous cadres on victory parade shocked the country, CPI(M) leaders met in the Capital to blame their political opponents. "Since January 2007, an abnormal situation had developed with an alliance of forces led by Trinamool Congress driving out workers and supporters of the Left Front including elected panchayat members," read a politburo statement. While an independent inquiry might be able to establish the number of deaths in Nandigram since early this year, the politburo claimed that 27 CPI(M)

supporters and workers were killed in the past few months.

The party leadership is unapologetic. "If anybody thinks that they can take away Nandigram from us by force, they are wrong," Karat told reporters. Although Karat had no proof of Maoist presence in Nandigram, he continued to search for bogeymen. His theory was that Banerjee had hired Maoists to create havoc there. West Bengal home secretary P.R. Roy's denial of Maoist presence did not deter Karat from holding on to his description of the trouble makers. Other Left Front constituents-CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc-are furious with the big brother. West Bengal units of the three parties have already reacted sharply to the political killings. However, their leaders in Delhi are eager to play safe. "If Nandigram has been troubled for the last many months, is it not obvious that somewhere things weren't right?" asks Bardhan. Yet, on record the veteran Communist did not hold the chief minister or CPI(M) responsible for the killings.

The politics of silence is stunning. The "socialist" components of the UPA-RJD and the Samaj Party-have proved their worth as friends of the Marxists. Home Minister Shivraj Patil has said nothing on the atrocity so far. Sonia has been silent too. Parliamentary affairs minister P.R. Dasmunshi's "personal view" was that it was "CPI(M)-led state-sponsored massacre". According to Marxist MPs Sitar am Yechury and Basudev Acharia, "At every stage in the past 11 months since the armed hoodlums backed by the Trinamool Congress took over Nandigram, Dasmunshi has been aiding and abetting these forces." They held the minister accountable for allegedly "opposing CRPF deployment".

This probably is mock anger. The CPI(M) leaders have at no stage named the Congress as a mischief maker. Even the statement against Dasmunshi is not an indictment of his party; it is rather a personal attack. Layers of political games between the Congress and the Marxists at the Centre and the state won't succeed in obscuring the truth about Nandigram. It has shown how the Marxist paranoia can kill, maim, burn and displace. And a party that has internalised the Stalinist horror chambers is unlikely to say sorry.

REDBRUTALITY

- ◆ 1979: The police and CPI(M) cadres massacred hundreds of East Bengal refugees; in a Sunderban island,
- ◆ 1982: CPI(M) cadres burnt to death 17 Ananda Margis in Kolkata fearing loss of their base in a constituency.
- ◆ 2000: At least 11 labourers were killed by CPI(M) activists in Birbhum district over land dispute.
- ◆ 2001: CPHM activists killed 18 in Midnapore, during a Trinamool Congress-sponsored state bandh.

(Courtesy: IndiaToday)■

How the Marxist cadres and goons teamed up to 'liberate' Nandigram

By Tathagata Bhattacharya/NANDIGRAM

The Haldi river bordering Nandigram is quiet and in mourning. On November 5, six battalions of armed CPI(M) cadres surrounded Nandigram in East Midnapore. Their mission: to 'recapture' villages from the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC)- a Trinamool Congress-led front against land acquisition for the proposed special economic zone (SEZ).

The cadres were armed with AK series rifles, INSAS rifles, SLRs, .303 guns and bombs. Three of the battalions were sourced from West Midnapore's Garbeta block, three to four hours from Nandigram, and were led by its local committee secretary Sukur Ali. The other three battalions were from the West Midnapore's Chandrakona region, three hours from Nandigram, and were led by its

district committee member Tapan Ghosh. Both Sukur and Tapan are wanted by the CBI in a case relating to the burning alive of seven anti CPI(M) activists in Chota Angaria.

Each battalion had around 100 men, including dacoits and criminals from Bankura and South 24 Parganas. They were paid in advance for 'Operation Nandigram', and given a free hand to loot the villages, CPI(M) sources said. The 'operation' was reportedly finalised at a meeting between a member of Parliament, a state cabinet minister and zonal and local leaders in Khejuri, a CPI(M) stronghold, at the guest house of the Kolaghat thermal power plant.

The blitzkrieg began with the cadres spraying bullets on Nandigram's fringe villages of Satengabari, Jambari, Kanungochowk and Brindabanchowk. They torched and ransacked houses. Even cattle were not spared. Thousands of men, women and children fled to the block headquarters in Nandigram Block I.

BUPC activists wielding antiquated weapons, mostly muskets, fought back. The cadres ran out of ammunition, and were forced to withdraw momentarily. But fresh supplies arrived through the waterways, and the battle resumed. Soon BUPC activists ran out of ammunition. The cadres took twelve to thirteen villages in two days, bringing most of West Nandigram under their control.

Opposition leader and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee alleged that the cadres used the official launch of the district magistrate of South 24 Parganas to ferry arms and ammunition to their stronghold in

Khejuri. Earlier, West Bengal home secretary Prasad Ranjan Roy had commented, "Nandigram is a war zone and the attacks are happening from Khejuri." West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi dubbed the 'capture' of villages "unlawful and undemocratic".

Fleeing villagers trooped from the strategic Tekhali bridge-which runs over the Talpati canal that divides N andigram from Khejuri-to the block headquarters, as CPI(M) cadres took control of the main road connecting Gokulnagar and Adhikaripara to the block headquarters. On November 8, massive firing in Maheshpur and Amgachia villages left many injured. The police remained mute spectators; even as thousands of villagers shook the gates of the police station. "We don't have orders," was what the officer-in-charge reportedly said.

On November 10, around 30,000 unarmed BUPC activists took out two processions to regain control of their land and homes; while one procession, of people who had taken shelter in camps in the block headquarters, marched from Nandigram to Maheshpur, another moved from the Sonachura village bordering Khejuri in the same direction. The two groups were to meet at a point and move to Tekhali bridge. On the way, cadres surrounded them and sprayed them with bullets. The official death toll was put at three, with 20 injured; but witnesses said the toll was higher.

"The CPI(M) men carried away the bodies on vans towards Khejuri. Even the injured were not spared. Over 500 people were marched off to Khejuri," said a processionist. The Khejuri police rescued about 350 men-some of them were by then badly beaten up-from various schools in Khejuri. Many others, including some young women, were missing. In Satengabari village, a 40-year-old woman and her two daughters, aged 14 and 17, were raped. The woman was admitted to Tamluk hospital.

In Egra, which is around an hour's drive from Nandigram, a crowd intercepted two vehicles carrying injured people from Nandigram in the evening. The Egra police arrested at least eight CPI(M) cadres. While Sukur and Tapan were among those held, the police changed their names. However, when they were produced in court, they gave their real names when photographs were produced.

The rampaging cadres took Sonachura, Garchakraberia and Osman Chak, Kendemari and Hosenpur-the centres of BUPC's resistance in Nandigram Block 1. Thousands of villagers fled to the camps in the block headquarters. By evening of November 11, the 'occupation' was complete.

Further, armed CPI(M) mobs stopped Mamata Banerjee from reaching Nandigram. The village was 'out of bounds' for the media, as all entry points-through river and land-were blocked. Even the CRPF men were turned back on the night of November 12.

Reports came in from Nandigram that after Sukur and Tapan were captured while trying to ferry the injured, CPI(M) cadres had changed tactics many of the dead and the half-dead were being burnt in the brick kilns of Khejuri. Reports of gangrapes, too, have been coming in.

Sparks, claims and dissenting voices marked the aftermath. CPI(M) state secretary Biman Bose called the Governor's remarks unconstitutional and questioned his intellectual credentials. "Peace has been restored" in Nandigram, he said, adding that it was a "new sunrise". Prominent CPI(M) and

CITU leader Shyamal Chakrabarty said, "Nandigram is now a liberated zone, free of terror. What is needed now is development."

RSP minister Kshiti Goswami was ashamed. He told THE WEEK: "Only the communists are capable of something like this, especially those dictated by Stalinist ideology. I have sent a letter to the RSP secretary, asking the party to let me resign. I don't feel like being a member of this government."

The violence drew flak from civil society. On November 12, a spontaneous bandh paralysed normal life in the state. Nothing moved. Even software engineers were not complaining. Many boycotted the Kolkata International Film Festival-which, interestingly, featured quite a few films on state repression.

(Courtesy: The Week) ■

Abducted Nandigram youth narrates harrowing experience

Golam Rasul was having his frugal lunch in his thatched house at Chowk Kendamari in Nandigram when he heard the sound of motorbikes approaching.

It was around 1 pm on November 14 when Golam, an agriculturist, was busy with his meal, but the food remained stuck in his mouth as the bikes came to a halt on the dirt road in front of his house.

He was called out and a gun-toting biker asked Golam to come with him. Golam, who managed to set himself free from the clutches of his abductors, revealed that he was forced to ride pillion on one of the motorbikes and was taken to Jhamka in Khejuri.

From there he was taken to Rasulpur on the banks of a river. The 30-year-old youth saw 11 others who had been allegedly abducted from different places and brought there.

Around midnight, Golam and the others were put on a motor launch with armed people wearing red head bands around their heads, guarding them. "The next day around noon, the launch stopped at an unknown place and we were taken to a nearby jungle, where we were made to sit in a line with the armed men keeping a watch on us," Golam narrated.

"After sometime, making an excuse of relieving myself, I walked to a nearby bush and then started running for my life. They chased me, but I kept on running and after about an hour, I managed to give them the slip and reached a metalled road," he said.

"I was gasping for breath when I saw a truck coming down the road. I managed to flag it down in the nick of time and boarded it. I suspect that we had been taken to some place in Orissa, but as I was too afraid and also tired after running for miles, I could not ask the driver the name of the place where I boarded," Golam said.

He said that he was dropped off by the driver at Cuttack. "With only Rs 3 in my pocket, I could only call up a neighbour in my village from a PCO and I asked him to call me back. After he called back, I narrated my plight and gave him my location," he said.

"The neighbour informed my father, who sent some relatives who brought me to the Bhumi Uched Pratirodh Committee Nandigram relief camp," Golam said adding, he could not dare to go back home.

"However, feeling unsafe at the camp also due to the presence of Communist Part of India-Marxist cadres around the area, I have now shifted to a new place in Contai, about 40 km from my village," he said but refused to disclose the address fearing that he might be abducted again.

"I don't know the fate of the other 11 who were abducted and taken to that jungle along with me," he said. Golam filed a complaint of abduction with the Nandigram police station .

East Midnapore District Superintendent of Police S S Panda confirmed that a case of abduction has been filed. Though no enquiry has yet been started, the SP said, "I feel he had himself gone away to Cuttack."

(Courtesy: Telegraph) ■

An inconvenient truth for secular CPM: Nandigram victims' mainly Muslim face

Subrata Nagchoudhury

No issue, says CPM, but dominance of Muslims in Opp, relief camps prompts attack from Muslim voices

The CPM, which always speaks of high ideals, is indulging in such shameful acts of violence. This is not an issue that concerns Muslims only. It's a national issue: Kamal Faruqui, permanent member, All India Muslim Personal Law Board

The only good thing with regard to Muslims is that in the last 30 years of Left rule in West Bengal, they were safe. What happened in Nandigram now puts question mark on that, too: Manzoor Alam, general secretary, All India Milli Council

This is, perhaps, the worst-kept secret of the Nandigram violence that's now being talked about openly. And is reason for embarrassment to the CPM which swears by its secular credentials: a majority of those targeted by its party cadres as they reclaim their turf are Muslim.

Certainly, the violence is political, not communal — the protests were over proposed land acquisition and a turf war, not any religious issue — but the demographics of Nandigram and the nature of opposition to the CPM have ensured that wherever you go, in relief camp after relief camp, most of the refugees are Muslim.

Local administration officials admit that at least 65% of those huddled in the largest relief camp at the Brojomohan Tiari Institute are Muslim. So is the victim of the first gangrape case officially registered and eight of those who have been killed so far.

Then there is the reference the National Human Rights Commission has made to Gujarat in its indictment of the state government. And, ironically, the CPM, at pains to draw a distinction between Gujarat and Nandigram to argue against a debate in Parliament, has ended up reinforcing this aspect.

Ask CPM MP Mohammed Salim and he says this is a mere coincidence. "Those who are trying to draw the Gujarat-Nandigram parallel are trying to undermine the seriousness of the Gujarat riots. If a particular area has 46% Muslim population it is natural that they will also be affected."

When contacted, Abdus Sattar, Minister of State for Minorities Welfare and Development and Madrassa Education, says: "A large number of Muslims might have been affected but what happened in Nandigram was not on the basis of religion. The Chief Minister is the

minister for minorities, I have no other comment to make." What both the MP and the Minister do not admit is that sections in the party are concerned over a possible backlash given how a majority of the victims in Nandigram are Muslim.

Consider the following:

- In areas where the Government proposed land acquisition for the chemical SEZ, almost 65% of the population is Muslim, largely the middle peasantry and sharecroppers. Says Siddiqullah Chowdhury of Jamiat-e-Ulema-Hind which became the backbone of the political opposition: "We could mobilise Muslims because they are the ones most dependent on land for livelihood. Most of them are unrecorded sharecroppers haunted by the fear that they might not get any compensation for not possessing any valid documents. In the core area of the proposed SEZ, a large number of Muslims owned small shops and were engaged in tailoring and zari work."
- So it's no surprise that the top rung of the Bhoomi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (Save Land Committee) — the umbrella group that began the agitation against the CPM — is Muslim: the chief is Abu Sufiyan, a former CPM panchayat leader who the party claims was expelled because of alleged financial irregularities. Sufiyan, however claims, he fell out of favour because he "refused to carry out illegal orders."
- Working president of the BUPC is Abdus Samad who owes his allegiance to the Congress. Helping Sufiyan and Samad are Abu Taher of the Trinamool Congress, Ashrafullullah who is the Treasurer and executive committee member Sayum Kazi.
- Muslims make up a significant section of the villages in Nandigram's Block 1 — the core of the agitation — which include Muhammadpur, Kendamarichar, Jalpai, Samsabad, Daudpur, Kalicharanpur, Garchakrebaria and Satengabad-Ranichawk.
- Admits Block Development Officer Ashok Sarkar: "In most of these villages, a large number of houses damaged belong to Muslims. They were from both sides but obviously those under the BPUC banner have suffered more." One estimate, according to Samad, is that in the latest cycle of violence, 500 houses belonging to Muslims have either been burnt or damaged.

While the CPM may see in these facts nothing more than mere coincidence, several powerful, influential voices from the Muslim community — and the Opposition — are now speaking up.

Says pro-CPM Salman Kurshid, secretary, Muslim Institute, a highly respected organisation of Muslim intellectuals: "Muslims in the state are thoroughly frustrated at what happened in Nandigram. The High Court has also called it (the March 14 firing) unconstitutional. It was just like in

Gujarat where Narendra Modi gave his men three days to wrap up their operation. In Nandigram, CPM cadres were let loose from November 6 to 9 when the administration collapsed. The Muslims in the state have been talking that there is no difference between BJP and the so called progressive Marxists.”

Said the Akhbar-e-Mashriq, the largest Urdu newspaper in Kolkata: “Believers of Marxist philosophy have never accepted democracy by heart. For remaining in power they can resort to any cruelty and oppression and term those as legally valid. Both the BJP and the CPM intend to make common people mental slaves to attain their goal...For God’s sake, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, let the (CRPF) jawans do their work, and issue instructions to the CPI(M) cadres to return to their barracks.”

The respected Azad Hind also wrote on November 15: “In this tense and dirty ambience, at present, everybody should stay cautious because power’s toxicity can put any one on the wrong path. Specially, Muslim organisations and the Muslim people need to take steps keeping in mind the prevailing situation.” (with Md Safi Samshi, Kolkata, and Jayanthi Jacob, New Delhi)

(Courtesy: The Telegraph) ■

Aparna boycott film Festival over Nandigram Makers

It’s official. Aparna Sen boycott the 13th Kolkata Film Festival opening in Kolkata. . The reason: The renewed spate of violence in Nandigram.

”The festival committee had asked me to inaugurate an event (the film market) on November 11, but I didn’t agree,” said the renowned director whose presence adds stature to the event described as “the only official non competitive annual film festival of India”.

This year, none of Sen’s films was to be screened in the state-sponsored celluloid fest. “Had one been included, I would have withdrawn it,” said Sen, whose select films had formed a Retrospective in the 11th KFF.

The director, whose father Chidanand Dasgupta is the chairman of KFF’s preview committee, had a lot of regard for KFF. “It’s my city’s festival and I was always very proud of it.” But she’s so pained that “I couldn’t bring myself to be part of it in any possible way.”

Sen has been condemning the state government’s stance in

Nandigram since January. “In view of the violence that has erupted again, I can’t endorse a government ‘festival’.” She added, “I sincerely believe that, in a democratic society, the opposition must rise from the civil societies itself for we, the people, have elected the government.” To oppose suppression we must not depend upon another political party, says the director who subscribes “to issue based politics, not party based politics.”

(Courtesy: The Times of India) ■

Nandigram : Fear stalks people in refugee camps

The Communist Party of India-Marxist’s recapture of Nandigram, people lodged in a refugee camp in Nandigram are claiming that they could not return to their homes fearing reprisal by Marxist cadres.

They also allege that they are deprived of compensation given by the administration.

The CPI-M, however, charges Bhumi Uched Pratirodh Committee, which spearheaded the anti land-acquisition movement in Nandigram, of ‘politicising’ the issue and said the people had to first return home to get the compensation.

“People are afraid that once they go back to their villages and lose touch with each other, CPI-M cadres will launch fresh attacks on them,” Bhabani Prasad Das, who claimed to be a district leader of Left opposition Socialist Unity Centre of India.

Das, who is one of the leaders at the camp set up at Brajamohan Tiwari Siksha Niketan, said there are around 800 refugees at the camp now, of which 250 are women and 200 children.

These refugees are mainly from Satengabari, Sonachura, Ranichowk, Kamalpur, Kalicharanpur, Soudkhali and Garchakraberia villages, he said.

All these areas were the strongholds of BUPC and had remained inaccessible to the district administration since January.

Bidhan Dalapati of Sonachura said he had returned to his house on November 15 after remaining homeless since the November 10 attack by CPI-M supporters. Dalapati claimed he was beaten up by CPI-M cadres and had also been allegedly confined to his house.

