

Communist Party of India (Marxist)
Manifesto for the 14th Lok Sabha Elections, 2004

Part I

The Indian people have to vote once again to elect a new government. The 14th Lok Sabha elections are being held after four and a half years of the BJP-led government in office. The elections are being held because the BJP-led government has dissolved parliament earlier than scheduled. This is the very same party, which has been advocating a fixed five-year term for the Lok Sabha and state legislatures, despite democratic opposition to the proposal.

Taking into account the period of the Vajpayee government since the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP rule has lasted for six years. This six-year rule has pursued a combination of communal politics, pro-rich economic policies and craven support to US imperialism.

The NDA exists merely for the sake of providing a cover for BJP rule. The BJP is nothing but an instrument for fulfilling the aims of the RSS. The NDA agenda is a farce enacted on the people. There is only one agenda: that of the RSS-BJP combine.

The sole achievement of the BJP-led coalition is that it stuck together proving that opportunism has been taken to new heights by the BJP and its allies. Even this opportunist combine is coming unstuck with eight parties leaving the NDA.

The BJP rule has meant:

- Systematic attacks against non-Hindus and those who do not share the sectarian ideology of Hindutva. The Gujarat pogrom, which was aided and abetted by the state government, is a precursor to what is in store if the BJP-RSS tightens its grip over State power.
- Economic policies designed to promote the interests of big business and foreign capital leading to erosion of economic sovereignty.
- Depriving millions of people of their livelihood and transferring wealth to the rich.
- Pro-American foreign policy harmful to the country's national interests.
- Attacks on democratic rights and curbing the rights of the working people.
- Unprecedented and brazen levels of corruption.

Secularism Endangered

These years amply confirm that the BJP-led government is harmful for the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution. The BJP, guided and controlled by the RSS, believes in the Hindutva ideology, which aims to dismantle the secular and democratic edifice of the Indian republic.

- Under the Vajpayee government every institution of the State has been penetrated by the RSS.
- Bypassing the judicial process, the Vajpayee government strove to facilitate the building of the temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood.
- The BJP is committed to the RSS-VHP stand that all the three sites at Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura should be handed over for building temples by demolishing the mosques existing there.
- The BJP-led government has sought to communalise the educational system by introducing anti-secular ideology in the curriculum and textbooks. History is sought to be rewritten on communal lines.
- The minorities, both Muslim and Christian, are continuously subject to intimidation and assaults. Gujarat and Jhabua epitomize the intolerance and hatred towards the religious minorities. The refusal to register cases against those responsible for the horrendous crimes against innocent women and children and the brazen attempts to protect the guilty in Gujarat is a warning sign of what is in store if the BJP outlook prevails. The National Human Rights Commission and the Supreme Court have confirmed that the state under BJP rule is unable to render justice to minorities.
- The intimidation and assaults on artistes, writers and cultural institutions who refuse to accept the sectarian-communal outlook, portend a serious threat to secular and democratic values under a BJP-regime.

Anti-National Economic Policies

Transfer of Wealth: At no time in independent India has so much been done for the rich and so little for the poor. The policies of the Vajpayee government have led to the systematic transfer of resources and assets from the people to a narrow circle of big business, big traders, speculators and foreign companies.

- The sale of public sector assets has meant a transfer of public resources to private hands.
- The fiscal and taxation policies have led to enormous concessions for the rich and cutbacks for the ordinary people. While a bonanza has been provided for the affluent, savings of the middle class, the pensioners and ordinary citizens have dwindled due to the cut in interest rates of bank deposits and provident and pension funds.
- Rural India is in distress because of the acute agrarian crisis. Recent estimates shows that the total loss to farmers due to crash in prices is Rs. 1,16,000 crores annually. The per capita availability of foodgrains per annum has come down from 184.5 kg in 1997 to

152.1 kg in 2001 – almost the same level of consumption that existed at the time of the Bengal famine in 1943.