“After two days, I managed to flee with my 12-year-old son and

reached the safety of the camp,” Dalapati said.

“We were asked to join a rally to be organised by the CPI-(M) on November 28,” he said.

He alleged that BUPC supporters were threatened to join the rally or face the consequences.

Sandhya Das of Gokulnagar said she had returned to her village after the violence of November 10, but ‘after getting threats, I decided to return to the camp.’

Describing the allegations as baseless, the CPI-(M) accused the BUPC of politicising the issue.

“The refugee camp is a showcase to launch political campaigns against us and to get grants from NGOs,” Niranjan Sihi, Zilla sabadhipati of East Midnapore district said in Nandigram.

(Courtesy: The Telegraph)



HC admits petition for probe

The high court admitted a petition demanding a CBI probe into the incidents in Nandigram between November 5 and 12 and fixed the hearing for next Monday.

Moving the petition before the division bench of Chief Justice S.S. Nijjar and Justice Pinaki Ghosh, advocate Kalyan Banerjee said that in its November 13 judgment, the court had allowed the CBI to continue its probe into the March 14 police firing. “But from November 5 to 12, CPM supporters carried out attacks on poor villagers, looted their properties and forced them to leave their homes,” said Banerjee.

He alleged that many were raped and beaten up by CPM goons. “These incidents should also come under the purview of the CBI probe and the court should direct the government to give adequate compensation to the homeless.”

Minority panel

The National Commission for Minorities will visit Nandigram to probe alleged police atrocities on March 14.

“We have received various allegations,” said a commission team that met the chief minister at Writers’.

(Courtesy: The Times of India)



How CPM recaptured Nandigram

The plan to recapture Nandigram was drawn two weeks back in a meeting between two top CPM leaders from East and West Midnapore. An MP from East Midnapore and a state minister from West Midnapore were also present at the meet. The main point of discussion was how to bring back Nandigram, out of bounds for CPM supporters for the last 11 months. Armed men were used from at least three districts — West Midnapore, Bankura and North 24 Parganas — for ‘Operation Nandigram’ to flush out the opposition.

The first attempt to re-enter the villages and oust Bhumi Uchchhed Pratirodh Committee supporters, who had held fort since early 2007, was made on March 14. The operation was conducted mainly by state police and did not bring the desired result. CPM had to go on the backfoot following widespread protests after the March 14 massacre. Since then no CPM leader has been able to set foot in Nandigram.

The party’s East Midnapore district unit was under pressure from its supporters in Nandigram who were forced to flee to Khejuri. Despite the talks of peace and aborted attempts to make the refugees return to the villages in small number, the guns along the Nandigram-Khejuri border were hardly ever silent. Leaders from both the districts had to set aside their differences to sort out the problem. CPM could not afford to let Nandigram remain out of its control till next year’s panchayat polls.

Also, the West Midnapore district unit has the experience of leading such an operation — Keshpur — in 2000. On November 4, local DYFI unit held a meeting at Heria (close to Khejuri) where it pledged to send back its homeless supporters to their villages. Two days before that, the process of withdrawing police from the troubles spot had already started.

Cadres — local criminals mostly involved in dacoity cases — for the operation were drawn from Chandrakona and Garbeta zonal committees. Also, cadres were sent from Narayangarh and Keshiary areas. Another group of around 250 armed CPM supporters and criminals came from the villages of Punishol at Onda and Rajpur, Taldangra in Bankura.

criminals were given money in advance and given a free-hand to bring whatever they could from the empty homes once the operation is complete. Sources said one such group that has returned to Onda came with motorcycles.

The Bankura group reached Nandigram after travelling by train and then road. The group boarded trains and allegedly got off at Balichak, four stations after Kharagpur, and then headed towards Nandigram via Khejuri in the guise of daily wage earners. They take the same disguise

when they go to Bihar and Jharkhand to collect arms, sources said.

Most of these people are suspected to be running arms smuggling rackets. The arms used in the recapture operation are believed to have been supplied from these suppliers.

Another cache of arms came from Purulia where party workers had received arms to combat Maoists. It is also suspected that the arms gone missing after the Purulia arms drop are with CPM supporters and were smuggled to Nandigram.

The coal mafia from Burdwan is also believed to have played a key role in the operation. The money from the mafia is believed to have supplied funds for the operation, helped in procuring ammunition and hire vehicles that carried the armed men to the interior areas as the attack progressed.

(Courtesy: The Times of India)

■

Minorities aren't happy in Bengal'

Nandigram: The Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government came in for a rude shock on Tuesday, this time from the National Commission for Minorities. The NCM fact-finding mission to Nandigram is reportedly dissatisfied with the condition of minorities in Bengal.

“After visiting Kolkata and Nandigram, we are certain that the minorities are not happy in the state. We have spoken to several people. From whatever they told us, we could make out that things aren't rosy for the members of the minority community,” said commission member Harcharan Singh Josh. “We will submit a report to the PM.”

(TNN)

■

Teachers of Buddha and Amartya Sen join protest rally

SANTINIKETAN: Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee seems to have lost many friends in the wake of the Nandigram violence. Even Mrinal Sen joined a protest march in Kolkata. Buddhadeb's teacher - Bhabatosh Dutta - stood at the head of a protest rally in Santiniketan.

The Nandigram carnage reminded him of the Jallianwalabagh massacre, Dutta said.

The rally included Lalit Mazumdar, a teacher of Amartya Sen, who used to teach at Visva Bharati School. Dutta's presence surprised many, particularly because he is quite fond of Bhattacharjee and the chief minister returns the compliment. The 81-year-old, who taught Bhattacharjee 44 years ago at Presidency College, said he was shocked by the violence in Nandigram. “The Buddhadeb I know is very gentle, sober and modest. I don't know whether there is any pressure on him. I am not a man of politics and don't understand matters of party and affiliation. But the death of innocent people has deeply hurt me,” Dutta said.

After Bhattacharjee was re-elected in the 2006 elections, Dutta, who addresses the CM as “kalyaniyeshu” (affectionate), was elated and had told TOI that it was one of his “happiest days”. “I can still see that shy boy, dressed in white dhoti-kurta, sitting in a corner of the classroom. He would never speak out of turn or speak unless spoken to,” he had said. “Unlike other students who were into politics, Buddhadeb was never ill-behaved or brash.” Even today, the bond remains strong - whenever his works are published, Buddhadeb sends a copy to Dutta and vice-versa - but when he joined the rally, the pain showed in Dutta's face. “Every death is unfortunate. I took part in this rally because whatever happened in Nandigram was inhuman,” he said. Though he refrained from saying anything directly against the chief minister, the others in the rally were not so forgiving. Painter Selim Munshi said: “We thought that our chief minister was a man of art and culture. But after Nandigram we have to change our opinion.”

Apart from Dutta, Mazumdar and Munshi, leading lights of Santiniketan - singer Swastika Mukherjee, secretary of Visva Bharati Adhyapak Sabha, Kishor Bhattacharya, university teachers like Shelly Bhattacharya, Ranadip Dutta, Bina Dey and former principal of Siksha Satra, Pijus Mukherjee - took part in the rally.

(Courtesy: The Economic Times)

■

Children suffering from insomnia in Nandigram

Nandigram: The long drawn violent events in the area have robbed traumatised children of sleep, who toss and turn at night and often wake up sobbing. “I have found at least 20 to 25 children, mostly in the age group of 7 to 12, suffering from sleeplessness. The nightmarish experience of the past 11 months has scarred them mentally,” district secretary of the Red Cross Rameshwar Mishra said.

These children are mostly from the former Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee strongholds of Sonachura, Satengabari, Gokulnagar, Adhikaripara and Mahespur, which fell after being “recaptured” by the CPM cadre. “They can’t come out of the traumatic experience and occasionally stay awake the whole night,” Mishra said. Raju (8) of Satengabari has seen his house burning before his eyes. “He is so afraid that he cannot go out of the relief camp alone and frequently wakes up at night sobbing uncontrollably,” he said. His mother Kalpana says, “I don’t know what has happened to my son, but I am very worried. He has been unable to have a sound sleep. I don’t have money to take him to Kolkata for treatment.”

Minati (7) of Sonachura sleeps so long as she is on her mother’s lap but the moment she is put on the bed, she starts crying. These are not isolated cases. “I have visited many trouble-torn places, but I haven’t seen children insomniacs in such large numbers,” said a member of the Red Cross team. “The problem in Nandigram has been continuing for such a long time that a fear psychosis has taken deep root in tender minds,” he said. “We have not been able to reach out to everybody, but in the relief camp I have found at least 20 children who have been suffering from this nightmarish experience.” He said outbreaks of diarrhoea and dysentery in camps were normal, but not insomnia.

“Diarrhoea and dysentery are understandable. The toilets are bad and drinking water is not upto the mark. These can be tackled with medication. But psychological trauma is very hard to remove,” said another member of the team. “This psychological problem might have a dangerous effect. Unless cured this might lead to serious psychological disorder later on,” he said. “A number of organisations are providing relief to the people of Nandigram, but they have not noticed this problem. If proper care is not taken then a generation here might live in fear all their lives,” he warned.

(Courtesy: PTI) ■

Cong, at last, attacks Left on Nandigram

Clearly under pressure from its West Bengal unit, the Congress today shed its initial ambivalence and stepped up its attack against the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya government for its inability to contain the violence in Nandigram.

“The primary responsibility of any government worth its name is to protect its citizens and ensure the safety and security of their lives and property. Unfortunately, it is not happening in Nandigram,” AICC general secretary Mohsina Kidwai, who is in-charge of West Bengal, said in a statement here.

Putting the onus squarely on the Left Front government, she said media reports indicated that the writ of the state government does not run in that area. This situation is totally unacceptable, she added.

(A Tribune report) ■

Cong wary of offending CPM

Despite the outrage over the Nandigram violence, the Congress leadership seems wary of offending the CPM with indications that the political resolution to be adopted at the session of the All India Congress Committee may steer clear of attacking the Marxists.

Sources said that members of the Congress Working Committee favoured calibrating the response to the Nandigram violence rather than lash out at the CPM. According to sources, foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee stressed the need for caution. “We are running a coalition here,” the veteran minister is learnt to have said.

The leadership was also cognizant of Left’s sensitivities on the nuclear deal, with the party bigwigs seemingly unimpressed by the pleas by at least two members of the CWC to play hard on the issue. They are learnt to have pointed to the quintals of propaganda material that the party got printed to espouse the deal.

(TNN) ■

CPM barbarians unleash a bloodbath in Nandigram

Buddhadeb cheers the lumpens

Ranjit Roy

Even after the unprecedented protest march in the city and widespread condemnation against the Chief Minister's open support to the CPM's "eye for an eye" revenge tactic in Nandigram, there is no change in the mind and voice of Bhattacharjee.

The outrageous statement that villagers of Nandigram have been "paid back in their own coin" by the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee only to express his joy and satisfaction over the bloody recapture of Nandigram by armed CPM goons has ignited a widespread protest from all walks of life in West Bengal. In a fitting reply to Bhattacharjee, over 100,000 people, bearing no political affiliation or leaning, thronged Kolkata streets on November 14 and marched in a silent procession, led by frontline Kolkata intelligentsia, to take on the ruling CPM for unleashing violence to crush dissent.

The city's leading lights like Mahashweta Devi (writer and social activist), Bibhash Chakraborty (play writer), Manoj Mitra (play writer), Aparna Sen (filmmaker), Mrinal Sen (filmmaker), Rituparna Ghosh (filmmaker) Jogen Chowdhury (painter), Subhaprasanna (painter), Anjan Dutta (actor and singer), Pallab Kirtaniya (singer), Rupam Islam (lead vocalist of Bangla band Fossil), Kaushik Sen (actor), Parambrata Chatterjee (actor), Sirshendu Mukherjee (writer), Joy Goswami (poet), Usha Uthhup (singer) and social activist Medha Patkar led the procession. Several luminaries who marched with them were once known for their sympathy to Leftist ideology.

The march started sharp at 1 pm in the afternoon from the College Square in central Kolkata. There had been no mobilisation of the participants, as happens with political rallies. People from different parts of the city and suburbs had arrived well before the scheduled time and had waited patiently for the march to commence. When the marchers had started walking slowly towards Esplanade, the numbers kept swelling with thousands of rally watchers on the street joining the silent procession voluntarily. It reminded many about the historical protest march on Kolkata streets, led by Rabindranath Tagore, to protest against the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1906.

Marchers took almost two hours to reach the destination point at Esplanade, a little over 3 kilometers away from the starting point near Kolkata university campus. While the marchers walked silently, young and elderly women showered flowers on them from balconies and rooftops expressing their solidarity. Not a word was spoken, no slogan was uttered, no political threat hurled, but the silence was greater than sound and slogans to caution the dictatorial might of the CPM. A podium has been standing at the heart of Esplanade, the busiest square of Kolkata, since 14th March 2007 when the first spate of violence had claimed 14 lives in Nandigram. The marchers had assembled around the podium where eminent personalities addressed the gathering. Tagore's patriotic songs were sung, poems recited.

Even after the unprecedented protest march in the city and widespread condemnation against the Chief Minister's open support to the CPM's "eye for an eye" revenge tactic in Nandigram, there is no change in the mind and voice of Bhattacharjee. He told mediapersons at Writers' Buildings on November 14 evening, "I repeat that our cadres have paid Trinamool Congress, Maoists and the Bhoomi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee activists in Nandigram in their own coin. Our men have been out of their homes for months and are desperate to return. So, they have used their might." No doubt, what the Chief Minister said echoes what Prakash Karat had said in Delhi on Monday or what Biman Bose has been telling in Kolkata over the past few days.

That the Chief Minister not only admitted that his armed party men have recaptured Nandigram but also justified it, which may raise serious constitutional questions about the Left Front government rule. It may be interpreted that the Chief Minister has greater faith in his party's armed cadres than in the rule of law to resolve Nandigram crisis. Bhattacharjee's statement actually makes him vulnerable to the charge of willfully violating his constitutional responsibilities by letting armed goons to usurp the administration's responsibility. It may also be stated that the Chief Minister has called for a politics of guns and that may rob him of the moral and constitutional authority of his chair.

The consequences of the call can be dangerous in West Bengal where violence has replaced democratic process to resolve political disputes. With blood on their hands, as the CPM cadres celebrate "the new sunrise in Nandigram", the party has struck a match to ignite turf war in West Bengal.

There is no denying the fact that the movement in Nandigram was not entirely peaceful and non-violent. But for a Chief Minister to say publicly that the protestors are paid back in their own coin is to endorse partisan warfare. That Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee thinks and acts in terms

of “our people and their people” shows that he is the Chief Minister of CPM and not West Bengal.

In fact, strongly-worded statement issued by the West Bengal Governor, Gopal Krishna Gandhi, in which he clearly condemned the party goons for murdering innocent people and capturing villages in Nandigram block, is enough to indicate that there is no constitutional government in West Bengal. Similar sentiment is also expressed in the ruling of the Kolkata High Court on November 13. While admitting a PIL, Justices G.C.Gupta and Tapan Mukherjee said, “There is evidence to show that the rule of law is not prevailing in Nandigram.” Upholding the rights of the people and the media to free movement, the judges said, “The state government shall ensure entry of media and social workers in Nandigram and also their safe return.”

During the 30 years of the Left Front rule, there have been a series of violent attacks by CPM armed cadres on unarmed villagers in West Bengal. The party guns killed people freely in Nanoor, Panskura, Chhoto Angaria, Garbeta, Ghatal, Gohat, Khanakul, Keshpur and Singur. Ironically, almost all the present hotspots in West Bengal are CPM strongholds till a few months ago. But the picture is now changing fast. With land reforms reaching saturation point and the rural neo-rich now hobnobbing with CPM village poor have now been pushed to corner. This is evident from the recent ration riots all over the state. And the party retaliated with bigger violence.

Nandigram’s tryst with violence began with the CPM fighting its own men. The disgruntled cadre left the party to save their own farm land from government acquisition, floated Bhoomi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee, and some of them took arms to resist. CPM has been desperate to check the erosion of its vote bank. This desperation has led to violence.

In fact, CPM’s long history of violence is rearing its ugly head once again. Unable to win over its opponents and frustrated at losing turf, the party has now unleashed an unprecedented attacks on its adversaries in West Bengal.

(Courtesy: Organiser) ■

**Leading writers give
voice to nation’s feelings**

An intellectual loss

By Swapan Dasgupta

In 1956, after Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest and crushed the democracy movement in Hungary, Communist parties of Western Europe lost nearly one-third of their members. The exodus of those outraged by the Kremlin’s intolerance was described as “the revolt of the intellectuals.”

The invasion of Hungary cost Communism its moral halo. The Soviet Union dissipated the goodwill it had generated during its battle against fascism. To many of the extremely talented individuals who became party members, fellow travellers and even Soviet spies in the 1930s, Communism became the “God that failed”. By the time the Berlin Wall was breached in 1989, the Comrades in Moscow discovered they could no longer inspire a defence of the cause. The Bolshevik Revolution died unmourned - except in Cuba and West Bengal.

It is intriguing that the wave of disillusionment bypassed Bengal. Barring hiccups between 1972 and 1977, the Communist movement in the state has expanded steadily since 1947. After 30 years of uninterrupted power, the CPM today exercises control over almost every walk of life in Bengal. Its organisational stranglehold is complemented by a staggering degree of intellectual hegemony over an otherwise garrulous and fractious people. Intellectual relevance in Bengal has become synonymous with ‘progressive’ thought. Public discourse has been moulded to fit into an ideological structure. Heretics have bought one-way tickets out of Kolkata.

The framework of Left intellectualism was built around three principles: grievance, guilt and envy. Beginning from violent movements against rapacious capitalists and landlords and culminating in solidarity with all acts of anti-Americanism, the Left became the epitome of the permanently aggrieved. This was supplemented by a mindset that made suffering and morbidity a romantic fetish - particularly in arty Bengali films.

In the ‘progressive’ world view of Bengal, market economics and globalisation were vulgar because they were invariably accompanied by the symbols of a decadent cosmopolitanism. The capitalist virus having engulfed India, Left fundamentalists felt that Bengal must remain an island

of enlightened backwardness.

The revolt of the intellectuals against the CPM for its conduct in Singur and Nandigram was not prompted by either an abhorrence of violence or respect for human rights. On both counts the record of Kolkata's intellectuals is shoddy - witness its glorification of Naxalites and silence over umpteen examples of CPM hooliganism. They were agitated because they instinctively sympathised with all opposition to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's reformism. In their eyes it was the chief minister who stood indicted for betraying the right of Bengal to live in a time warp.

The banner for last Wednesday's impressive rally in Kolkata extended the 'revolutionary greetings' of intellectuals to Singur and Nandigram. Medha Patkar, a deity of the Flat Earth fraternity, was a star attraction; and an email of support from Noam Chomsky was read out. Berating those fellow-traveller intellectuals who have remained loyal to the CPM, poet Shankha Ghosh sneered: "Time will decide who are the real Leftists."

The intellectuals, who tore up their Communist Party cards in 1956, believed they had upheld the humanistic ethos of Marxism. Some, like the historian EP Thompson, never wavered from this commitment. Others travelled down the more abstruse by-lanes of radicalism and lost their way. A significant minority, however, went completely over to the 'other' side and became part of the neo-conservative nucleus. Their examples helped in the decimation of Marxism as a force in the erstwhile Soviet bloc after 1989.

The CPM should beware. The alienation of its committed intellectuals may yet trigger Bengal's decisive break from decades of mental darkness.

(Courtesy: The Times of India)



Blood On Their Hands

By Praful Bidwai

Nandigram is one of the darkest chapters in CPM's history

West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's rationalisation of the violent "recapture" of Nandigram by CPM cadres as mere "retaliation" against their opponents, who were paid back "in the same coin", is one of the most brazen defences by an Indian leader of the state's abdication of its fundamental responsibility to protect the life and limb of all its citizens. What Nandigram witnessed was a CPM campaign of armed violence to regain control of two of the area's three blocks, which it lost early this year owing to its abortive bid to impose a 25,000-acre Special Economic Zone on an unwilling population to favour Indonesia's Salim Group.

Bhattacharjee didn't speak like a responsible, democratically elected CM, but like a party apparatchik who reposes greater faith in its cadres and musclemen than in the rule of law. Indeed, he explicitly defended his decision not to send the police into Nandigram because "I didn't want a repeat of the March 14 incident", in which 14 people were killed. The firing wasn't a fluke. Citizens' independent inquiries have established that armed pro-CPM cadres joined the police in that punitive expedition, some disguised in official uniforms. A People's Tribunal, consisting of a retired high court chief justice and social activists, documented this, after recording 174 depositions by the victims. Its chilling conclusions show close police-CPM collusion. The motive was to "teach" SEZ opponents "a lesson".

The CPM just wouldn't countenance that it would not be the people's sole representative or lose its influence in Nandigram. To regain it, it started a systematic campaign of intimidation and eviction of ordinary people, turning thousands into refugees, and imposing collective punishment on them through a months-long economic blockade. The logic was that the anti-CPM Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) must be ousted at any cost so the party's unquestioned supremacy could be re-established — even if that meant brutalising innocents. In recent weeks, the impending arrival of the Central Reserve Police Force lent urgency to the task.

The latest episode represents one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Indian Left. It has tarnished the Left's, particularly the

CPM's, image as one of the few principled components of our political spectrum guided by an ideology and programme, which upholds constitutional values, public decency, and negotiated resolution of conflicts, represents the poor, and is an asset to democracy. Nandigram showed that the CPM can unleash, for entirely sectarian reasons, violence against farmers and other working people, in whose name it speaks — and from whom it derives its very rationale.

Going by well-corroborated reports, last fortnight's armed invasion was meticulously planned. The police were confined to the barracks. CPM cadres from four districts were deployed, many of them trained in using firearms. The military-style operation had three components. On November 5-8, a multi-pronged offensive was launched by three attacking groups, each 200-plus-strong. On November 10, a second wave of attackers pushed BUPC supporters into CPM stronghold Khejuri, taking 600 of them "prisoner". Finally, BUPC stronghold Sonachura was overrun, using the prisoners as a "human shield". Within hours, the area was "liberated" amidst raucous celebrations by gun-toting musclemen.

This couldn't have happened without the state's complicity, indeed without the party suborning the state. This has disturbing implications. Any defence of such actions greatly weakens the liberal-secular-democratic argument against the communal Right, articulated ably by the Left too, that interference by political parties and their affiliates (.....) with the state's functions gravely undermines democracy.

However, several CPM members and supporters, including some distinguished academics, have turned a blind eye to this while rushing to the party's defence — just when they should be counselling critical introspection. Their argument rests on presenting CPM cadres as Nandigram's principal victims, and highlighting "infiltration" by Maoists, assisted by Trinamul Congress.

But evidence of such infiltration is of the same quality as the evidence about Saddam's mass-destruction weapons. Besides, it beggars belief that ousted/"dislodged" CPM cadres greatly outnumbered BUPC-supporter refugees. By all credible evidence, the latter (several thousands) outnumbered the former by a factor of 10 or more. The BUPC and Trinamul indisputably have their own thugs. They too practised violence, but it's hard to believe they matched the state-assisted clout of the domineering, militant, well-oiled ruling party machine.

Even assuming the BUPC "dislodged" CPM cadres, it's for the state, not the party, to remedy this. Violent retaliation can only generate counter-violence, while breaching constitutional norms. Nor can Maoist "infiltration" justify indiscriminate attacks on adversaries or ordinary people.

Nandigram exposes the rot that has set into the West Bengal CPM in the form of criminalisation, pro-rich policies, corruption, reliance on muscle power, and arrogant disdain towards its own allies — the CPI, Forward Bloc and RSP. The three now say the CPM alone bears "responsibility" for the Nandigram violence and must rethink its policies. Their plea can only work if they quit the cabinet while remaining in the Left Front.

The writer is a political commentator .

(Courtesy: The Times of India) ■

Nandigram's fallout

By Jagannath Guha

The intellectuals of West Bengal, advocates of the Left Front Government until recently, are split over the CPI(M)'s crimes

Buddha a rogue Stalinist

Leading Kolkata-based theatre personality, TV serial director and film actor. His most recent cameo role was in Namesake

I belong to a generation that has grown up on Marxism. In many ways, I represent the class that has identified with all that is good about the Leftist ideology. Hence, the recent developments in West Bengal come as a sudden and rude shock to us. What we see today is a lot of rogue Stalinists, who have sneaked into the grassroots level of the organisation, running amok. Clearly, today's Leftist leadership has lost control over the party's cadre base.

And I say this without getting into the merits of the events that have unfolded in Nandigram. Mind you, the protesters can hardly be described as the supporters of Ms Mamata Banerjee. In her entire career she has not been able to inspire an iota of confidence in the people in her brand of politics. She is such a maverick who for her whims, fancies and self-aggrandisement can put any of her supporters in an awkward position at any moment. Nevertheless, the basic question is: Why should the Left Front Government be shy of a dialogue with her, be resistant to the idea of protest and deny space to political opposition from Ms Banerjee or anybody who differs with its point of view?

Also, when there is ample scope for a debate on the ideology of

Socialism, land ownership, rights of the peasantry, etc, with respect to the massacres beginning with Marichjhanpi on to those in Keshpur, Haripur, Garbeta, Singur and Nandigram, it's amazing to note that the debate is conspicuous by its absence. Without scope for ideology in governance, the inevitable has happened ? all that is left is hooliganism.

This shows the CPI(M)'s inability to handle democracy. There's a question of an ethical mandate which the Left Front Government has lost. And the rot is not only spread at the grassroots but has also reached the top. How can a Government that claims to stand for democratic values nitpick the Governor's comments and have no respect for the Constitution? Look at the language used by CPI(M) State secretary Biman Bose who is going about casting aspersions on whoever begs to differ with the Government he represents. Is there any modicum of decency in this political discourse?

All this is happening as the present leadership of the CPI(M) has not risen by virtue of its participation in any people's movement. They have been propped up by the woodwork of the party's bureaucracy. I'm impelled to recall former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's era. For all his fallings, Mr Basu's rise in politics owes to several historical events of people's movement of which he was an integral part. He believed in dialogue with the political Opposition as well as the resistant voices within the Marxist fold. His exchanges with 'unrepentant Communist' the late Hiren Mukherjee, who would on various occasions disagree with the then Left Front Government's policies and actions, showed the legitimate space Jyoti babu was ready to give to opposing voices and dissent.

On the contrary, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, as far as I can remember, hasn't ever been involved in any people's movement. He and his more polished and urbane versions in the party's leadership ? Mr Prakash Karat and Mr Sitaram Yechury ? are all, as I said earlier, results of the woodwork of the party's bureaucracy and conspiracies. No wonder then that we see arrogance, insolence and intolerance in their policy, speech and action.

Having said all that, it must, however, be noted that this Left Front Government has no alternative in the absence of a credible Opposition. So its return in election after election cannot be averted. Let's not forget that intellectuals and artistes who are protesting the State Government's actions today cannot be a part of a political process. With time, these protesters will disperse or will be dissipated. It goes to the credit of the CPI and the RSP especially the latter, to express serious reservations on the issue, virtually sticking their necks out. But these parties have such a marginal presence in West Bengal.

This is the opportune moment for a strong Socialist and democratic

party to rise and take charge of a credible and forceful Opposition. But unfortunately, there is no such party left in the country today. With democratic space getting severely eroded, I think Mr Jyoti Basu, despite his age, has to step in to take charge of the situation. The situation is beyond Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

(Courtesy: The Pioneer) ■

Government for the people?

By Tavleen Singh

The Indian state's contempt for the most vulnerable, most voiceless of our citizens is one of its ugliest features. The 'people' in whose name we suffered decades of economically debilitating socialism are the very people Indian officials treat like dirt. It is my conviction that if they treated them like human beings instead of chattel, thousands of desperately poor people in our towns and cities would lift themselves out of poverty without any help from those anti-poverty schemes on which we have spent thousands and thousands of crore rupees.

Nandigram is an extreme example of the attitude of the Indian state towards the poor and it is fascinating that it should be a Marxist government that behaves in such a thuggish way. But every day, anywhere in India, if you know people living below the poverty line you will hear stories of the weakest of our citizens being marginalised by the state. Most of the people I know living in extreme poverty live on Mumbai's mean streets. I know them because of an attempt on my part some years ago to try and lure street children into going to school by giving them a hot breakfast every morning under a programme called Nashta. My effort failed but I keep in touch with them and some of the girls are now married with children of their own.

One of them came to me last week and asked if I could help her husband get into driving school. I had earlier paid for other street kids to learn how to drive and thought it would be as simple as it was before, but when Surekha took her new husband to the Good Luck Driving School she was asked if he had a birth certificate, school leaving certificate, or a voter identity card. When she said he did not, she was told that as he could not prove that he was Indian, he could not be admitted because the local transport authority can only give licenses to Indians.

This seemed so absurd I rang the school myself and was told politely by a man called Sufiyan that he was helpless because of the new rule that came into force three months ago. “Even if I teach him how to drive,” he said, “it would be no use because it is the RTO that gives the license and they will not give it without proof of citizenship.”

How do people below the poverty line prove this? The Indian state excels at making rules that keep our poorest citizens in poverty and they do this most brutally by imposing a license raj on pavement shops and hawkers. Licenses are almost impossible to get but when an unlicensed hawker is caught by municipal officials, his goods are confiscated and his pathetic little stall smashed. The license raj has created a vast infrastructure of corruption that thrives on takings from India’s poorest citizens.

Street vendors exist in every city in the world and make an honest living and should be allowed to exist in a country that provides so few other opportunities. All that is needed is a few simple rules that regulate numbers and cleanliness. Millions of Indians would lift themselves out of poverty if this happens, but it will not because hafta to policemen and officials is too large a vested interest.

Now let’s talk of Nandigram. If you look beyond the bloodshed and the horror, what is happening is quite simply that the state is grabbing land from people for whom it is their only livelihood. That it happens under a Marxist government makes it worse but this kind of land grabbing from the poor happens all the time because they usually cannot fight back.

Nandigram is proof that the state can no longer get away with its high-handedness. If land is needed for building factories, roads and power plants, it must be paid for at a proper market price and people who still wish to hang on to their land should be given the choice to do so. When they see the benefits that development and progress bring, they will themselves participate in the process, as we have seen in hundreds of villages around our metropolitan cities where land prices have gone from a few lakh rupees an acre ten years ago to crores of rupees an acre.

The state must learn to pay a proper price and our officials must learn that the times have changed. They can no longer get away with bullying ordinary people by terrorising them with the might of the state. Meanwhile, though, as someone who thinks of Marxists as the most morally corrupt of our politicians, it gives me a certain pleasure to see them try to defend the indefensible in Nandigram. More power to the people!

(Courtesy: The Express)

Hammered and sickled

By Barkha Dutt

This time the violence has unfolded behind a veil of intrigue and secrecy. Unlike in March, when an entire country watched horrified as police guns pummelled unarmed villagers with bullets and bulldozed their way through Nandigram, this week Marxist foot soldiers made sure that blockades and threats and the stealth of the night would keep them protected from public gaze.

But, as horror stories managed to break through the shroud of silence — bone chilling stories of rape, plunder and murder — the West Bengal Chief Minister gave away the game himself. With the transparent aggression that marks a man with a guilty conscience, he flared up in rare anger and told journalists that the protestors in Nandigram been “paid back in their own coin.”

And so, just like that, the mask was off.

There wasn’t even a feeble attempt to deny that CPM cadres had been permitted by the party to storm their way back into Nandigram. If they had to shoot, kill and rape to make their way back in, so be it. No explanations were provided for why central paramilitary forces were sent in only after the Left’s militia was firmly back at home base. No apologies were offered for why a state government in democratic India should need to wage an extra-constitutional war. Other than contempt and criticism, there was no response at all to the high-minded public lament by Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi. As far as the Chief Minister was concerned his party’s private army had “retaliated in desperation”.

Twenty fours later, after a storm of protests over his remarks, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had another opportunity to take back his words, or make a retraction that is standard for politicians. He didn’t bother. Instead, he took it all one step further by declaring that he stood by his comments because he could not forget his “political identity” and he was “not above the party”.

But what happened to not being above the law? No explanations were provided for why central paramilitary forces were sent in only after the Left’s militia was firmly back at home base.

Nandigram may well be a complex cocktail of contradictory ingredients distilled into oversimplification by a liberal media. Its faultlines run through several layers of debate. Economics marked out the original battle-lines between different models of development. Politics catapulted the always-dramatic Mamata Bannerjee into the role of a lifetime. Religious politics

and a sizeable Muslim population created an opportunity for the reactionary Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind to play to stereotype and oppose “imperialism”. And a contentious land acquisition policy (made worse by a blundering administration) set the stage for a violent face-off between the Marxists and the Maoists.

So, the Left may even have a point when it argues that it’s not just hapless farmers lining the trenches in the Nandigram war.

But, no matter how many varied (and vested) interests make up the opposition in Nandigram, how can any government possibly justify this kind of illegal storm-trooping? How can a state’s police force and an entire administration look the other way while vigilante armies set foot on the path of ‘justice’?

It wasn’t the BJP, but Left-leaning historian Sumit Sarkar who first compared the anarchy in Nandigram to the riots in Gujarat. The rest of us may balk at the analogy and argue passionately against such dangerous generalisations.

But, if you stop and think more about it for a moment, here’s what you may come up against. The anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 was made possible by a state government that refused to intervene and stop it. The motivation of the principal players in Bengal may be entirely different from the communal poison that fuelled the riots. But once democratic governments start arguing that in certain circumstances it is permissible for the administration to lapse into deliberate paralysis, you are entering terribly dangerous territory. Who gets to determine when it’s justified for law-makers to temporarily terminate the rules of governance?

The Marxists don’t do themselves justice either by arguing against a debate on Nandigram in Parliament because it is a “state subject”. Its comments may be driven by political opportunity, but the BJP is perfectly placed to ask why it was valid to treat the violence in Gujarat as a matter of national concern, but not the contentious state action and inaction in Bengal. Nandigram is already under national scrutiny — not least because of the UPA’s own indefensible hands-off attitude to the violence (conspiracy theorists shouldn’t be blamed for seeing a quid pro quo take shape on the nuclear deal). The desire to keep it out of Parliament smacks of dogma and defensiveness.

And finally, there’s an interesting leitmotif running through Corporate India’s response to eruptions of such social turbulence. No less a man than Ratan Tata was willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with Narendra Modi and laud the investment-friendly environment of a “vibrant Gujarat”. The other social indices seem irrelevant to India’s billionaires.

Big Business has had a similar response to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee — projecting him as the brave, reformist Chief Minister fighting a lonely

but modern battle to shift the paradigm of an archaic ideology. Admittedly, after two long conversations with him a few months back, I too, came away with the same impression. His voice dropped to a trembling whisper at times as he described the lonely determination of pushing ahead with industrialisation. And one couldn’t help commiserate with him on the pulls and pressures within his own party.

Most of us are impatient with the activism of professional do-gooders who reflexively oppose every act of liberalisation. We recognise the shallowness of their rhetoric and are impatient with the staleness of their rehearsed opposition. But how does one explain or justify the repeated and brazen blunders of the state government? How does one defend a state that allows no autonomy of thought or action to its police force? If the violence was fomented by Maoists, why did a party that wears its social liberalism as a badge of honour stop the media from entering Nandigram? What about the people’s right to know?

After two eruptions of political violence in Nandigram, the dispute has gone much beyond a debate over economic reform. The controversy is no longer confined to whether an Indonesian chemical plant should have been allowed to come up in villages that don’t want it.

It’s now only about one thing — the abject failure of governance. And to borrow a phrase from the Left, the state government will eventually be paid back in its own coin.

*Barkha Dutt is Managing Editor, NDTV 24x7
(Courtesy: The Hindustan Times)*



Hell’s new name : Nandigram

*Chandan Mitra writes after a visit to the area as part of the
NDA MPs’ delegation*

For most of us in urban India, terror is something experienced usually in films. Even today, the sound of a bullet-belt scraping against bare rocks as Gabbar Singh made his dramatic entry in that chilling scene from Sholay gives us shivers. Alfred Hitchcock’s masterly generation of fear in the viewers’ mind is celebrated because it doesn’t actually happen to us in real life. We read about outlaws spreading terror in the badlands of middle India from the reassuring comfort of our urban homes. We do not usually sense terror that is invisible, cold terror that is palpable in the eyes,

creeping terror that makes people lose even their power of speech. But we came face-to-face with such terror in Nandigram on Tuesday.