- The Vajpayee government has assiduously worked to dismantle the public sector. The most profitable PSUs like VSNL, Balco, etc., are being sold off cheaply to Indian and foreign monopolies. The privatisation drive has affected all sectors – telecom, oil, transport, power and even public services.
- In every budget presented by the Vajpayee government since 1999, the rich have been given direct tax concessions. The top 100 big business houses saved taxes to the extent of Rs. 6853.64 crores in a single year – 2000-01. Excise and customs duties have been reduced on air-conditioners, refrigerators, gold, silver, diamonds and automobiles. On the other hand, an additional duty of Re. 1 per litre of diesel, a steep increase in postal rates, matches, textiles and administered price increase of LPG and kerosene and fertilisers were announced, imposing a heavy burden on the common people. The bonanza of pre-election sops have also benefited the affluent.
- The abolition of quantitative restrictions on imports and steep cuts in customs and import duties have badly affected agriculture and made small and medium industries vulnerable to the global market and spelt ruin for these sectors.

Vicious Attacks on People

If there is one single episode which reveals the callousness towards the poor and the inhuman character of the BJP-led government's policies, it is the dismantling of the public distribution system. The curtailment of the PDS was cruel and deprived millions of the urban and rural poor of cheap and essential foodstuff. This government, which promised to eliminate *bhook* (hunger), has presided over large-scale hunger affecting millions of people.

The government hoarded six crore tonnes of foodgrains in 2002 rather than distribute it to the hungry rural poor who were badly hit by the drought in recent years. Instead, the prices of rice and wheat in all categories for the BPL and APL were hiked up periodically. The same government thought it fit to export one crore tonnes of foodgrains at below poverty line prices rather than distribute it to the needy in India. Subsidised export of foodgrains for foreigners and keeping the poor hungry – this is the new version of *swadeshi* of the BJP.

The BJP government surrendered to the rich countries and the implementation of the WTO regulations have been disastrous for Indian agriculture and the farmers. The abolition of quantitative restrictions and the drastic lowering of import duties have led to price fluctuations for many agricultural commodities. Suicides by farmers have been rampant all around the country. In Andhra Pradesh alone 3,189 farmers committed suicide in a single year, 2002. There can be no worse shame for the BJP government than the fact that farmers, who made India self-reliant in food production, are now committing suicide in droves.

The plight of millions of handloom, powerloom and other workers in the traditional industries is one of ruin and despair. The impact of government policies has been to increase the prices of their inputs and removing all protection for their goods in the market. Artisans and fish workers, both men and women, are the worst victims of the BJP brand of liberalisation.

Regional Disparities

Abandonment of planning and allocation of resources and promotion of a market-economy has heightened regional disparities. Growing regional inequalities are providing a fillip to divisive forces and creating new social tensions.

Scourge of Unemployment

The government's economic policies have made unemployment the biggest problem for the people. Rural unemployment, unemployment for the youth, educated unemployment, unemployment for women and loss of existing jobs in the public sector and the organised sector have blighted the lives of millions of people. The rate of growth of employment has been a dismal 1.13 per cent under BJP rule. Of the forty-one million registered job seekers in the employment exchange in 2000-01 only 99,000 got jobs. Existing employment is being done away with. There was a decline of 8.34 lakh jobs in the organised sector between 1998 and March 2002. According to the Planning Commission, an estimated 16 per cent of the youth will be unemployed at the end of the Tenth Plan. In rural areas agricultural workers and women are faced with sharply reduced workdays per year.

The promise of one crore jobs by the BJP in its election manifesto is a cruel joke for those who are jobless and are faced with a bleak and dismal future.

Attacks on Federalism

The Vajpayee government has proved its intolerance of state governments run by opposition parties. It was only the lack of a majority in the Rajya Sabha which prevented the central government from invoking Article 356 against such governments as in Bihar. This shows its contempt for federalism and its authoritarian attitude towards states' rights.

The economic and fiscal policies of the Vajpayee government have contributed to the financial problem of the states. Due to the central government's policies the states' share in revenue has come down drastically – the state's share in the divisible pool was reduced by more than Rs. 10,000 crores. The fiscal situation of the states has been adversely affected by the lowering of interests on small savings.

The central government has illegally imposed terms and conditions on the state governments in pursuance of policies dictated by the IMF and the World Bank. The insistence on MOUs to be signed by the states is inimical to the federal system. The terms of reference of the Finance Commission

has been so framed as to impose on the states conditionalities if they are to receive grants which are their constitutional entitlement.

The assault on states' rights has taken the shape of the Centre depriving the states of the right to legislate on the cooperative sector and usurped the authority to decide the posts of Chairman or Chief Executives of the cooperative. In the health sector too the Centre has indirectly usurped the powers of the states and funds are being allocated arbitrarily. The Model University Act proposed through the UGC is an attack on states' rights and the autonomy of universities.