Village after village in this violence-ravaged area in West Bengal's East Medinipur district wears a forlorn look. They are virtually bereft of all able-bodied men. Only scrawny elders furtively watched us from a distance. Occasionally, petrified young mothers with small children stood outside their partially destroyed homes with a vacant expression on their faces. We did not encounter any visible CPI(M) presence in the villages. But from the tense look on people's faces, it was apparent that the dreaded party was omnipresent. An eerie silence hung in the air everywhere. In the villages of Nandigram, even babies have forgotten to cry, dogs do not bark here any more.

Most houses here fly freshly-installed red flags with the CPI(M)'s hammer and sickle emblem. We spotted big piles of red flags on the road side, obviously waiting to be hoisted as proclamation of territorial conquest. Every Opposition party office has been razed; their defaced signboards lie on the roadside.

It is now mandatory to fly the CPI(M) flag over every house, especially those belonging to supporters of the Bhoomi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee. Most BUPC men have fled Nandigram, unable to withstand the CPI(M) cadre's superior fire power backed to the hilt by a supine administration and a captive police, often regarded as "cadre in uniform".

We learnt that many BUPC supporters, mainly poor, marginal farmers who cannot afford to leave their fields untended (the paddy crop is ripe, awaiting harvest) are trickling back from their hideouts. If they decide to come back, they are required to first report to the CPI(M)'s Local Committee office, sign an "instrument of surrender", switch political allegiance, undertake not to speak to the media and only then return home carrying a red flag for hoisting atop their house.

We met an ageing man near Adhikary Pada, almost bent over with fear at the sight of over 100 mediapersons and politicians. He haltingly began to respond to our queries: "Who attacked this village?" Tremulously, he said, "Men on motorbikes." Which party, we persisted. He wouldn't say. Somebody prompted, "Why don't you speak out, M-party, wasn't it?" Yes, he muttered and quickly retracted, "I don't know. I wasn't here. I didn't see anything. Now please go away."

A middle-aged woman held Ms Sushma Swaraj's hand and cried bitterly, asking for help to trace her missing sons. Somebody in the media group took out a notepad and sternly asked, "What's your name?" She froze because the name had, howsoever inaudibly, slipped out. Immediately, other mediapersons using their presence of mind directed her not to reveal her identity. Later we were told the CPI(M) was so heavily organised that

it always sent cadre disguised as reporters to extract information from unsuspecting villagers, information that was subsequently used to extract terrible revenge.

The NDA delegation was mobbed on the compound of Nandigram high school (which doubles up as a refugee centre for those who have fled their homes) by wailing women screaming for help to trace their missing husbands or sons. We met a boy not more than 10 years old who saw his mother being shot dead before his eyes. "She was walking in a peace march when they killed her," he mumbled. Gopal has lost his mother Shyamali while his father is missing for months. In Nandigram, "missing" usually means "dead". Gory tales of how bodies were whisked away and dumped in rivers or even brick kilns followed us everywhere.

We planned to visit Satangabari, a village that has borne the brunt of the CPI(M)'s wrath as its residents put up stiff resistance till recently. But we could not reach the spot since the appointed hour to meet Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi in Kolkata was ticking away. But we stopped briefly at Kamalpur, a few km before Satangabari, to inspect a relatively large, two-storied house that had been completely gutted. Its owner, Mohibul, told us he was targeted because his absconding elder brother is a BUPC leader. Last Thursday night a horde of CPI(M) men came to the house, turfed out all its occupants and set it on fire. Only the outer frame remains of what was evidently a bustling house till the other day.

Is Nandigram only an unrelenting tale of sorrow, torture and terror? Not quite. It was really heartening to see that the spirit had not been completely snuffed out. In isolated villages deep in the interior, people are understandably petrified and sullen, their anger smouldering. They dare not express their pent-up rage. But not even the dreaded "Harmad Bahini", local name for the CPI(M)'s private army, has been able to silence residents of Nandigram town for here they have the safety of numbers. We were surprised how quickly a crowd of over 1,000 almost miraculously materialised at the school grounds when our delegation went to meet people staying at the relief camp.

Although there was no plan, Mr LK Advani was persuaded to address the gathering amid full-throated cries demanding "phansi" for Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and controversial ex-MP of the region, Laxman Seth. Trinamool and BJP flags fluttered in many towns en route, crowds gathered to cheer our motorcade all the way to Nandigram, some 160 km from Kolkata. History tells us that terror can suppress people's power of expression only for a brief while. Finally, it is the indomitable spirit of man that triumphs and it is that spirit which moves history.

(Courtesy: The Pioneer)



Lesson from Nandigram

By Vir Sanghvi

Judging by the things I have seen and read over the last week, there are two broad responses to the events that occurred at Nandigram. Both responses are reasonable and fair — even if they contradict each other — but they seem to me to miss the point, nevertheless.

The first response is the one that emanates from those who may be described as Left-leaning intellectuals and fellow travellers. A variation of this argument is also advanced by the CPM's political enemies.

According to this position, the poor people who were attacked in Nandigram were asserting their fundamental rights to hang on to their property and to prevent their farms from being seized. It is shocking that the CPM — long regarded as a friend of the poor — should have been so unsympathetic to their cause. And it is appalling that brute force was used to make some of India's poorest people give up the little pieces of land that they could call their own.

An extension of this response relates to the methods that were used to recapture Nandigram: the allegations of rape, the violence against journalists, the charges of murder etc. These have been widely condemned and the condemnation is understandable.

The second response is unusual in that it unites two completely different ideological groupings: the CII and the CPM. Many industrialists and hardcore party members believe that there was no alternative to the events of last week, no matter how shocking they seem to liberals.

If the CPM had not acted in Nandigram then the entire process of industrialisation would have been halted. It would have become impossible for any state government anywhere to have acquired any land for industrial purposes. The SEZ proposals are already on hold.

But now, no new factory could have come up because farmers and activists would have prevented the acquisition of the land it needed.

Moreover, you have to look at the forces that were active in Nandigram. It is always tempting to attack the CPM given its self-righteous air and the spoilt-brat behaviour it has exhibited as part of the UPA coalition. But Nandigram was controlled by extremist outfits that were so far beyond the pale that they posed a threat to India's democratic system. Islamist elements were present in large numbers as were Maoists who are committed to overthrowing the Indian state.

There was no alternative to the operation that allowed the CPM to regain control of Nandigram. To have allowed the extremists to flourish

would have been to threaten the very foundations of the Indian state.

As I said, both positions have their strengths. On balance, however, the second position has much more merit. None of us is ever happy about the forcible acquisition of land. Equally, we have to accept that it is exactly through such methods that industrialisation and development have taken place all over the world. The best we can hope for is that anybody who is made to give up his or her land — for a factory, for a road, for a railway line etc — is adequately compensated and offered alternative land somewhere else.

The argument about extremists is also well taken. Whatever our views on the CPM, it can never be right for a district to declare itself autonomous of the Indian state and under the control of revolutionary elements. At some stage, the rule of law has to be reimposed and the extremists have to be thrown out.

So why do I think that both responses miss the point?

Well, because they are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the true nature of the CPM. I wrote, some months ago, about the gulf between the way in which anybody who has ever lived in CPM-controlled Calcutta views the party and the glamourised notion that liberals with no real experience of CPM rule have of the hard Left.

Sitting in Delhi or Bombay, we see the CPM as a bunch of democratic communists, of overgrown student leaders who may be committed to an outdated and obsolete ideology but whose hearts are in the right place and who are deeply committed to the plight of the less fortunate.

If you live in the CPM's Bengal, however, you recognise the party for what it truly is: a rigidly disciplined totalitarian outfit which depends on murderous cadres and which has no real patience with democracy or dissent. When we treat the CPM as just another political party, we make a serious mistake. The Congress may have been inspired by the Fabians and the British Labour Party. The BJP may seek inspiration from Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party.

But the CPM's models all come from deeply undemocratic regimes. The CPM began as part of the CPI, a communist party which first venerated the murderous Josef Stalin who killed 20 million people and then went on to support succeeding Soviet regimes that sent dissidents to Gulags. When the CPM broke away from the CPI, it was largely because it supported China rather than Russia (even when China was fighting India). And Chinese communism was as undemocratic as the Russian version. I am not sure if Mao Tse Tung killed as many people as Josef Stalin did but my guess is he came close. Chinese communism led to massacres, tyranny, the complete suppression of human rights and to totalitarianism on a level that was previously unimaginable.

These are the CPM's models. These are the murderous dictators that its leaders worshipped when they were growing up. And it is this legacy that the CPM epitomises.

Integral to the communist notion of governance is that there is no difference between the party and the state. In Russia and in China, party designations counted for much more than government posts. Even here, the CPM Politburo has more clout than elected chief ministers. When Jyoti Basu wanted to accept the prime ministership, it was the Politburo that had the power to stop him. And two months ago, Prakash Karat, a man who has never won any democratic election outside of his own party organisation, nearly forced India into a general election that two of his party chief ministers wanted desperately to avoid.

You need to understand this background to recognise what really happened in Nandigram. Yes, it is true that land acquisition is a fact of life. And it is as true that the state had to reassert control over the troubled district.

But that doesn't explain the events of last week. If it was the state that had to impose the rule of law, then why didn't the West Bengal government send in the police? Instead, it was armed CPM cadres who went into Nandigram and fought pitched battles with the extremists, killing and raping villagers in the process while simultaneously assaulting the media to prevent their violent acts from being recorded.

All this was because the CPM, in the manner of all communist parties, sees no distinction between the party and the state, between the cadres and the police and between the enemies of the party and the enemies of the nation.

Even if Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had been unable to regain control of Nandigram, he could have done what any other chief minister would have and asked Delhi for central forces or, even, the army. But that is not the CPM's way. It treats any threat to the order in West Bengal as a threat to the party. And like all totalitarian parties, it uses its cadres to re-impose its dominance on wayward elements.

Anybody who thinks that the true lesson of Nandigram is about the poor man's right to hold on to his land or to the imposition of the rule of law on extremists misses the point. The debate about acquisition is an old one and there can be no dispute over the need to fight extremism.

The lesson of Nandigram is not about any of those things. It is about the true nature of the CPM, a totalitarian party that does not recognise the difference between the rule of law and the rule of the Politburo. If Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had used the instruments of the state to regain control of Nandigram, many of us would have supported him.

But at the end of the day, he is a communist by instinct and training.

So, he fell back on his cadres. And now, he has only himself to blame as he is forced to defend their murders and rapes. In the process, he has transformed what should have been an operation by the Indian state against extremist elements into a fight between two communist outfits: the powerful CPM and the less powerful Maoists.

(Courtesy: **The Hindustan Times**) ■

MAHASVETA DEVI on Nandigram

Our killing fields

TODAY IS November 15, 2007. Yesterday, in Kolkata, nearly 100,000 people walked on the streets in support of Nandigram. Their slogan was "Tomar nam, amar nam, Nandigram, Nandi-gram." (Your name, my name, Nandigram, Nandigram.) Nandi-gram is a place in East Midnapore district of West Bengal. Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has joined the multinational corporate giants and started acquiring agri-cultural land in West Bengal in the name of industrialisation. Singur in Hooghly went to the Tatas. Nandigram was earmarked for a chemical hub for the Salim Group. Lakshman Seth, the supremo of the Haldia Metropolitan Development Authority, issued notices to Nandi-gram in December 2006. This notice - till date not officially withdrawn by the West Bengal government - triggered the mass killings in Nandigram in January and March 2007. In Nandigram, men, women and children have been - and are being - killed. Women are being raped, and there has been no redressal steps taken by the state government. On the other hand, CPI(M) cadres and hired killers - recruited from adjacent districts, Jharkhand and other places - are killing people with great regularity. Hindus and Muslims are facing and fighting the enemy together. The CPI(M) has ultimately managed to enter Nandi-gram. Hundreds of houses have been demolished; rice, clothes and utensils have been looted; ponds and other water resources have been poisoned. And women were raped. Rape is a tactic that the CPI(M) uses. Yesterday, the people just walked on the streets of Kolkata wearing black badges. I have seldom seen a more dignified and solemn procession. The presence of the young generation was also very impressive. Our writers, painters, singers, cultural workers from the theatre, the cinema and other media joined in. Most impressive

was the huge assemblage of the common people. They are the essence of Kolkata. Donations were being collected. I was so proud of Kolkata. Today, the state government has organised another procession to counter yesterday's protest. My small flat is packed with rice, clothes and blankets. These are being carried to Nandigram by trucks by local volunteers. The sky is dark. The weather forecast says a cyclone is in the offing. Nandigram needs tarpaulins, blankets and rice. Nandigram needs active doctors, selfless workers, especially young people who will show us the way to serve people. More later, when I can.

Mahasveta Devi is a writer and activist. She was awarded the Jnanpith in 1996 and received the Magsaysay Award in 1997

(Courtesy: **The Hindustan Times**)



Message has been delivered

Uday Basu

When the CPI-M Politburo member-turned-chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee transformed Nandigram, which was an “oasis of peace” till 11 months back, into “killing fields”, he ceased to be a nephew of the rebel, young poet, Sukanta, and became a cousin of Pol Pot, the blood thirsty monster who led the ethnic cleansing of Cambodia in the 1970s. Incidentally, the name of the communist outfit Pol Pot headed, Khmer Rouge, had a red tag (“rouge” in French means red) like the colour of Mr Bhattacharjee's party flag.

After the ruthless red terror in Nandigram for about a week since 3 November when democracy was buried alive and the ghost of Stalin let out of the grave to haunt the hapless villages, Mr Bhattacharjee and his fellow comrades, such as the Karat couple, have forfeited the moral right to utter a single word on the present day version of Nazi concentration camp - the prison of Abu Ghraib. For, Nandigram was turned into something far worse than Abu Ghraib.

From 3 November Mr Bhattacharjee has forfeited the right to call President George W Bush, which he did after the US invasion of Iraq, “the leader of a gang of killers”, since the description fits him no less.

From 3 November Karat & Co. has lost the right to indulge in the luxury of the rhetorical outburst against the USA that it's out to clamp its hegemony over the Gulf and other Asian countries.

The Marxist chief minister must now shed all his pretensions about being a man of culture and refinement and take off his mask of being a “humane and sensitive” head of a government; he has been wearing the mask since he assumed office.

Those who know him had no doubt about his real identity when he donned the chief minister's mantle and projected himself as Mr Clean, both physically (clad in immaculately white and starched dhoti and kurta and a mop of grey hair) and mentally.

It was a makeover the Marxists desperately needed after Mr Jyoti Basu lost his sheen as a “leader of leaders” as a logical corollary to warming the seat of power for about 23 years. His tenure ended as one of great expectations scandalously belied. He became a liability for the party and Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee came within striking distance of capturing power.

The CPI-M, then under the stewardship of the astute political manager, Anil Biswas, staged a coup of sorts by replacing Mr Basu with Mr Bhattacharjee six months before the 2001 Assembly poll. The gamble richly paid off as much because of Miss Banerjee's fickle-minded political behaviour as of Mr Bhattacharjee's image of integrity.

Mr Bhattacharjee responded to the needs of the times so well that the people hailed him as one who could deliver the goods with elan. To be true to the image he and his party were craftily building, he rushed to a remote village in South 24-Parganas shaken by a series of dacoities. The newspapers splashed his photograph as he was perched on a cycle-van to reach the villages which lacked the roads to let his motorcade trundle along. Here was a common man's chief minister, the people thought. He perfectly played to the gallery matching the words he spoke to this writer in an interview in *The Statesman* during the run-up to the 2001 Assembly poll that he wanted to be “known”, as Tagore wrote, “as one of yours” (people's).

Six years later, the same chief minister couldn't even think in the wildest stretch of his imagination to go to Nandigram and see with his own eyes why the ill-clad, ill-fed villagers had fortified themselves against the state administration and the cadres of the party that runs the administration.

The explanation that the chief minister gave to justify the Stalinist repression when the media wasn't allowed to move into the war zone, where a one-sided battle was waged by heavily armed CPI-M cadres with the police withdrawn, was that the people of Nandigram had evicted 1,500 CPI-M supporters from their homes and didn't let them return.

“Our men paid them back in their own coin”, the CPI-M man-turned chief minister gloated after the operation was over. When told that the

peace that was restored in this barbaric way was that of the graveyard, Mr Bhattacharjee shot back shamelessly and with overweening pride: “Was there heavenly peace during the past 11 months?”

Well, to “pay” the chief minister “back in his own coin”, of course, Nandigram was an oasis of peace (an expression he is so fond of) till 11 months ago, but who destroyed the “heavenly peace?” It was Mr Bhattacharjee himself in collusion with his party.

It’s the height of hypocrisy for the chief minister to pretend that the people of Nandigram overnight formed the Bhumi Uchched Protirodh Committee, took up arms, hounded CPI-M activists out of their homes and turned Nandigram into a liberated zone. It was Mr Bhattacharjee who “murdered the sleep” of these wretched villagers by trying to take away their land for the now aborted mega chemical hub project to favour big capital, such as the Salim Group of Indonesia.

One feels like reminding him of Macbeth: “Glamis hath murder’d sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more.”

It’s no argument as put forward by Mr Bhattacharjee that the people of Nandigram should have laid down their arms and embraced CPI-M cadres as their brethren the moment he announced no land would be acquired and there won’t be a chemical hub there. The plain truth is: Who would trust such a chief minister?

So, Nandigram concluded eternal vigil is the price of freedom. Only a painfully protracted peace process, as advocated by veteran politicians like Mr Jyoti Basu and the Forward Bloc’s Mr Ashoke Ghosh, was the only way out of the Nandigram imbroglio.

But, Mr Bhattacharjee and his party had other compulsions. They will have to face the rural electorate in the panchayat poll only a few months away. For them Nandigram in the hands of villagers owing allegiance to the BUPC was a chilling reality that the CPI-M can be “paid back in its own coin” and that the rural people could no longer be chained by the fear of Marxist muscle power.

The revolt by near-starving rural masses against corrupt ration dealers, many of whom were CPI-M leaders and their kin, was spreading frighteningly for the past few months. Only if the backbone of resistance against CPI-M terror was broken at Nandigram, the message could be driven home to the rural population that they mustn’t dare defy the Marxists, or else they would meet the fate of Nandigram.

The chief minister certainly calculates the message has been delivered and the Opposition may not be able even to field their candidates in the panchayat poll as it happened the last time when it complained that about 25,000 candidates couldn’t file their nomination. If that happens, the Stalinist operation at Nandigram would be considered a grand success.

But the gain would be far outweighed by the loss of whatever credibility the Marxists have had as champions of the poor and staunch opponents of the politics of gun and political vendetta. Will they now be able to expand their influence, as it resolved in their last party Congress, outside the three states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura? After they bared their fangs in Nandigram not even the most die-hard Marxists would believe so, since the country has seen the real face of the Karats and their lieutenants in West Bengal.

(The author is a Special Representative of The Statesman, Kolkata)

(Courtesy: The Statesman) ■

Nandigram, a blot on our democracy

By Devi Cherian

The Nandigram tragedy is a blot on our democracy. The orgy of violence leading to the capture of the village by the CPM cadre has proved that might is right in West Bengal.

The war zone of Nandigram State might has emboldened CPM cadre so much that even paramilitary forces could reach the village only after the cadre had thrown out the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee members from the area. In a most inhuman act, the CPM is learnt to have led a “reoccupation” rally using hundreds of captured BUPC members as a shield. Trust our democracy not to take any action against such violence right under the nose of a State Government. Even the Governor’s advice was ignored and protests by allies silenced. Intellectuals, filmmakers and artists protesting silently against the massacre were beaten up and arrested. Among them were Aparna Sen and Rituparno Ghosh and Suman Mukherjee. Forget Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee who is the State Government’s bete-noire, even Medha Patkar was not spared.

To recount how a legitimate protest by rural folk was countered with brutal force: At the beginning of 2007, villagers of Nandigram rose up against the acquisition of their land for an SEZ. Their protest was silenced by the police. The red cadre then moved in and 11 people were killed in clashes. In the name of restoring order in March, the police connived with the CPM cadre to attack protesters. In the ensuing mayhem, over 150 people were killed. The fresh round of violence last week has ended in the cadre taking total control of Nandigram. Any political opposition to this brazen occupation is disdainfully silenced by the CPM who enjoys a majority in the Assembly. The entire episode raises disturbing issues.

Can a State Government be allowed to transgress its limits just because it holds a majority? With what face can the CPM criticise other State Governments when innocents, including Dalits, are being attacked by their own cadre in their own State.

The much touted land reforms and distribution of small plots to the landless, supposed to be the panacea of rural ills, have clearly not brought about a utopia for the masses. A much higher rate of growth is called for. The problem, therefore, of acquiring agricultural land for industrial purposes is a truism which no political party can deny.

So, why not come together and devise a formula which can be followed by all States, from the so-called secular ones to the seemingly egalitarian State of West Bengal?

(Courtesy: Pioneer) ■

NIGHT WITHOUT END

By Ravik Bhattacharya

There's fear and suspicion lurking at every corner in Nandigram, where CPI(M) cadres patrol the streets and the protestors they have ousted flock to relief camps and hospitals after sundown.

Ravik Bhattacharya and photographer Subham Dutta spend a night in Nandigram to find that the darkness lingers on even after sunrise

At the Nandigram Block Hospital, the eerie silence is broken by the groans of the injured. Then there is a scream that peters out. Another death? It's midnight. A medical staff walks up to the hospital gate where anxious villagers stand in a huddle and says something. Basudeb Purwa, a supporter of the Bhoomi Uchched Protirodh Committee (BUPC), which has been at the receiving end of the CPI(M) cadres' wrath for the past week, turns around and smiles. His wife Sabita has given birth to a girl.

"Sir, it is a girl. My first



baby," beams Purwa.

It's the first good news he has heard in months. A moment of hope in times of despair. But it's a moment, just that. For, he can't shake off the terror that has gripped him.

"The CPI(M) men beat up my family members and ransacked my house because we took part in the BUPC rally," says Purwa. The violence came at a time his wife was going into labour, but the primary health centre near their village had been shut for the past 11 months.

"I put her on a rickshaw van when they attacked my village. The CPI(M) cadres stopped us to check a number of times on our way. I implored them to let us through," says Purwa.

His wife gave birth in the women's ward, alongside women injured in the violence that has torn Nandigram in the past fortnight, with the CPI(M) taking on supporters of the BUPC,

the group which is protesting against the Government's acquisition of land for industrialisation.

Bhaktipada Das, among those outside the hospital, is also a proud father, of a baby boy born in the evening. "My wife and child are fine," he smiles.

It's Tuesday night and it has been three hours since we decided to travel through the night in a Nandigram where the day these days is as dark as the night. A Nandigram still pricking from the violence unleashed by the CPI(M) activists, adamant on recapturing their fiefdom that they had lost to the protesters. The turf the protesters led by BUPC are protecting has been acquired as land for a chemical hub by the West Bengal Government under the SEZ policy. In March, clashes between police and the people took over 14 lives. There was simmering tension in Nandigram since, but the CPI(M) supporters had to leave the town alone. Until last week, when armed communist activists attacked the people and regained lost ground.

The moon is visible; so are thousands of stars on this clear winter night (electricity supply is erratic in these parts). This is our night journey in Nandigram.

9.30 pm

Nandigram Town

Men of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are positioned at major crossings as others patrol the streets. As the town winds down, the roads empty out and even the crowd outside the police station, the busiest spot here for the past 11 months, disperses.

RP Singh, a CRPF officer out with his men, says they have been here for just two days. "The town shuts down early here," says Singh, com-

paring it with the industrial town of Dhanbad where they were stationed.

“We are doing our duty. Reassuring the people is most vital and our men are doing their best. We will patrol all night so that the people can sleep,” says Singh.

9.45 pm

The state electricity board

does it bit to send people to sleep with a blackout. It’s the third power failure this evening but the shopkeepers and food-stall owners aren’t overly disturbed. No call centre or helpline. Within minutes, candles and lanterns are taken out and lit.

10 pm

A teashop

near the Nandigram police station is pulling its shutters down for the day, the last in the area to do so. Owner Harihar rinses the cups and the kettle while some hangers-on talk in hushed tones of the deprivations of the past 11 months, the horrors of the past few days and a dread of the future.

“Hundreds of people died, bodies were thrown into the river,” they say, “as armed cadres attacked villages. Now the CPI(M) is in charge and we have been told to join their rallies. What do we do? We have to think of our lives first,” says one of the teashop regulars, Zulfikar Ali.

“Armed cadres are openly doing the rounds on bikes,” he says.

Harihar’s shop is the only one in the neighbourhood that remains open so late. “All shops are closed by now. I keep it open till now because of the thana nearby. Business has been good for the past 11 months. So many people come to the thana, so many policemen. They like my tea,” he says.

11 pm

We are the only civilians

on the roads. We head off for the relief camp at Brajamohan Tiwari School on one edge of Nandigram town. The school is now a camp for thousands of people from neighbouring villages seeking shelter from the CPI(M) marauders.

The sickly smell of fear and waste clings to the school. A few halogen lights break the darkness. On the school ground, hundreds queue up for their relief “dinner”. Most have plastic packets in their hands, the lucky ones have sal-leaf plates.

“When armed CPI(M) cadres set fire to my house in Saudkhali, I managed to save my two children but nothing else. Now we have noth-

ing,” says Sabita Jana, a housewife.

Volunteers dole out a few ladles of rice, dal and vegetables. Even women with newborn children wait their turn.

The men sit inside the classrooms, desultorily having their dinner, while the women wait their turn.

There are no Hindus and Muslims here. No upper caste or lower caste. They are all refugees. The sleeping arrangements are simple: women and children sleep inside the classrooms, the men outside.

Four armed guards man the locked gates but their number seems inadequate. “Armed CPI(M) activists sometimes come and threaten us even here,” adds Jana. “I could not find my husband. My elder son went missing when CPI(M) men fired on a peace michil (rally) a few days ago. I found him yesterday in Nandigram hospital; he can barely speak. Shyamal — my boy — is just 15 years old.”

Most women here haven’t been able to trace their husbands and relatives. A non-governmental organisation has brought a medical team but their number is hopelessly outmatched by that of the injured and the ill. Bhabani Das, a leader of the BUPC, says: “It is very hard to arrange food, shelter and protection for so many people. Some are returning home to face the inhuman atrocities. It is especially hard for women and children.”

At the Block Hospital, we meet with life. And walk on.

1 Am

Nandigram police station

A couple of jeeps drive out with CRPF men and a police guide, leaving the station almost deserted. Behind the lone sentry is the sub-inspector on night duty, Pradyut Ghosh.

“Everyone is so tired, they’ve all gone to sleep. For the past 11 months, we have been on strict duty. All leaves were cancelled. Now we have to take care of the CRPF. The streams of VIPs, netas also take their toll on us,” says Ghosh. The silver lining: the lockups are empty. “No usual complaints of thefts or anything. That’s the only positive side of the situation,” says the SI.

2 Am

Maheshpur Bazaar

Enveloped in winter mist, the streets are deserted; stray dogs bark their annoyance. All doors are bolted. The few villagers who are still out melt away when they see the Express car. A lone figure emerges from behind a row of shops, torch in hand. Introductions over, he gives a signal and 15 people come out of the dark.

They are all night guards who, for the last 11 months, had taken turns to patrol the area. By day they are shopkeepers and villagers.

“Some of us returned two days ago after the BUPC went away. Today the CPI(M) rules here and everything is peaceful. We are guarding against the BUPC people,” says one. “Political allegiance does not matter, our homes and shops do,” says another. “Now things are peaceful, but there is fear in the air. We have seen people being shot dead and houses burnt down. We try and save whatever we can,” says Shankar Parul, a shopkeeper-cum-night guard.

A final word of caution: “No one will speak to you here.” And it is not safe for us to be here, we are told. We move on.

2.30 Am

Tekhali Bridge

Bordering Nandigram and Khejuri, the bridge demarcates the strongholds of the BUPC and the CPI(M). Tonight, dressed in red flags, the bridge stands deserted. The sandbag bunkers, once used by the police, are unmanned. Neither the CRPF, nor the Eastern Frontier Rifles, which has a camp nearby, are present on the bridge.

3 Am

Maheshpur High School

Our car is stopped by a group of lathi-wielding CPI(M) youths. Eight men with flags and lathis greet us and ask us a number of questions and check our credentials. “We take turns to watch the area. You never know when the BUPC people might retaliate,” says Manu Das, fish vendor and party cadre, almost apologetically. “We have formed a village rakskhi bahini and the BUPC and outsiders are not allowed. Which side are you on?” asks Das.

Further down, we meet Swapan Das, a CPI(M) supporter who says he was chased from the village by the Trinamool Congress adherents heading the protest against land acquisition in February and has only now managed to return home.

“The Trinamool people burnt down my house in February and I fled along with my wife and children. They committed atrocities, beat up people and raped girls. We have spent 11 months in the Khejuri camp in inhuman conditions. My food stall was ransacked and my two bigha land remained untilled. Now it is our turn,” says Das, who returned home last Wednesday. Manu Das, the fish vendor, also talks revenge. “We have a list of neighbours who will not be allowed to come back. Their property belongs to us now. If they try to return, they will be finished.”

CPI(M) cadres tell us that they are opening the schools closed for months. Women feel safer now, they claim.

3.30 Am

A tea stall

near Hospital More crossing is the first to open. The owner, 78-year-old Lakshmikanta Jana, begins his early morning routine.

“For the past 11 months, fear and bloodshed have ruled the area. But business was good. I am the first to open, at 2.30 am everyday. People have thronged the hospital and many of them depend on me for their tea and bread,” says Jana.

He has been running this shop for the past 22 years. “Never have I seen such trouble in Nandigram. This was a very peaceful area until Buddhadeb (Bhattacharjee, the West Bengal Chief Minister) decided to take our land,” he says. “Whenever there was firing and bombing in the area, I closed my shop. Four days ago, when the CPI(M) men came on motorcycles, there was a lot of trouble. They sprayed bullets on the walls,” he adds. The night was dark, but the rising sun does not appear to dispel the darker days in Nandigram.

(Courtesy: The Indian Express) ■

BENGAL: NANDIGRAM ATTACK

The Fuzzy Arc Of Subversion

Saikat Datta

The MHA points to the presence of Maoists, but also takes to task Bengal's policing efforts

Last fortnight, National Security Advisor (NSA) M.K. Narayanan revealed that Maoists could be behind the latest troubles in Nandigram, especially the violence “in one area”. The disclosure came after receiving inputs from the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) that some Maoist elements from Purulia, a neighbouring district, had moved into Nandigram to exploit the unrest in the area. Apparently, they were also training activists of the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), a local organisation supported among others by the Trinamool Congress.

According to senior MHA officials, three reasons point towards the possible involvement of Maoists. The landmines and IEDs used required a certain expertise, usually associated with the Maoists. The digging of trenches to ensure the CPI(M) cadre could not move in, is a classic tactic

used by the Maoists in Chhattisgarh and other Naxal-affected areas. Finally, the ability of the local protesters to sustain their agitation for close to 11 months is another indication the Maoists were either training them or even providing some leadership to the movement. In fact, MHA officials discussed the Maoist link threadbare before taking a call on sending a CRPF batallion to Nandigram.

The MHA is also upset with the Bengal government for not taking adequate measures to contain the situation. The ministry has repeatedly pointed out to the state government that it needs to fill in the nearly 12,000 police posts lying vacant for years. Upset with the efforts in this regard, the MHA had even threatened to take back 50 per cent of the funds allotted to the state government for police modernisation. Incidentally, West Bengal has the highest number of police posts lying vacant among the Naxal-affected states, say MHA sources. The NSA had described the situation in Nandigram as “far too sensitive”. However, West Bengal home secretary P.R. Roy says that there were no confirmed reports of Maoists being spotted by the state’s security apparatus. MHA sources told Outlook there was initial reluctance to send a CRPF battalion into Nandigram because the inputs from the state government were thin. “The troops have no local intelligence, they would be on unfamiliar terrain and the situation was politically complex. All this had to be factored in before the CRPF could be sent in,” said an MHA official.

■

Conservative Estimates From Vietnam to Nandigram

Ravi Shnaker Kapoor

IN the November 15 rally in Kolkata in which prominent intellectuals protested against the brutality of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) at Nandigram, a poster had a picture of Karl Marx with the caption “Not In My Name.” The poster actually sums up the thinking of the entire intellectual class: Marxism is a great ideology that has been hijacked or appropriated by the goons masquerading as Marxists. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The thinking is deeply flawed on several counts. First, to say that the CPM is not the real Marxist party is like saying that Saudi Arabia is a true Islamic nation (It is a country where rape victims are flogged. Some dogmatic liberals may say that Saudi Arabia is not truly Islamic!). Facts,

however, are facts. The CPM is Marxist and Saudi Arabia is Islamic.

Second, there is a mountain of evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that communism is the most violent ideology the world has ever witnessed, killing more than 100 million people in various countries in the twentieth century.

Yet, our intellectuals continue to deceive themselves, and others, about the reality of communism. They should be asked a few simple questions: Didn’t you know about Stalin, his murderous purges in which hundreds of thousands were eliminated, some of them being his own closest friends? Didn’t you know about the holocaust-like collectivisation drives in which millions perished during Stalin’s reign? Didn’t you know that there was a time when 25,000 people were dying every day? Didn’t you know that Mao was responsible for the death of 70 million people in peacetime? Didn’t you know anything about the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot, about the hills of skulls in Cambodia?

If the answer to all these questions is yes, then the intellectuals should not be complaining, for the CPM goons are angels in comparison to the dreaded Cheka set up by Lenin and developed by Stalin. They are no match to the young, violent students unleashed on ordinary people by Mao; nor are CPM cadres faintly as merciless as the thugs who slaughtered millions in Cambodia.

Unfortunately, our intellectuals answer in the negative. Parroting communists’ lies, they say that all the bad things said about the Soviet Union, Maoist China, or Pol Pot’s Cambodia are either ‘Western propaganda’ or gross exaggerations. And this is the crux of the problem.

Like the neo-Nazi negationists who claim that Hitler never killed the Jews and the Holocaust is a Zionist fiction of gigantic proportions, our intellectuals are just not willing to accept that communism is an evil ideology. This evilness is evident not only in the countries where the Reds ruled but also in many of the writings of Marx. For instance, in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels wrote, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

As American philosopher Thomas Sowell said, “Most people who read The Communist Manifesto probably have no idea that it was written by a couple of young men who had never worked a day in their lives, and who nevertheless spoke boldly in the name of ‘the workers’.” Marxism is violent but enthralling poetry, but it masquerades as philosophy. In the Marxian scheme of things, there is only struggle, conflict, class war; there is no harmony, no peaceful coexistence, no philanthropy or altruism. Therefore, Marx wanted to establish a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” a clever euphemism for the Communist party’s tyranny.

Unsurprisingly, it has always attracted excitable, violent, and sentimentalist people. And our intellectuals have always sympathised

with such people. Nandigram has certainly strained the cozy relationship between communists and intellectuals. On November 15, intellectuals led a rally, in which over 50,000 people participated, against the CPM's brutality at Nandigram. The intellectuals included filmmakers Aparna Sen, Rituparno Ghosh, Gautam Ghosh, authors Mahasweta Devi and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, poet Shankho Ghosh, celebrated movie cameraman Soumendu Roy, artists Suvapasanna and Jogen Choudhury. Even Mrinal Sen, considered close to West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, made common cause with other prominent public figures.

There was also the permanent protester, Medha Patkar, exhorting the participants to march to Nandigram. "Raise the slogan: Tomar naam amaar naam Nandigram Nandigram (Your name, my name, Nandigram, Nandigram)," she said. This was on the lines of the famous Leftist slogan of the 1960s against America's intervention in Vietnam—Tomaar naam amaar naam Vietnam Vietnam.

It took a Nandigram to wake up intellectuals to the reality of Marxists. But when would they wake up to the reality of Marxism? We can paraphrase Bob Dylan, the cult poet-singer of the 1960s whose poem 'Blowin' in the Wind' was sung at the anti-CPM protests, and say: "How many ears must an intellectual have/ Before he can hear people cry?/ Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows/ That too many people have died?/ The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,/ The answer is blowin' in the wind."

(The writer is the author of *How India's Intellectual Spread Lies* (2007), Vision Books.)