Pro-American Foreign Policy

The Vajpayee government has been the most pro-imperialist government in independent India. The non-aligned foreign policy has been given up. The BJP has supported every aggressive move by the Bush administration whether it be its war on Afghanistan, or its war and occupation of Iraq.

The Vajpayee government has entered into a strategic alliance with Israel. It follows the RSS view that a US-Israel-India axis would serve the interests of Hindutva.

The Vajpayee government has cemented its strategic alliance with the United States. It supports the National Missile Defence system being put in place by the Bush administration which has been opposed by a majority of the countries in the world. There is increasing military cooperation at all levels with the United States. The United States has set up an FBI office in India and it is being given increasing access to sensitive military installations in the border areas in the name of joint exercises.

The Vajpayee government refused to continue with the bilateral dialogue with Pakistan after the failure of the Agra summit. The BJP-led government suspended travel links, sporting ties, downgraded diplomatic relations and amassed troops on the border. The CPI(M) had consistently advocated the resumption of dialogue as a means to reduce Indo-Pak tensions and to keep off American intervention. The Vajpayee government has initiated talks with Pakistan after a full two years. This has come about due to American pressure. Improvement of relations with Pakistan is essential for the well being of both countries but it should be a bilateral process and not under American auspices.

Attacks on Democratic Rights

The Vajpayee government enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota), a draconian piece of legislation in the name of fighting terrorism. The Pota, like its precursor Tada, is being misused against political opponents. Nor has the use of Pota prevented terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere.

The BJP-led government is supportive of all the measures being taken by the higher judiciary and the administration to curtail the right to protest,

to hold demonstrations and meetings, counterposing them to the rights of citizens. The Vajpayee government has refused to step in to protect the right to strike which has been threatened by the Supreme Court judgement of July 2003.

Attacks on the Rights of the Working Class & Employees

The government has been trying to change labour laws to allow employers to close down factories without getting government permission and to allow unrestricted dismissal of workers. The BJP government's policies have eroded the savings and provident fund guarantees of the workers. From 12 per cent interest on the provident fund it has been reduced to 9 per cent. The new pension plan for government employees is purely contributory with the government abdicating its responsibility. The pension and provident funds are sought to be put at the disposal of the stock market and the corporate sector endangering the hard-earned savings of the workers. The BJP has refused to enact a comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers, given its pro-landlord and pro-rich farmer bias. It has announced a fraudulent scheme of social welfare benefits for the unorganised sector, which will provide no genuine protection for millions of workers in the unorganised sector.

Abdication of Social Responsibilities

The BJP-led government has failed to fulfill its elementary responsibilities in the field of education. Despite the passage of the 93rd Constitutional amendment making education free and compulsory in the elementary stage for children aged 6-14 years, the ground realities are different. 19 per cent of the children in the age group 6 to 14 years did not attend school in 2002-03. At the primary level, the drop-out rate increased from 40.3 per cent in 1999-2000 to 40.7 per cent in 2001. Today 30 million children do not go to school. Higher education is a privilege beyond the reach of the poor with the government promoting crass commercialization and allowing fees to be hiked up without any regulation.

The government's record in fulfilling its social responsibilities is dismal. The central budget allocation for health is around 1.3 per cent of the total budget. The government promotes privatization of health care leading to the denigration of the public health system and government-run hospitals and dispensaries. The government has abolished drug control for most drugs, leading to a steep increase in prices of medicines including life-saving drugs.

Life for an ordinary Indian is no better. 200 million (20 crore) Indians have no access to safe drinking water; 63 per cent of all rural households do not have electricity. 1.6 lakh villages remain unconnected by all weather roads. 47 per cent of children below 3 years are malnourished. 70 per cent women in the reproductive age group in rural India suffer from malnutrition.

Yet the BJP and the Vajpayee government have the gall to claim that India is shining.

The reality is that BJP rule benefits only the top ten per cent of the population.

Brazen Corruption

The Vajpayee government has set new records in high-level corruption. The Tehelka tape exposure revealed shockingly how kickbacks in defence deals are a regular occurrence. For the first time the President of a ruling party was seen receiving a bribe on camera. Instead of cleaning up the system, the government launched a vindictive campaign to harass Tehelka.

One of the biggest scandals involving thousands of crores of rupees has been the way the US64 scheme of the UTI was allowed to collapse, depriving millions of small investors of their hard earned savings.

The Vajpayee government is known as a government of privatisation scams. Every public sector sale and the disinvestment of shares are wrapped in dubious methods, shady deals and under-valuation of assets. The VSNL, the Balco and Centaur Hotel sales are some examples. The CAG report on the Centaur hotel sale has exposed the racketeering which has cost the government exchequer heavily.

Corruption has hit all sectors affected by privatisation: telecom, oil, sugar and so on. The massive stamp paper swindle involved the sale of machinery from the government security press at Nasik to Telgi.

No item is beyond the greed of the BJP-RSS combine. A majority of the 3,850 petrol pumps and gas agencies allotted through the ministry of petroleum were found to benefit BJP-RSS functionaries and their relatives.

Another stint of BJP-RSS rule in the name of the NDA would mean facilitating the advance of a Hindutva-based authoritarianism which spells danger for secularism, democracy and social justice. It would mean more reactionary economic policies which will threaten the livelihood of millions. The BJP rule would mean bringing in imperialism and foreign capital in a big way into our economy and society, further eroding national sovereignty and thwarting any semblance of an independent foreign policy.

For all these reasons, the BJP and its alliance must be rejected by all sections of the people who are patriotic, cherish the hard earned gains of independence, are proud of our secular and democratic traditions and wish to see India united and prosperous.

Congress Policies No Alternative

The Congress party ruled the country for over four decades. Its policies and record of government contributed to the present plight of the people and the country. Its failure to strengthen the foundations of democracy, secularism, federalism and its anti-people policies laid the basis for the

rise of the BJP and its coalition government. The Congress has not learnt lessons from the past. The Congress advocates economic policies which are not different from the BJP. The Congress-run state governments such as the UDF government in Kerala are pursuing policies which promote privatisation and liberalisation. The people opposed to the oppressive BJP rule expect a firm defence of secularism and democratic values, not a vacillating and compromising role. They will rally to policies which provide them with a stake in economic development and which are an alternative to the BJP's rightwing, pro-big business policies.

Strengthen the CPI (M) and the Left

To make an alternative government possible and for a change in the policies it is necessary to strengthen the CPI(M) and increase the Left representation in parliament. The Left will have a major role to play after the elections because:

it is the consistent defender of secularism and democratic values;

it advances the struggle for social and economic justice;

it defends the interests of the country against the depredations of imperialism.

Record of Left-led Governments

The record of the Left-led governments of West Bengal and Tripura and earlier in Kerala shows the alternative path which can be taken if the Left and democratic forces are strengthened at the national level. Advances made in these states are notable. They have implemented land reforms, ensured democratic functioning of three-tier panchayat system and decentralization, expanded the democratic rights of the people, maintained communal amity and defended secular values, and have been staunch defenders of the rights of the working people.

In the states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura where the Left is strong it has shown that alternative policies can be put in place which are distinct from those of the BJP and the Congress. That is why it is necessary to ensure the defeat of the BJP and the Congress in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura and to project the platform of policies of the Left independently all over the country.

Need For Alternative Secular Government

All those who cherish the country's unity, who wish to strengthen the democratic and secular basis of India and who are interested in the economic well-being and social upliftment of the people, must come together to reject the BJP and its allies.

The CPI (M) will cooperate with all other left democratic and secular forces to achieve this goal. The 14th Lok Sabha elections should result in the formation of a secular government at the Centre.

Vote:

To defeat the BJP and its allies

For the formation of a secular government at the Centre

To strengthen the CPI (M) and Left in Parliament

Part II

After more than fifty-six years of independence, the people of India are still not free from the basic problems of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease. The social and economic emancipation of millions of Indians remains an unfinished agenda. There can be no real advance towards a more democratic society accompanied by economic and social justice for all citizens without breaking free from the policies pursued by successive governments after independence which have favoured the owners of big capital, landlords and the tiny section of the rich in India. It is only the CPI(M) and the Left parties who present alternative policies which can bring about basic social transformation.

The struggle for such alternative policies is part of the basic platform of the CPI(M). In the present elections, the Party wishes to set forth a set of policies which are relevant for the advance to a new India.