Ashok Mitra on Nandigram

Ashok Mitra is a former Chairman of the Agricultural Prices Commission and Chief Economic Advisor of the Government of India. He was the first Finance Minister of the Left Front Government in West Bengal in 1977, and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. He has been a close friend to Monthly Review, from Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff to the present editorial committee. Ashok Mitra assisted in the creation of Monthly Review's sister edition in India, the Analytical Monthly Review. His heartfelt appeal to the central leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) for a fundamental change of course is of the greatest significance.

— John Mage

Till death I would remain guilty to my conscience if I keep mum about the happenings of the last two weeks in West Bengal over Nandigram. One gets torn by pain too. Those against whom I am speaking have been my comrades at some point of time. The party whose leadership they adorn has been the centre of my dreams and works for the last 60 years.

Let me start with the Governor. Those who remember Anantprasad Sharma or T.V. Rajeshwar would admit that it's a great fortune of this state and the government that they have someone as gentle, well-mannered, sympathetic, modest and erudite as Gopalkrishna Gandhi as Governor.

Let me also add that he had consented to the post because of the interest shown by the central leadership of the CPI(M). What has been his fault that the ruling party is so determined to declare him as its enemy?

It is being said that the Governor has termed the return of those who were forced to flee Nandigram to take shelter in Khejuri as illegitimate and unpardonable. This is nothing but a travesty of truth. He has not done so. He has condemned, in no uncertain terms, the way in which they have been brought back.

By now the machinations that went on behind the return is known to the world. The government had enough scope to rehabilitate these devastated people in their own homes through political mediation or administrative arrangements during the last 11 months. The attempts through unilateral threats, police action and indiscriminate firing had a tragic end. But there were still many avenues left to be explored. The government could have announced compensation for the family of the dead and injured after the idiotic incident of firing.

Promises could have been made to take action against the police officers and personnel involved in the crime. Days passed, the government did nothing.

The senior-most political leader of the state and the country had to take the initiative to call up Mamata Banerjee, sit and discuss with her a few conditions for resolution. The government was intimidated, but did not proceed. On the initiative of senior Forward Bloc leader Ashok Ghosh, an all-party meeting was convened. That also got stalled due to the indirect pressure from the ruling party.

Meanwhile, as was inevitable, opposition parties started using the unstable situation of Nandigram to their own advantage. The flame of tension was kept burning by a variety of organisations of different colours and classes. The whining one hears from the ruling party over this has no rationale whatsoever. The responsibility of unspoken suffering of those who spent 11 months as homeless rests squarely on the shoulders of the government. It is better to look further into the past. Nandigram was not after all the 'first blood'. The Singur episode had happened before that.

The government does not like nationalised industries; they want to set up private industries in the state. Hence, there are promises to acquire land on behalf of the national and international capitalists. Since there was declaration of industrialisation in the election manifesto, and since they have won 235 seats, it was assumed that there was no need for preparations. All of a sudden, peasants were told: leave the land, the masters would set up industries here. If it had learned even a very little from the protests, clashes and the blood-letting at Singur, the government would have been more careful in Nandigram. But that was not to be, it remained as arrogant as ever.

Even the top leaders of the ruling party have been saying there was no existence of opposition parties in Nandigram. The government itself provided them with the opportunity to grow. The loyal followers of the ruling party declared revolt and those who were not with them were driven out. The onus of this rests on the government as well.

For 11 months, complete silence and inactivity were carefully maintained. No political or administrative alternative was explored. Suddenly, a new plot was hatched. As has been repeatedly admitted by the Bengal Home Secretary, the police was instructed to remain inactive. Mercenaries were collected from across the state. Workers of the ruling party encircled Nandigram from all directions. Birds, bees, flies, journalists — no one was given the permission to penetrate the blockade.

And then the light brigade of the ruling party charged in, beat the wayward militants of Nandigram to a pulp and into submission. Those who had fled returned. However, the moment of their return saw a parallel

and opposite incident. Houses were torched anew; those who were inside Nandigram were butchered in a massive celebration of revenge. At present, the Nandigram sky is reverberating with screams of the recent batch of refugees. The problem does not involve Singur and Nandigram alone.

It is much more deep and serious. The repetition of mistakes has become a habit. Just consider this for a minute: it has only been a year-and-a-half since the Left Front has won a massive mandate. And what examples of arrogance and stupidity during this brief span. Come what may, we shall have control over every nook and corner of the state. The cricket board will get its chief elected by our dictates. If our candidate loses, we would say, "Evil power has won, we will chase him out." We are an all-knowing government: from cricket, poetry, theatre, films to the magic of land acquisition — we know everything. Neither should anyone lecture us on the pros and cons of the nuclear deal, for we have won 235 seats. Jyoti Basu won more seats in 1987 but he was never heard to mouth such hubris.

Not only hubris, ineptitude also. Decades have passed shouting hoarse about universal education, and still Bengal is behind so many states. Money is flowing in from the Centre for employment generation schemes, there is zero administrative initiative. The hungry and the unemployed go hungry and unemployed. The Centre has arranged for wheat and rice. These are not even picked up so that they could be sent to the middle and lower classes through the public distribution system.

One can borrow S.D. Burman's song to describe what the CPI(M) was in the state a few decades ago: "You are not what you were." Ninety per cent of the party members have joined after 1977, 70 per cent after 1991.

They do not know the history of sacrifices of the party. To them ideological commitment to revolution and socialism is simply a fading folktale. As the new ideology is development, many of them associated with the party are in the search for personal development. They have come to take, not to give. One efficient way to bag privileges is to flatter the masters.

The party has turned into a wide open field of flatterers and court jesters. Moreover, there has been a rising dominance of 'anti-socials'.

For different reasons, every political party has to lend patronage to 'anti-socials', they remain in the background and are called into duty at urgent times. In the 1970s, these anti-socials had reached the top rung of the state Congress. I fear the same fate is awaiting the communist party.

I feel sorry for Jyoti Basu. Of the four ministerial colleagues who took the oath as members of the first Left Front government with him on June 21, 1977, only I am still alive. His current state — like imprisoned Shah Jahan — saddens me deeply. But my real concern lies elsewhere.

Mamata Banerjee is the safest insurance for the current ruling party. Urban and rural masses may have become discontented with the Left Front, but whenever they imagine Banerjee's ascent to power, the sheer terror of that possibility has made them vote for the Left Front.

But if it comes to a situation that the hubris and ineptitude of leaders of the Left Front government frustrate them so much that they begin to think there is no difference really, it's all tweedledum and tweedledee, that will be the real disaster. For notice the behaviour, patronage, programme, mode of action, speech of Mamata Banerjee — she personifies fascism. My ardent appeal to the central leadership of the party which I still love to think to be mine: please think it over. You shiver at the terror of Maoism. Will that shivering compel you to throw West Bengal into the gutter of fascism?

This is an edited extract of the article that appeared in Anandabazar Patrika on 14 November 2007. It has been translated from Bengali by Debarshi Das and appeared in the Hindustan Times on 19 November 2007.

(Courtesy: Hindustan Times) ■

Cadres slap Nandigram 'return fine'

By Kinsuk Basu

New homeless allege demands to pay money and obeisance to Red flag

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's "boys" have not just been paying back opponents in their own coin. They are also taking hard cash, according to the new homeless in Nandigram.

Local CPM workers have ordered their homeless rivals to pay a "fine" of Rs 2,000 to Rs 10,000 if they want to return, supporters of the Bhoomi Uchchhed Pratirodh Committee.

This is apart from the "red flag" they have to plant near their door and joining all CPM processions to demonstrate their support for the party.

Four days after the CP(M)'s bloody recapture of all the Nandigram villages, misery has returned for BUPC supporters in another form: a "jarimana". The fine depends on the area of the land they owned.

"My wife, who is all alone at Daudpur, has told me how CP(M) cadres

threatened her saying I would have to pay a fine whenever I return," said Rabiul Islam Khan.

The 64-year-old's only son Rahul is still hiding at his in-laws place in Chandipur.

With his wife also informing him that the cadres had warned of "stern action" once the family returned, the former employee of Duckback company said he had decided against going back.

"*Buddhadebbabu key bolben, aamra aar bari phirtey chaai na,*" he said, alluding to the chief minister's repeated assertion that BUPC supporters will be persuaded to return.

"Besides, there have also been reports of how the cadres have been beating up those who have dared to return. At night, they move around with faces covered. You think I will return under these circumstances?"

Local CP(M) leaders refused to comment on the "return fine" or the other conditions imposed by party cadres, saying there might be some "hiccups". Rabiul isn't the only one who has made up his mind not to return. It's the same story across parts of Brindabanchowk, Roynagar, Jalbunia, Takapura, Gokulnagar and Adhikaripara — areas that till a few days back were BUPC strongholds.

"CP(M) leaders held a meeting at Takapura where they said I would have to pay Rs 1.5 lakh if I wanted to come back. My fault is I was a key hand in organising the BUPC movement in that zone for the last 11 months," said Sheikh Sahauddin.

"Forget administrative moves, if you ask any of the homeless here, they would all tell you how they are dying to return home but won't. Move around and you will know why."

In his mid-30s, Sahauddin had joined people like Rabiul and others in the fight to protect the land their forefathers had handed down. While some took part in active protests through the Trinamul Congress-backed BUPC, others remained silent sympathisers.

Now, days after what CP(M) state secretary Biman Bose described as a "new sunrise", they live in a situation where fear reigns and return means switching allegiance.

"The other day, a gang of supporters barged into my chamber and went on a rampage for over four hours from 3pm and then left us homeless. If I have to return, I will have to participate in CP(M)-led processions and even ensure that the red flag always flies atop my house," said Dr Imadul Mohammed of Daudpur.

The SDO of Haldia, Sankar Halder, convened an all-party meeting to ensure the homeless could return. BUPC members boycotted the meet, saying the committee was not invited and that bike-borne cadres were still spreading terror across Nandigram.

Sheikh Sohidullah, the CP(M)'s local committee secretary for Nandigram, said the party wants people to return home. "The CP(M) has always advocated peace in Nandigram and now that it is back, it's time normality returned. If people are facing any problems, the party will look into it," he said. Not many are convinced.

(Courtesy: **The Telegraph**) ■

Nandigram issue has created chasm among people of West Bengal: Noam Chomsky

By Suman Guha Mozumder

Leading intellectuals from the United States and Europe, including Noam Chomsky and Victoria Brittain, have expressed concern and distress over the recent developments in West Bengal on the Nandigram issue that has created a chasm among people in the state "sharing similar values."

In a statement christened 'To our Friends in Bengal', over a dozen scholars and academics, who have been monitoring the state of affairs in West Bengal, and Nandigram in particular, said that the events in West Bengal have overtaken the optimism that some of them have experienced during trips to the State.

"We are concerned about the rancor that has divided the public space, created what appear to be unbridgeable gaps between people who share similar values. It is this that distresses us. We hear from people on both sides of this chasm, and we are trying to make some sense of the events and the dynamics," the statement said.

"Obviously, our distance prevents us from saying anything definitive. We continue to trust that the people of Bengal will not allow their differences on some issues to tear apart the important experiments undertaken in the state (land reforms, local self-government)," it said.

"We send our fullest solidarity to the peasants who have been forcibly dispossessed. We understand that the government has promised not to build a chemical hub in the area around Nandigram. We understand that those who had been dispossessed by the violence are now being allowed back to their homes, without recrimination," the statement said.

"We understand that there is now talk of reconciliation. This is what we favour."

Among those who signed the statement included Chomsky, an institute professor and professor emeritus of linguistics at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an renowned linguist, philosopher, political activist and author; Brittain, a former associate foreign editor of the Guardian, and a research associate at the London School of Economics; author Tariq Ali; Howard Zinn, historian, author and playwright; Susan George, an American author who is chair of the Planning Board of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam and Vijay Prasad, George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and Professor of International Studies in Trinity College, in Hartford, Connecticut.

(Courtesy: **rediffmail.com**)■

Notes on Nandigram

By Bhaswati Chakravorty

It was a day's trip. On November 18, , I travelled to Nandigram with a small group of people from different non-governmental organizations. We went first to the relief camp in Brajamohan Tewari Shikshaniketan, and then travelled down the road past Sonachura to Bhangaberia bridge. Some of the people who spoke to us were hesitant to be named or photographed, but many were willing that we should know their names. That seemed important to them, like a signature to all that they were saying.

Just before we left Calcutta, I met a woman from Adhikaripara, who had escaped to Calcutta. She had been one of the victims of the March 14 violence when, while at the puja where women and children had gathered, she was hit with a lathi, then had fallen choking and dazed with tear gas fumes into a field, from where she was dragged away and possibly raped by three men. She does not remember very well, but she still bleeds heavily if she tries to do any physical work.

But why was she in Calcutta? In the months after March, she and other women in the neighbouring villages, had built up small women's groups of resistance. Now that "they", the CPI(M), had "recaptured" the villages, she was on the run.

I asked her if they had been told that the police might use force that day at the puja. She said no one expected it; they had been told the police might come, but they would go away when they saw so many women and children. This was my first personal encounter with the enigmatic meshing of agency, consciousness, memory, victimhood and political play in Nandigram, something that would wrap itself around me more confusingly through the day.

As we approached Nandigram, we were overtaken by a heavyweight police convoy. The director-general of police, Anup Vohra, was entering Nandigram to hold a meeting in the police station. Later that evening, it was reported that the meeting had been about a change in the positions of CRPF camps; within another day, it was not so.

We saw CRPF personnel and vehicles, usually clustered in the town and around junctions with bazaars and shops on the way, and occasionally standing by the almost empty road. It felt cold on a sunny day to see a soldier standing under the thatched roof of a mud hut by the roadside, gun poised. Green fields, shady groves and shimmering ponds stretched for miles around us, and behind him, as we passed.

The vista of the enormous and beautiful school with its green grounds, familiar now to every newspaper reader and TV viewer in Bengal, opened like magic the moment our car passed through the gates in a narrow, crowded street. In spite of the twelve to thirteen hundred people who were there that morning — apart from the many men running the camp — the area looked tidy, orderly. The population there is a fluctuating one; reports say that almost half the people we may have seen there that day have gone back to their homes in the week that has followed.

In the rough estimates we were given, there were around 2,400 people taking shelter there on November 7, although the school had to be thrown open to house the hundreds running for cover on the afternoon of November 6. That night the refugees had to live on dry food, such as puffed rice, and full-fledged cooking started the day after. The state government had provided a one-time relief of 25 quintals of rice. The first three days a religious organization had provided all foodstuff except rice. Since then, meals each day were dependent on the efforts of individuals and organizations bringing foodstuff and clothes, and on the untiring efforts at collecting relief and food by a Trinamul Congress panchayat pradhan. On November 8, around 3,200 to 3,500 people had eaten in the camp, the highest number the camp had seen.

The cooking takes place in the yard behind the main building, in huge iron woks simmering on clay ovens. The cooks are men from close by, stirring, pouring and serving with almost professional steadiness the enormous amounts of food to be distributed on perfectly crafted sal plates sewn with white thread. There are tube-wells for water. In one wing of the main building is a temporary clinic, where doctors come and sit, because the health centre that had been kept going since trouble first broke is now under the control of the most recent captors. The people have taken shelter in the large classrooms, emptied of their benches, and carpeted with plastic sheets. A microphone is used to summon them to their meals.

The relief material we had taken was collected by people delegated

for this particular job, one of whom wrote out a receipt. A woman with pleading eyes asked me when she would get a second sari, she was still wearing the one she had on when she came away. “You have brought saris for us?” asked another little knot of women. “But when will we get them?” One of them said that she wished we had given the saris to the local leader of her village instead of donating them centrally.

Within the appearance of order, disorder was intangible, but oppressive. Children ran about, playing, when they should have been at school. Girls of eight or ten, with babies on their hips and with adult faces, joined the women when they talked of misery, loss and fear. At the same time, the children of the school which housed the homeless could not come to class. The shelter was fragile. **The Madhyamik test was due, and the principal wanted the school cleared. “We have requested him to conduct the test in the upstairs classrooms,” said one of the men. “Where will I go?” asked a terrified middle-aged woman. “My home has been broken down, it is empty. Everyone has gone I do not know where. My younger daughter’s in-laws live close by, they will not have me. And I will be killed if I go back. For 13 days I have been here and I still can’t go back.”**

What about school in the 11 months that they were in their villages, when “we had control”, as one of the men said? It was irregular, said almost all the children and women we spoke to. There were bouts of shooting and rumours of trouble almost constantly, and very often, parents kept children at home. And not everyone who had escaped was in the camp. Only those who had nowhere else to go had come there. The others had gone to relatives and friends, to Calcutta, to Burdwan and Birbhum, to Jamshedpur and Ranchi, to Punjab, to Haryana.

The numbers in the camp fluctuated because many of those who went home came back, bringing with them accounts of devastation and looting, rape, fines and terror. The looting was done systematically, with van rickshaws being loaded with furniture, sometimes even with doors and windows taken off their hinges. Anyone who returned ran the risk of having his bike or bicycle taken away, if he had one, and if the looting of his home had not been completed satisfactorily. Houses had been smashed in with ‘dredgers’, we were told. “But how would you know that?”

I asked. A man, who had come from Calcutta to check on his in-laws, said he had seen the machine. A woman from Satengabari joined in: “I saw one being brought over as I was running away.”

One young woman from Gokulnagar had taken shelter with her parents in Nandigram. Men with pistols had come to that house too, gone into all the rooms to see if she had brought away any of her in-laws’ “good things” from her village. They had even checked the henhouses,

she said.

We found an unsettling echo later as we stood at Bhangaberia bridge talking to men who had taken shelter in Khejuri for 11 months. “Even if we have returned, what can we do?” said one. “Everything has been looted.”

(Courtesy: **The Telegraph**)

■

OVER THE FIELDS THEY OWN

If there is to be no SEZ, why is there so much violence and fear?

Going into Nandigram, there is a disorienting sense of wading into waves of fear, of getting out of depth in story after story, name after name, figure after figure, of losses, deaths, disappearances, guns, rapes. The women in the relief camp keep speaking of March 14 as if it happened with a horror that seems strange when one remembers that they remained home then and were driven out after November 6. Their accounts merge one period with another. It is all one tale of violence and fear. Driving down to Sonachura later, it was painful to imagine the vast distances that people, old and young, must have run in fear in one direction or the other.