Promote Secular Values

- The CPI(M) stands for the separation of religion and politics and necessary legislative measures to firm up this separation.
- Enforce the Protection of Places of Worship Act to prevent raising of disputes on religious places.
- The Ayodhya dispute should be decided by the judicial process. The final judicial verdict should be accepted by all.

Strengthen Federalism

The CPI(M) advocates greater powers for the states in the economic and political spheres, institutionalizing the federal system through the Inter-State Council and empowering the National Development Council with sufficient powers.

- Constitutional amendments for devolving more powers in the economic, fiscal and administrative areas; decentralisation of powers to the district bodies and panchayats; ensuring local participation in formulation of plans and projects.
- Replacing Article 356 with suitable provisions so that the draconian powers of the Centre to dismiss state governments are curbed.
- Maximum autonomy for the state of Jammu & Kashmir to be provided for within the ambit of Article 370 of the Constitution; regional autonomy to be provided to Jammu and Ladakh regions.
- Special provision for the development of the north-eastern region with particular emphasis on infrastructure development and creation of employment opportunities.
- Reversing the process of central dictates on devolving finances to the states by imposing conditionalities to pursue the central government's economic policy directives.

Foreign Policy

The Vajpayee government's pro-imperialist foreign policy should be reversed. The CPI(M) will work for:

- An independent and non-aligned foreign policy which defends India from imperialist pressures; initiatives for South-South cooperation and reviving the non-aligned movement on a new basis.
- Opposition to US superpower unilateralism and the expanding role of NATO globally; ending the occupation of Iraq by US and its allies and

strengthening the multilateral forums like the UN to deal with all disputes between countries.

- Democratising the Security Council and the UN structure.
- Promote multipolarity in international relations; special attention to improving all-round relations with China; fostering close ties with Russia and special efforts to coordinate relations between India-Russia and China.
- Expanding the scope of cooperation between major developing countries like Brazil, South Africa.
- Dialogue with Pakistan should be pursued seriously without US intervention; promotion of people to people relations between the two countries.
- Special attention to promote SAARC cooperation and improving relations with all neighbouring countries in South Asia.

National Security

- Cancellation of Indo-US military cooperation which links up India with the US global strategy.
- Revert to nuclear policy of using nuclear energy for civilian and peaceful purposes. Provide parliamentary sanction for moratorium on testing. Open talks with Pakistan for de-nuclearised environment in South Asia.
- Removal of nuclear weapons from the US military base in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.
- Promote the policy of no foreign military bases in South Asia.
- Create a national security apparatus which will work within the framework of the parliamentary democratic system.

Economic Policies

From 1998 the BJP-led government has pursued economic policies which have been disastrous for the country and for the majority of the people. These are policies which are designed to benefit the affluent 10 per cent while the rest of the people are pauperized and subjected to deprivation.

The CPI(M) proposes a comprehensive set of policies to replace the existing ones.

Land Reforms

- Keeping in mind that seventy per cent of the people of India live in the rural areas, the single most important step for rural transformation is the implementation of land reforms.
- The new policy will reverse the current thrust to dilute land ceiling laws and provide fresh momentum for speedy and comprehensive steps for implementing land reforms.
- To achieve this, loopholes in the existing laws have to be plugged.
- Takeover and distribution of surplus land above the ceiling, handing over cultivable waste land to the landless, priority to be given to landless scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in land distribution; correction of land records, security for tenants. Issuance of joint pattas for women.

Develop Agriculture

- Increased public investment in agriculture.
- Prohibit sale of agricultural lands to foreign companies or their subsidiaries for agri-business.
- Ensure self-sufficiency in foodgrains production; remunerative prices for crops through market intervention by the state.

- Greater allocation for developing irrigation facilities.
- Comprehensive insurance schemes for crop and cattle.
- Expansion of credit facilities for poor peasants and small farmers.
- Increase subsidies on agricultural inputs.
- Sufficient allocations and encouragement to animal husbandry, pisci culture, poultry farming, seri culture.

Industries

The CPI(M) stands for:

- Increased public investment in infrastructure; review of power and telecom policies in tune with interests of national development; adequate public outlays for power, communications, railways and road development.
- Strengthening of the public sector in the core and strategic areas by injecting fresh capital and technology.
- Foreign capital to be channeled in those areas for which clear-cut priorities are set. These priorities are to be determined by the need for developing new production capacities and acquiring new technology.
- Protection of domestic industry from indiscriminate lowering of import duties and takeover of existing Indian companies by foreign companies. Private sector to be encouraged to invest in new productive areas, R&D and the service sector like tourism.
- Encouragement to small-scale industries with adequate incentives and sufficient credit from banks.
- Protection of traditional industries such as handloom, coir, etc. Yarn to be provided at control rates for the weavers and adequate facilities for the marketing of their goods.
- Ending the deployment of deep-sea fishing trawlers, protecting rights of the fishing community.

Financial Sector

Steps to strengthen LIC and GIC as part of the public sector in the insurance field; foreign companies should be barred entry into this sector; the trend of privatizing the banking sector should be halted. Reforms should be introduced to make banks accountable and restore social priorities; there should be proper regulation of non-banking finance companies to safeguard interests of depositors; capital flows should be regulated; no convertibility should be allowed on the capital account.

Resource Mobilisation

- Broaden the direct taxes base; instead of reducing taxes on the rich, raise the tax rates on the affluent sections (corporate tax, wealth tax, income tax, etc.) and ensure strict compliance; tax evasion should be firmly dealt with.
- Unearth black money kept inside and outside the country and tap it for productive purposes.
- Wasteful expenditure and the growing misuse of public money by officialdom and public servants should be stopped.

Public Distribution System

Food security should be the highest priority of the government. This requires the strengthening and expansion of the public distribution system. For this the CPI(M) advocates:

- Reintroduction of universal system of PDS and giving up targeting in the name of reaching the poor.
- BPL cards should be available for all those who are not income-tax payers. The Antodaya scheme should be expanded to cover all sections of the rural poor.
- 14 essential commodities should be included for supply under the PDS.
- A network of fair-price shops and cooperatives should cover all panchayats.
- Overhead costs should be curtailed; FCI and distribution mechanism should be streamlined.

Rights of the Working People

Agricultural Workers

The CPI(M) will uncompromisingly struggle for:

A central legislation for agricultural workers to protect the basic rights which should include:

- guaranteed minimum wages;
- pension and other social benefits;
- provision of homestead lands;
- equal wages for equal work for women agricultural workers;
- provision of workmen's compensation for accidents.

Working Class

The CPI (M) will fight for:

- Revival of sick units, halt privatisation of profitable public sector units, revival of sick public sector units by a suitable package of measures including reorienting the government policy on tax-concession, order-placement, credit, etc., in that direction.
- Rejecting the retrograde recommendations of the Report of the Second National Commission on Labour aimed at vesting the employers with the right to 'hire and fire' to the detriment of the interests of the workers.
- Rescinding the notification issued by the government adding a new classification of 'fixed term employment workman' under the Model Standing Order Rules, a concept which will wipe out permanency in all jobs even in the organised sector.
- Provision of need-based minimum wage for workers, revision of the statutory minimum wages in that direction with the provision of automatic linkage of the emoluments with price index. Restoration of interest rate in Provident Fund.
- Rejuvenating the enforcement machinery of labour laws and social security legislations and suitable amendments in the laws to provide for stringent punishment for violation and expanding their coverage.
- Comprehensive legislation for the workers in the unorganised sector and home-based workers to govern their service condition, job-security, grievance-redressal and social security benefit adequately financed by budgetary allocation by the government.
- Recognition of trade unions through secret ballot and protection of trade union rights and right to collective bargaining by a truly representative forum.
- Effective scheme for workers' participation in management in both public and private sector.

Protect the Right to Strike

- Safeguarding the right to organise, collective bargaining and the right to strike for all workers, including government employees, by legislation adopted in Parliament to annul the Supreme Court judgement prohibiting strikes.
- India should ratify the International Labour Organisation convention 151 which accords government employees the rights which other citizens enjoy, subject to their administrative responsibilities.

Women's Rights

The CPI(M) commits in policy and practice to fight for women's rights in every sphere at a time when women face the worst assault on their rights.