Absences have become part of the story. Many have “disappeared”. The women insisted that people they know have been missing since January. Till they all come back, nothing would be “normal”. The Bhoomi Ucchhed Pratirodh Committee leaders have submitted to the police a list of 42 names of those missing since the peace procession was fired upon this month.

The stories multiply from moment to moment. During the lunch to which the organizers of the camp had warmly invited us, saying that a few people more would not make a difference, we met a journalist from Kerala and her companion. Just back from the police station, they said that a woman who had left the camp to go home with her 14-year-old daughter the evening before, was back, weeping. Seven or eight men had surrounded them on the way to her village, beaten her up and disappeared with her daughter.

The men in the camp said it was a lie that the bike army had left. They came out regularly after nightfall, when the Central forces went off the

roads. They also timed their daylight forays between CRPF rounds, whizzing off on their bikes across the invisible border towards Khejuri just in time. The villagers, who stood around us while the “official” spokesmen talked, gave us names of six men who were walking around in broad daylight with “pistols”.

What is the violence about? Almost everyone we spoke to had land of their own. A dominating fear is that their crop is being looted, or will be taken away from them by force as penalty for having resisted the CPI(M). A woman from No 7 Jalpai said that they had bought a bit of land after a long struggle. One bigha cost Rs 50,000, which meant saving for two to four years. All the rice would now be gone.

But, for the men, there was another dimension. As they talked about the violence, a visitor said, puzzled, “But there will be no SEZ, the chief minister has said.” A man with patient, humorous eyes asked from behind me, “Then why is there so much conflict?” A younger villager, more impetuous, explained: “No one can go home, you see. The villages have been emptied, and those who go back are being forced to support the CPI(M). The government does not have to do anything at all.”

When I asked the woman from No 7 Jalpai whether she thought there would be an SEZ she said, “How can we be sure? He says one thing one day, another the next, and again something else another day, how will we believe anything?” But it still hurts. “Do you think that the CPI(M) was not close to my heart?” she asked me. “All my life my family has believed in it, we have worked for it. Then they don’t talk to us, or anything, just send a notice that they will take away our land. We love our land, that is why we got together to save it.

And now look at what has happened. People cannot say good things that girls have come out into the open and are speaking like this. But for our land, for our soil, for our birthplace, we women have come out. ‘Go home, nothing will happen,’ they say. Can anyone say what will happen? And when we do go home, what will happen to the families where the women have been raped, molested, touched?” She spoke unafraid, but saw nothing normal in the future.

(Courtesy: **The Outlook India**)

■

PM finally says Nandigram unfortunate

By Ashok Mallik

Hopes CPM deploys CRPF effectively

Breaking his silence on Nandigram, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh termed the recent violence in West Bengal's troubled rural belt as "unfortunate" and hoped the "State Government will be able to take necessary steps to restore the confidence of the people... through effective deployment of security forces". **Reading out a measured but firm statement during a mini-Press conference on board his special plane — he was travelling to Singapore for the ASEAN/East Asia summit — Singh said he understood the "spontaneous outpouring of grief and anguish... by artistes and intellectuals in Kolkata".**

While seemingly innocuous, Singh's statement made two significant points. It put the "security forces" ball firmly in the State Government's court. In recent days, the Left Front leadership in West Bengal has sought to blame the Centre for delayed arrival of paramilitary forces. Second, Singh reached out to the fellow travellers — some of them, such as former West Bengal Finance Minister Ashok Mitra, are old friends and former colleagues of his — who are disillusioned with the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government's apparent approbation of the bloodshed in Nandigram and with its "revisionist" economic policies.

Answering questions on the India-US nuclear deal, the Prime Minister said he hadn't "given up hope" of evolving a national consensus. Insisting that the option of buying nuclear reactors from Russia was very much on, he said only a formal agreement had been delayed — during his recent visit to Moscow — till the IAEA safeguards agreement and NSG clearances came in. He said President Vladimir Putin was "supportive" of India's moves to clear hurdles at the IAEA and NSG; and the "Chinese too have not said they will not support us" at the NSG. Referring to his upcoming interactions with the ASEAN leadership, Singh admitted the proposed India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) had run into problems primarily due to certain "sensitive agricultural products", the free import of which could hurt India's "subsistence farmers". The Prime Minister was alluding to the impact of, for instance, free palm oil imports on oilseed farmers in India. Tea, coffee and pepper are other contentious commodities. Also, earlier this month, Malaysia (an ASEAN member) and Pakistan muddled the waters somewhat by signing an FTA of their own. Kuala Lumpur's move has been interpreted as a snub by Indian diplomats, and has not helped the atmospherics at India-ASEAN negotiations.

(Courtesy: The Pioneer)



The Killing Fields Of Nandigram

By Jaideep Mazumdar

NANDIGRAM

The red flags are fluttering merrily in the early winter breeze at Nandigram after a gap of 11 months. On the ground, "victorious" CPI(M) cadres, drunk on their victory—the "recapture" of more than a hundred villages that had remained beyond their control for so long—are taking out processions and bike rallies, bursting countrymade-bombs like Diwali firecrackers and ensuring that the lakhs who had supported the anti-land acquisition brigade—the Bhumi Uchched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC)—submit meekly to the CPI(M). But tension is palpable, as is the intense loathing for the CPI(M) that had deployed its armed cadres, many from outside this East Midnapore district, to kill, rape, loot and "recapture" the villages that had remained under the BUPC's control for so long.

The operation to liberate Nandigram and re-establish the CPI(M)'s grip there started in the middle of last week and was, by all accounts, a well-planned affair that had the blessings of the party's top leadership. The administration, especially the police, was asked to step aside and remain mute spectators to hundreds of well-armed CPI(M) cadres running riot in Nandigram.

Even a stinging rebuke from Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi asking the state government to act failed to move the powers that be at Writers' Building. The CRPF, which was sent following a request from the state government, arrived on Saturday, but is yet to be deployed in the trouble-torn and traumatized villages, as I write this piece at 8:50 PM.

In fact, five companies of the para-military force, led by its IG Subhas Goswami and DIG Alok Raj, had to face barricades put up by the 'red cadres' at two places in the 30 km journey from Tamluk to Nandigram town. They'll remain stationed at Nandigram police station on Monday evening and will fan out to the villages only from Tuesday morning.

The whole area remained out of bounds for media persons ever since the CPI(M)'s operation began and it was only on Monday, after the party had been successful in re-establishing its total control in the area, that scribes were allowed in. But not before we witnessed a fair bit of "red terror", perhaps to serve as an ominous reminder about the CPI(M)'s "power" to us. The Outlook team, one of the first to enter Nandigram after its "re-capture", was caught in many CPI(M) processions and in one along Debipur village, cadres burst countrymade bombs in front of us to

demonstrate their “power”. The party’s local committee secretary, Tilak Roy, however told us that the bombs were “firecrackers left over from Diwali” and asked us not to write about such “celebrations” by his “enthusiastic party workers”. Perhaps it was this “enthusiasm” which was responsible for a TV camera person having her camera and mobile phone snatched when she went to cover the ransacking of the Trinamool Congress office by the CPI(M) cadre on Sunday.

By Monday afternoon, red flags were up in every nook and corner of Nandigram, including the Tekhali bridge that had served as the no-man’s land between the warring CPI(M) and BUPC activists. CPI(M) activists and supporters who had been displaced from their villages were still returning home. They, too, had suffered at the hands of the BUPC: driven out of their homes, they have had to spend months in relief camps funded almost entirely by the CPI(M). Their houses had been looted and often torched and some have had to suffer serious injuries in exchange of fire with BUPC activists. Their children had to stop going to schools and have lost a full academic year.

Most have not been able to cultivate their fields or pursue their vocations, thus becoming dependant for their meals and all other necessities on the CPI(M). Naturally, they were desperate to return to their homes.

But with the BUPC resisting all efforts by the state administration to re-settle the displaced in their respective villages, and putting up stiff and often impossible conditions for such return, the ground became ripe for the CPI(M) to initiate ‘direct action’. They did so with full and brutal force, importing sophisticated arms and sharp-shooters as well as leaders of the party’s ‘killer squads’ from neighbouring districts.

Though the official death toll is four, local persons say they saw scores of dead bodies, all of which have been removed and burnt or buried by the CPI(M). There is truth in these allegations—on Saturday, 13 CPI(M) activists, including two persons who were wanted by the CBI for their role in the killings of Trinamool Congress workers in Choto Angaria a few years ago, were nabbed by locals while they were removing some injured from Nandigram.

For five days, while the CPI(M)’s ‘killer squads’ went on the rampage, the police kept themselves confined to their barracks. District Superintendent of Police S.S.Panda said his men were “scared” to venture into the killing fields of Nandigram and were awaiting the arrival of the CRPF. Which was just a lame excuse for inaction and a shameful ploy to give the CPI(M) squads a free hand to complete their task. But the non-deployment of the CRPF immediately after the force’s arrival in Calcutta on Saturday has raised doubts over the state government real motive.

The Outlook team was also the first to venture into Satengabari,

braving belligerent CPI(M) cadres who kept issuing warnings and threats openly. We had a close shave at Jambari village where party cadres surrounded us and demanded to know what we’d write. It was only after we assured them that we would report on the sorry plight of those who had been driven out of their homes by the BUPC activists that we were allowed to return in one piece. At the village, which was “liberated” from the BUPC on November 6, the party’s killer squads looted and torched two houses, severely assaulted a 70-year-old and drove a few men, all activists of the BUPC, out of their damaged homes.

“Now, everything is peaceful here. We’ve established our total control and have rid our village of the BUPC’s terror,” boasted CPI(M) branch secretary Sudarshan Maity who had, only minutes ago, accused us of being “Trinamool agents” who needed to be taught a lesson.

But the calm that envelopes Jambari village is an elusive one. Before the CPI(M) activists arrived on the scene, many villagers, speaking in whispers, told us about the ‘red terror’ they had been liberated from eleven months ago that will again haunt them from now on. They spoke of the CPI(M)’s atrocities, high-handedness and total control over all aspects of their lives till January this year when trouble broke out and the newly-formed BUPC drove out the CPI(M) from their villages and their lives.

The Nandigram story is, however, not about the BUPC establishing control over more than a hundred villages 11 months ago and making them ‘out of bounds’ for the state administration after driving out CPI(M) supporters and activists. Or about the CPI(M) deploying its killer squads to ‘re-capture’ Nandigram, killing, raping and maiming scores in the process. It is all about the state government having failed miserably in its task of administering.

The state administration has re-established control over Nandigram again now. But it did so riding piggyback on the CPI(M)’s extra-constitutional medieval warfare way. This is where it has erred. Sinned would be a better word. But then, the distinction between the party (the CPIM) and the government had long ago blurred in West Bengal.

(Courtesy: Outlook India) ■

Nandigram symbolizes shame and suffering

Rashmi Bansal

Beyond belief: It can happen in a democracy!

Recently an unprecedented incident happened, unheard of in any civilized society in a democracy where an elected State government recaptured a territory within its State with the help of party cadres and goons. It is a big blot on any democracy. The most anguishing part is that UPA government at the Centre is keeping mum to save its own *gaddi* as it is squarely dependent on the outside support of these very totally undemocratic party personnel.

This is the tale of Nandigram - where trouble first erupted in the beginning of the year over forcible land acquisition for a proposed land for SEZ. At that time police had fired at the unarmed villagers with the connivance of the State government. The only difference is that this time the Left Front government sent its own party cadres alongwith noted criminals and goons to recapture Nandigram. After the blood bath and the mayhem where the cadres went on a killing and raping spree, the CPM cadres rejoiced in their victory with the party's local committee officially celebrating it as the "November Day" (coinciding with the observance of the November Revolution) by bursting crackers, beating drums, blowing pipes and horns and dancing and merrymaking.

The whole episode started on November 05, when CPM cadres raided villages in Nandigram, exchanged fire with Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee (BUPC) supporters and recaptured lost territory. In most places, the CPM cadres entered the villages firing indiscriminately and following it up with looting and arson. In a move reminiscent of medieval warfare, the CPM organised a huge rally placing 500 captured BUPC members, all tied up, on the forefront as human shields. In the ensuing violence many people were killed and injured. These cadres were armed with AK series rifles, INSAS rifles, SLRs, .303 guns and bombs. Their battalions, each having around a hundred men including dacoits and criminals from Bankura and South 24 Parganas who were paid in advance for "Operation Nandigram" and given a free hand to loot the villages were led by Sukur Ali, the Local Committee Secretary and Tapan Ghosh the District Committee Member. The "Operation" was reportedly finalized at a meeting between a Member of Parliament, a State Cabinet Minister and zonal and local

leaders in Khejuri, a CPM stronghold at the guest house of the Kolaghat Thermal Power Plant.

The violence did not stop. On November 08, massive firing in Maheshpur and Amgachia villages left many injured. The police remained mute spectators even as thousands of villagers shook the gates of the police station. The officer in charge reportedly said "We don't have orders." By the evening of November 11 the "Operation" was complete.

These utterly shocking barbaric acts evoked strong public response and there were widespread protests by people from all walks of life. On November 12 a spontaneous bandh paralyzed normal life in West Bengal. Nothing moved including software companies. The public and the intelligentsia were equally appalled and shocked by the whole incident. The media was not allowed to freely cover the incidents in Nandigram. All entry points through river and land were blocked by CPM activists. There was a gag on free movement and free reporting. Armed CPM mobs stopped Sushri Mamta Banerjee from reaching Nandigram.

The anguished West Bengal Governor, Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi openly criticized CPM for recapturing the Nandigram areas upon which the CPM State Secretary, Biman Bose called the Governor's remarks unconstitutional and questioned his intellectual credentials. He said it was a "new sunrise" in Nandigram. This shows the utter lack of a sense of shame or remorse on CPM's part but RSP Minister Shri Kshiti Goswami found the whole thing intolerable. He told the *Week*, "Only the communists are capable of something like this, especially those dictated by Stalinist ideology. I have sent a letter to the RSP Secretary, asking the party to let me resign. I don't feel like being a member of this government."

But the most shocking is the "deafening silence" of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi about the violence in Nandigram in their speeches at the AICC session.

While neither Prime Minister Manmohan Singh nor Congress President Sonia Gandhi deemed it fit to pay a visit to the violence ravaged land of Nandigram, prominent BJP leaders, including Leader of the Opposition Shri L.K. Advani and Smt. Sushma Swaraj promptly visited Nandigram to assess the ground situation and give solace to the people. Shri Advani, met the Governor and said: "I cannot recall any Governor ever having issued a statement in such clear terms. Your comments are perfectly justified. The situation in Nandigram is really very bad. The behaviour of the authorities and establishment is illegal, so the Centre should invoke Constitutional provisions under Article 355 or 356."

Noted columnist, Vir Sanghvi stated in the Hindustan Times: "If you live in the CPM's Bengal, however, you recognise the party for what it truly is: a rigidly disciplined totalitarian outfit which depends on murderous

cadres and which has no real patience with democracy or dissent. When we treat the CPM as just another political party, we make a serious mistake. The Congress may have been inspired by the Fabians and the British Labour Party. The BJP may seek inspiration from Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party. But the CPM's models all come from deeply undemocratic regimes. The CPM began as part of the CPI, a communist party which first venerated the murderous Josef Stalin who killed 20 million people and then went on to support succeeding Soviet regimes that sent dissidents to Gulags. When the CPM broke away from the CPI, it was largely because it supported China rather than Russia (even when China was fighting India). And Chinese communism was as undemocratic as the Russian version. I am not sure if Mao Tse Tung killed as many people as Josef Stalin did but my guess is he came close. Chinese communism led to massacres, tyranny, the complete suppression of human rights and to totalitarianism on a level that was previously unimaginable. These are the CPM's models. These are the murderous dictators that its leaders worshipped when they were growing up. And it is this legacy that the CPM epitomises."

What has happened in Nandigram has shocked the collective conscience of the nation as a whole. It is beyond belief that this is really happening in independent India, in a country which prides itself on being the world's largest democracy. It is utterly shameful but even more shameful is that the perpetrators of this heinous act are not only completely unrepentant they are in fact rejoicing in their so called victory over reclaiming a part of the State. One fails to understand how such acts can be tolerated. But this is the true face of the CPM – a party which believes in governing without accountability at the Centre and where it is, it believes it is answerable to none, when the Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said in a press conference: "You can go on writing whatever trash you want. It does not matter. I will not reply to your questions. I find it distasteful to respond to you". Need anything more be said? ■

CPM proves it's a party of fascists

By Kanchan Gupta

Bengal has this fascination for bhadrakol Marxists, which is really a contradiction in terms but has stood the CPI(M) in good stead in West Bengal. As Deputy Chief Minister in the fumbling, bumbling United Front Governments, Mr Jyoti Basu presided over the lumpenisation of West Bengal politics and began the process of destroying West Bengal's industrial infrastructure, which in the 1960s was not to be scoffed at.

He made gherao into an instrument of state policy and lawlessness the hallmark of Marxist politics. When harried industrialists petitioned the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court and the judge sought an explanation, Mr Basu deployed thousands of his party's hoodlum brigade to gherao the court. The Chief Justice saw merit in the dictum that discretion is the better part of valour.

As Chief Minister after the Left Front came to power in 1977, Mr Basu vigorously pursued his reckless agenda, denuding West Bengal of whatever little remained of its once thriving industry, while making it a point to holiday in London every year, ostensibly to seduce investors. From the Marichjhanpi massacre to the Bantala gangrape, his tenure as Chief Minister was one long saga of atrocities committed by either Marxist goons or the police, which he had swiftly converted into an extension counter of the CPI(M). Yet, people were easily persuaded to vote for him and the CPI(M)-led Left Front, election after election, because whatever his faults, he was a 'bhadrakol'. Never mind the fact that behind the spotless dhuti-panjabi façade lurked an evil man with a malevolent mind, a modern day Mephistopheles who derived perverse pleasure from West Bengal's impoverishment.

His successor, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, was seen and feted as a 'bhadrakol' twice over. His lineage was impeccable. A graduate of Presidency College, nephew of Sukanto Bhattacharjee whose darkly haunting poetry is replete with metaphors of human bondage and struggle against hunger and poverty, translator of Russian poet Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky, poet and playwright of sorts at one with Kolkata's intellectuals for whom Nandan is their second home, high on Marxist dialectics and suitably preachy. Bengalis could not have asked for more. What added to his appeal is Mr Bhattacharjee's 'reformist' zeal. He borrowed Nike's slogan and came up with his (in retrospect, rather corny) one-liner: 'Do it now.' Buddhajeabis, who have amazing power to influence opinion in West Bengal, overnight became 'Buddhajeabis' and wore their new identity on their sleeves. Mr Basu would let his mask slip

once in a while and indulge in crudity; Mr Bhattacharjee, who claims to be a fan of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, would never do that.