- While holding the NDA government squarely responsible for the shameful failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill the CPI(M) pledges to continue its firm support for one-third reservation for women in the legislatures and to work for its passage in the new parliament.
- It also supports the important amendments to the Domestic Violence Bill moved by women's organisations and will work for its passage. It will also work for the adoption of laws against sexual harassment and child abuse.
- The CPI(M) supports a huge expansion in employment opportunities for women in the organised sector and in rural areas with equal wages; it will fight all attempts to remove protective legislation for women in the name of labour reform; it supports legislation for unorganised sector workers including home-based workers and domestic workers.
- It demands implementation of joint pattas for women in all land distributed including housing plots given in urban areas by government and special schemes for female headed households.
- The state should provide credit at low rates of interest to self-help groups and assistance to market their products.
- Condemning female foeticide and the alarming decrease in sex ratios, the CPI(M) pledges to strengthen existing laws against female foeticide, implement them and support social campaigns in favour of the girl child. It will strongly oppose any coercive population control measures or the promotion of hazardous contraceptives for women.
- The CPI(M) advocates equal rights for women of all communities. It demands compulsory registration of marriages. Eradication of the practice of dowry as a national mission.
- It also stands for a comprehensive media policy to check the growing trend of commodification of women.

Children's Rights

- Universalisation of child care services; all children upto 6 years should be in anganwadis.
- Prohibition of child labour and enforcing rights of children subject to such exploitation.

Education

The CPI(M) will strive for:

- The 93rd Constitutional amendment promising free and compulsory education for children till the elementary stage must be amended to ensure the State fulfills its commitment to make education a basic right for children upto the age of 14 by providing financial backing. Free and

compulsory school education can be attained only if it is accompanied by free mid-day meals, provision of textbooks and other education materials.

- Upgradation of the salaries of elementary school teachers and providing schools equipped with basic facilities.
- Syllabus and curriculum to inculcate secularism, progressive values, scientific temper and national unity.
- Ensure social control over private educational institutions for regulation of admissions, fees and content of education. Central legislation to empower the states to regulate self-financing institutions.
- Allocation of 10 per cent of union budget for education.
- Support to mass literacy programmes.
- Democratisation of the higher education system and development of vocational education.

Health

The public health system is in a state of disarray. The trend towards privatisation of health services must be reversed. The CPI(M) advocates:

- Increasing the expenditure on public health by the government to 5 per cent of the GDP.
- Provision of an adequate network of primary health centres that guarantee the delivery of all basic services and have sufficient stocks of medicines that are procured through a transparent drug procurement system based on the list of essential drugs. The Primary Health Care infrastructure should include a National Community Health Worker scheme to deliver basic health services at the habitation (village/urban settlement) level.
- Ensuring supply of essential drugs at prices affordable to the common people. All essential drugs should be under price control.

WTO Issues

Agriculture

The CPI(M) wants the government to adopt the following stand in the interests of India and the developing countries with regard to the iniquitous provisions in the agreement on agriculture:

- Reduction of domestic and export subsidies of developed countries.
- Reintroduction of quantitative restrictions on import of those commodities that get subsidies above the allowable minimum in their home countries.
- Increase in import tariffs to protect domestic agriculture.
- Protect biodiversity and seed rights of farming communities and create an institutional state framework to fight biopiracy.

Patents

The amendments to the Indian Patent Act of 1970 has introduced many imbalances that favour the multinational pharmaceutical industry and is inimical to the interests of the common people and the indigenous drug industry.

The CPI (M) advocates:

- A review of the pending Patents Third Amendment Bill, with a view to addressing the imbalances. Specifically, the issues that need to be addressed include: a system of compulsory licensing that promotes real competition in the market; automatic granting of compulsory license for government use and in the case of drugs that address major public health

problems; and ban on the patenting of life forms, including micro-organisms.

- A comprehensive review of the TRIPS agreement in the WTO based on the experience of the last 9 years, and specifically to overturn the pro-MNC and pro-developed countries bias in the agreement.

Services

The CPI(M) will demand that:

- In the negotiations for General Agreement on Trade Services (GATS) India should not make offers for market access for basic services like education, health and water resources.
- Review of existing agreement to rectify imbalances should be undertaken first.
- No commitment for privatisation and entry of foreign entities in services which should be governed by social benefit rather than profit.

Water Resources

- Water is a public resource which cannot be privatised.
- There should be a new National Water Policy. Provide for community/panchayat role in management of water resources. Exercise control on indiscriminate use of ground water.
- Provision of potable drinking water to all villages must be a priority task.

Housing

- Housing to be accorded the status of a basic right; housing schemes for urban and rural poor to be stepped up.

Employment

- Guarantee right to work as a fundamental right.
- Provide food-for-work programmes to generate employment.
- Ensure adequate credit for self-employment schemes for educated unemployed, artisans and disabled persons.
- Scrap freeze in recruitment in the Government sector.

Senior Citizens

- Grant of pension to working people as a third benefit; one-rank one-pension for ex-servicemen; upgrading pensions of all categories of pensioners in consonance with the cost of living.
- Network of old-age homes/day care centres to be set up with State support.

Social Justice for Oppressed

The CPI (M) calls for:

Dalits

- Stringent action against untouchability and atrocities against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and invoking of the provisions of the Prevention of Atrocities Act for this purpose.

- Ensuring that quotas for reservation for scheduled castes and tribes are filled up. Statutory reservation of same quota of jobs in public sector and government departments' jobs which are privatised.
- OBC reservation to be implemented.
- Reservation to be extended to dalit Christians.

Tribal/Adivasi People

- Protect land rights of adivasis and restore land illegally alienated from them.
- Ensure the right of access to forests and forest produce; the Forest Act be amended for this purpose. Recording of rights of inhabitants of forest villages.
- No project, industrial or developmental, should be undertaken where displacement of tribal people occurs without a comprehensive and sustainable rehabilitation package. Such a scheme must be put in place before any displacement or work begins.
- Regional autonomy should be provided for tribal compact areas wherever necessary. Extension of panchayat system in the fifth and sixth schedule areas.

Rights of Minorities

Equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of religion or caste are essential for a secular-democratic society. The Muslim community and some other minorities suffer from various forms of deprivation and discrimination. Special measures are required to remove their social and economic backwardness.

- Protection of the just rights of the minorities; implement provisions of the Constitution to prevent discrimination.
- Special schemes for promoting educational facilities for deprived minorities; provision for equal opportunities for employment; availability of bank credit for self-employment.
- Promotion and support to Urdu language.

Youth

- A national youth policy must be adopted which comprehensively deals with issues of special concern to youth.
- The State should provide for an adequate network of sports and cultural facilities for youth in all parts of the country.

Media and Culture

- All national languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution should be equally encouraged and developed.
- The Prasar Bharati Corporation must be strengthened so that it becomes a genuine public broadcasting service. Prohibit cross-media ownership to prevent monopolies. Remove decision allowing foreign stakes of print media.
- Enforce a media code for satellite broadcasters.
- Ensure that states have a say in media policy and programmes in the public broadcasting service.

- To prevent any infringement of the freedom of expression of the media, it is necessary to codify the laws relating to legislative privilege. Parliament and state legislatures should undertake this task.

Science and Technology

A science and technology policy must be adopted which:

- Promotes self-reliant development.
- Development of scientific institutions and popularization of a scientific temper.
- Strong R&D base through public funding, CSIR laboratories, etc.

Environment

- Formulate an environment policy which is integrated with the needs of rapid and sustainable development.
- Strict control must be exercised against industries using hazardous technology which affects the health of workers and the neighbourhood.
- Stringent action should be taken against contractors illegally cutting down forests.
- There has to be a uniform national rehabilitation policy for persons displaced by development projects.
- Develop mass-transit and public transport system to curb vehicular pollution.
- Steps to check soil and river erosion.

Electoral Reforms

- Proportional representation with partial list system.
- Effective steps to prohibit persons with criminal background from contesting elections.
- State funding in the form of material for recognised political parties based on the Indrajit Gupta Committee Report.
- Prohibition on corporate funding to political parties.

Fight Corruption

- Suitable institutional mechanism should be established to stop corruption at appropriate levels including members of Cabinet and the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and judiciary. Proceedings including trial of cases should be completed within a period of two years from the date of complaint.
- Right to Information Act should be implemented.

Judicial Reforms

- Reforms in judicial system to provide speedy relief at affordable cost to the common people.
- Constituting a National Judicial Commission comprising of representatives from judiciary, executive, legislature and bar for appointment, transfer of judges and to ensure judicial accountability.
- There should be a proper balance in the relations between the legislature, judiciary and the executive and the exercise of powers in their respective spheres without encroaching into the legitimate domain of other organs.

Vote:

To defeat the BJP and its allies

For the formation of a secular government at the Centre

To strengthen the CPI (M) and Left in Parliament