But all this must now belong to the past. Mr Bhattacharjee's bhadralok image has taken a severe beating and today he stands exposed as a charlatan who doesn't deserve the office he holds. .or all his pretensions of being a man of culture and integrity, he is no less Mephistophelean than Mr Basu. If imitation is the best form of flattery, Mr Bhattacharjee has proved himself an accomplished flatterer by aping his party general secretary, Mr Prakash Karat, in justifying murder, rape and pillage by Marxist criminals. There is not even the faintest hint of regret that Nandigram should have become the leitmotif of the CPI(M)'s unrestrained thuggery. There is no belated acceptance of moral responsibility, leave alone assertion of authority, even at this stage when his friends have begun spitting at him. The Pioneer was not exaggerating when it suggested to its readers that for a lesson in fascism, they should read Mr Bhattacharjee's shocking comments at a Press conference where he praised his party's black shirts and poured scorn and ridicule on the hapless victims of their crimes. Among the victims, it needs to be noted, are a Muslim woman and her two teenaged daughters who were gangraped by the Marxist marauders. The two girls are missing; for all we know, they may have been killed or are being held captive to satiate the animal desires of those about whom Mr Karat and Mr Bhattacharjee speak so admiringly.

Compare this with the CPI(M)'s clamorous and vile protest against the alleged custodial killing of a wanted criminal and his moll in Gujarat. Recall also how 24x7 television channels, notably those headquartered in Delhi, went berserk, trying to pin the guilt of that alleged crime on Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Contrast the timid, almost cowardly, media response to Mr Bhattacharjee's appalling comments and Mr Karat's chilling defence of the Marxist killers and rapists who have let loose a reign of terror and whose victims are largely Muslims, to the epithets and worse hurled by our newspapers and 24x7 channels at Mr Modi who has at no stage justified the 2002 violence in Gujarat or the alleged custodial killing of a mafia don and his moll. Is it because there is an 'ideological' affinity between the fascists of AK Gopalan Bhawan and mediapersons? Or is it because Mr Modi is a soft target and, unlike Mr Karat or Mr Bhattacharjee, whose storm troopers have been intimidating journalists and threatening dire consequences if they report the truth, will not retaliate? Or are there 'linkages' that influence our media, more so 24x7 channels, to black out Marxist crimes and invent scurrilous stories to demean others? If our media bravehearts wish to shame and shun Mr Modi, it's their choice. But must they so shamelessly admire those who prescribe 'Dum Dum dawai', thuggery of the sort witnessed in Nandigram as Ms Brinda Karat did at a

rally in Kolkata? And support Mr Sitaram Yechury who has the temerity to insist that Nandigram can't be discussed in Parliament because law and order is a State subject?

Mr Bhattacharjee has no doubt sold his soul to the likes of Indonesia's Salem Group and, closer home, Ambuja Cement and industrialists, who were no more than small time Burrabazar traders till the CPI(M) came to power and facilitated their rags-to-riches journey. Mr Karat genuflects at Stalin's altar and listens to the Internationale to relax, so we shouldn't expect him to be touched by the plight of those maimed, killed and raped by his cadre. But what about mediapersons who tirelessly preach moral and ethical rectitude to others from their high perch in 'national' newspapers and 'national' news channels? By not admonishing those responsible for the ghastly events in Nandigram, they have legitimised the indefensible and paved the path for similar crimes elsewhere. Amen.

(Courtesy: The Pioneer) ■

Cracks in LF appear, CPM claims no rift

By Parwez Hafeez

Distancing themselves from the CPI(M), three principal partners of the Left Front accused the ruling party of being solely responsible for the resurgence of bloodshed in Nandigram.

Perhaps for the first time in the past 30 years that the Left Front has been in power in West Bengal, any one issue has created such serious differences between the CPI(M) and the junior constituents. A strongly-worded resolution adopted after an emergency meeting of the RSP, CPI and Forward Bloc said: "We don't approve of the politics of violence and revenge. The situation in Nandigram has become alarming due to the resurgence of violence, which we are totally opposed to. The CPI(M) alone is responsible for this unfortunate turn of events."

Significantly, the Left Front constituents did not hold the Trinamul Congress-led Bhumi Ucched Pratirodh Committee equally responsible for the Nandigram mayhem. A copy of the resolution which was adopted after the two-hour long meeting at the Forward Bloc office was sent to the Left Front chairman, Mr Biman Bose, who is now attending the CPI(M) politburo meeting in New Delhi.

In Kolkata, the stand taken by the Front partners irked CPI(M) leader Benoy Konar, who said it would provoke their opponents to unleash more violence in Nandigram. "Their criticism of the CPI(M) alone is unfair. Why did they not criticised the Bhumi Ucchedh Pratirodh Committee, which has made a mockery of the rule of law in Nandigram?" Mr Konar asked. The meeting of the "mini-Front" clearly sought to isolate the CPI(M) on Nandigram. The intention of the smaller constituents was clear: they did not want to share the liability which they feared the fresh bloodbath in Nandigram would bring. Although the resolution was unanimously adopted, it is the RSP which has virtually raised a banner of revolt against the CPI(M). Senior RSP leader and PWD minister Kshiti Goswami announced his decision to resign from the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Cabinet. "I cannot remain in the ministry when defenceless people are being killed in Nandigram. I find it morally repugnant," he added. To cock a snook at the CPI(M), RSP leaders Manoj Bhattacharjee, Geeta Sengupta and Mihir Banerjee sat with social activist Medha Patkar in a show of solidarity. They also condemned the attack on Ms Patkar's convoy by CPI(M) supporters.

(Courtesy: The Asian Age) ■

Gangrape victim's house vandalised, police say can't go there, 'too tense'

By Ravik Bhattacharya

No action taken by police 10 days after incident, CPI(M) cadres still control access

Nandigram, Nov 16: It's been 10 days since Sabina Begum (name changed to protect her identity) was allegedly gangraped by CPI(M) men during "Operation Recapture," as first reported in The Indian Express today. But the Nandigram police, who registered a case after the medical report confirmed the rape, say they have not been able to visit the victim's house in Satengabari, the scene of the crime that can yield crucial evidence in the case.

For the record, Superintendent of Police S S Panda says: "Investigation cannot be started because the situation is so tense." When asked if the delay could hamper evidence collection, Panda said: "It's possible to get conviction on the basis of the victim's statement. It's very difficult to get witnesses in these cases."

That's hardly a surprise.

For, The Indian Express was able to reach Sabina's Satengabari house this afternoon, dodging past the close surveillance of a 150-strong mob of CPI(M) supporters. Any one who enters the village has to explain the purpose of their visit and get the cadres' permission. The mud house of Sabina Begum is thoroughly ransacked. There is hardly any household article left inside. Overhead mud tiles are smashed, clothing is strewn on the floor.

The police have also not taken any step to search for Sabina's two missing daughters who she said were also gangraped and abducted by CPI(M) cadres.

CPI(M) cadres now guard the village and mill around Sabina's house. Asked if any police team had come to investigate, CPI(M) member Shyamal Jana said: "No. A CRPF team made a round but no policeman has come after the village was freed from terror unleashed by the Bhumi Uchchedh men."

At the Brojomohan Tiari relief camp in Nandigram, Sabina's relatives are traumatized. They are afraid to even step out of the camp. Still, they keep making several rounds of the local police station to inquire about the two missing daughters. "But the police have no time to listen," says Sheikh Motleb, the victim's brother.

He says that Nasreen, 14, and Fatima, 16, (both names changed to protect their identities) had studied up to Class IV and Class VI respectively. The younger one studied in Satengabari primary school while her elder sister used to go to Brindaban Chawk Girls' School.

"They dropped out because of financial constraints in the family and began zari work. Each earned about Rs 3000 per month working under a trader in nearby Bajkul. But the biggest worry now is to find out if they are alive," said Motleb.

(Courtesy: The Asian Age) ■

Bengal tilts away from left

By S. Nihal Singh

Is Nandigram the beginning of the end of Marxist dominance in West Bengal? It would seem so for a variety of reasons, the most important of them being the rupture between the CPI(M) and its conscience, the great majority of intellectuals who had backed and sanctified its rule, despite its aberrations.

It was no secret that the Marxists used strong-arm tactics to maintain its rule. In the rural areas, the party had instituted a parallel regime that had taken the attributes of government. But there was the innate belief among articulate Bengalis that the party's heart was in the right place, that it was a party for the poor and under-privileged and that it was relatively honest. This perception is no longer the dominant feeling among the avant-garde of Bengali society.

Rather, people are beginning to tilt to the view that three decades are simply too long for a single party to remain in power in a democratic set-up.

Perhaps Nandigram was only the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It was preceded by Singur for the Tata car plant, but the controversy there was over a relatively small number of plots of land. Then came the mysterious death of Rizwanur Rehman, the graphic designer married to the daughter of a Hindu industrialist against the family's vigorous objection. Before the state government was compelled to hand over the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation, public perception grew that the police were complicit in piling up pressure on Rizwanur to separate from his bride.

Nandigram was the final straw because of the callousness of the state authorities in letting armed party cadres loose to recapture areas seized by CPI(M) ranks that came to oppose official policy and the wresting of high ground by the Trinamul Congress riding on the back of the land protection committee, Bhoomi Uchched Pratirodh Committee. For CPI(M) cadres to fire at unarmed villagers leading to several deaths while the police looked on was shocking. Governor Gopal Gandhi called it unacceptable and much of articulate Bengal was horrified as CPI(M)-inspired gangs raped women and burned homes.

Equally, if not more, shocking was the reaction of chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. He justified the shameful incidents as CPI(M) ranks paying back their opponents in the same coin. Even more atrociously, he said he was first a party man, then a chief minister. In other words, his loyalties were first to the CPI(M), then to the state and the country.

It so happens that Nandigram is a Muslim-majority area and those at the receiving end were, in a large measure, Muslims. Marxists have, over the decades, taken much pride — justifiably — in protecting minorities, particularly Muslims. But Muslim resentment over CPI(M) tactics in Nandigram was palpable even as Muslim anger over lack of economic opportunities in the inner city of Kolkata had been building up. Perhaps inevitably, the cocktail of Muslim grievances merged in the case of the Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, who was traditionally outspoken against the common practices of Islam. The subsequent rioting in Kolkata was a disgrace for those who participated in it, and in calling out the Army the state authorities overreacted. Even more reprehensible was the reaction of the CPI(M) state chief, Biman Bose, who suggested that the writer leave West Bengal if she was the cause of the disturbance of peace; his subsequent clarification was unconvincing.

It is clear that the chief minister and the CPI(M) panicked in the unusual situation they found themselves in. Yet Bhattacharjee was ironically taking the party away from the cul-de-sac of its ideological blinkers to a future that inevitably lay in industrialisation. For a party still living in the world of the first half of the 20th century, it was a brave act in ploughing a lonely furrow. But the arrogance that comes from three decades of uninterrupted power stood in the way of the chief minister explaining to the affected people in person what he was trying to do, and even telling them that he had given up the idea of locating a chemical hub planned by an Indonesian industrialist there. What Bhattacharjee saw was an attack on the CPI(M) by an Opposition-inspired land committee seeking to supplant the party's God-given right to rule. Even though the agitators had made Nandigram a no-go area for the authorities for months on end, the CPI(M) cadres sought to block inconvenient outsiders after they captured the area — the media, the social activist Medha Patkar and the Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee, to name a few.

The CPI(M) apparently kept Central security forces waiting until its cadres had completed the job of recapturing Nandigram.

The Left's attraction for an increasing number of articulate men and women in India is that it is secular, more honest than other party men and more conscious of the plight of the under-privileged. West Bengal was the CPI(M)'s most significant experimental ground because unlike Kerala, where it periodically stays afloat only with the help of highly atomised factions, it had long years of power in which to demonstrate its effectiveness. But land reforms lagged after an initial spurt and an obsession with retaining power led the party to sharp practices and employment of goon squads.

Nandigram has become a symbol of all that is wrong with the CPI(M).

A state that prided itself on its tolerance of dissenting views was reduced to asking its most famous dissident, Taslima Nasreen, to leave; the ultimate ignominy was to send her to a Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled state to ensure her safety. And the chief minister had the insolence to pledge his loyalty to the party, rather than to the state or the country. How can a state authority justify armed party goons violently capturing territory while the police looked on?

Those who came out in opposition to the state authorities' actions in Nandigram — filmmakers, writers and concerned citizens — have been the strength of the Left parties, the CPI(M) in particular. That they have become disillusioned with the ugly face the CPI(M) revealed in Nandigram and Kolkata speaks volumes. And, in electoral terms, the increasing disillusionment of the substantial Muslim minority in the state will have an impact on the CPI(M)'s fortunes.

The road is now open for the Congress and a revitalised Trinamul to challenge the no longer invincible CPI(M) the next time around.

(**Courtesy: The Asian Age**)



Buddha's true face

He is a fascist who fêtes CPM goons

The Pioneer Edit Desk

West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee justly deserves to be pitilessly castigated for his callous comments at a Press conference in Kolkata on Tuesday. Briefing mediapersons on the blood-curdling violence unleashed by 'Harmat Brigade', the Marxist militia, he made little effort to hide his indifference to the plight of thousands of villagers who have been subjected to unimaginable atrocities by thugs waving the CPI(M)'s flag. He elected not to speak as Chief Minister of West Bengal, but as an ardent admirer of hoodlums who hold the country's Constitution and the law of the land in contempt. He chose to felicitate men with the blood of innocent people on their hands, justifying their criminal misdeeds and gloating over their successful capture of Nandigram. According to Mr Bhattacharjee, who holds a high constitutional office and has pledged to uphold the Constitution of India, his criminals cannot be faulted as they have paid back members of the Bhoomi Uchchedh Pratirodh Committee "in their own coin". In other words, the man who heads the Government of West Bengal sees nothing wrong about the butchery, loot, arson and rape indulged in by the Marxist militia because it owes allegiance to the CPI(M). So much for the Marxists' insistence on denouncing others, most notably the BJP, and describing the smallest infringement elsewhere as "fascism". If we must understand the true meaning of fascism, we need to revisit the horrendous crimes committed in Nandigram under the tutelage of fascists, among them Mr Bhattacharjee. The man who has pretended all these years to be a writer and a poet — a Marxist 'intellectual' with a sensitive soul — stands exposed as no better than those who ran amok in Nandigram and let loose a reign of terror; Mr Bhattacharjee may be a Marxist, albeit of dubious credentials, but he is neither an 'intellectual' nor a 'bhadralok'.

Mr Bhattacharjee, of course, is welcome to join the ranks of the 'Harmat Brigade' and make himself indistinguishable from his party's hoodlums. But can a Chief Minister speak like a rogue element and a social malcontent

without a care for the dignity of the office he holds and his constitutional obligations? By justifying the Marxist mayhem in Nandigram, Mr Bhattacharjee has also justified his abdication of both moral and constitutional responsibilities to the people of West Bengal. Worse, by defending his decision not to send in the police to maintain law and order even as CPI(M) cadre laid villages to waste he has sought to justify the Left Front Government's appalling move to hand over its authority to Marxist goons. These are self-incriminating statements that paint a shocking picture in lurid colours of the state of affairs in West Bengal. A Chief Minister, Mr Bhattacharjee would recall his party preaching to others in the context of violence elsewhere, must enforce the law of the land and the authority of the state. As the head of Government, she or he cannot differentiate between "our people" and "their people". If a Chief Minister fails in fulfilling these responsibilities, then she or he loses the moral right to remain in office. Mr Bhattacharjee, drunk on power and too arrogant to own up responsibility for his abject failure, has lost that right. If he has even an iota of dignity and integrity, then he should resign from office. He has the option of not doing so and getting thrown out of office by the people of West Bengal. But then, callous men like him cannot be expected to be bothered about ignominy.

(Coursty: The Pioneer) ■

Nandigram's spectre

*The brutality, and its justification, has robbed
CPM of its argument against the likes of Modi*

Away from Ground Zero, the political shadow-boxing has thrown up a parallel. Is Nandigram 2007 like Gujarat 2002? Such comparisons deceive. Every crime is horrifying in its own way. Yet there is something outrageous about the way in which the CPM is trying to evade acknowledgement of the enormity of the wrong committed in Nandigram. The lumpenism of party cadres as they killed and raped and "reclaimed" territory, the abdication by the police as they retreated and watched, and the solidarity expressed at the highest echelons of government with the brutes not the brutalised, must be confronted. Computing the exact degrees of separation that lie between Nandigram and the communal carnage in Modi's Gujarat five years ago is a tawdry exercise, best left to those who have the stomach

for it. But the moral superiority that has for so long been the CPM's best weapon against the likes of Modi, stands dimmed.

The CPM, along with other Left parties, insists that the unchecked violence in Nandigram is to do with 'law and order', which is a state subject and therefore cannot be discussed in Parliament. This follows the virtual barricading of Nandigram earlier — it was several days before mediapersons were allowed access. The CPM may have got the formal language right, but can it seriously pass the test of the spirit that pervades India's Constitution? Can it make a case based on constitutional morality for shielding from public view those who are guilty of rendering thousands homeless, and now huddled in relief camps? On Friday, this paper carried the chilling account of Sabina Begum. Hers is the first officially confirmed case of gang-rape, allegedly by armed CPM cadres on the night of November 6, during 'Operation Recapture' in Nandigram. The mother has said her daughters were raped as well before they were abducted. They are still missing. So far the party of government in West Bengal has offered Sabina Begum, and others like her, no hope at all that the men she has been so courageous to name will be brought to book.

The Calcutta High Court has just pronounced the March 14 police firing in Nandigram unconstitutional. It has ordered the West Bengal government to pay adequate compensation to those who were raped, molested and killed on that day and directed the CBI to continue its inquiry. There is a well-timed lesson in this for the CPM. As Gujarat 2002 highlighted, when one institution fails, another will step in. In the long run, democracy and justice will prevail over those who seek to undermine our faith in it. The CPM must decide which side it is on in Nandigram.

(Coursty: Indian Express) ■