



COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

Central Committee

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Report on Political Developments *(Adopted at the Central Committee Meeting August 17-18, 2013, New Delhi)*

International

The last three months have seen the continuation of the global economic slowdown. Global growth will remain around 3 per cent in 2013. The first part of the year has confirmed the trend of the slowing of economic growth in China and other major developing countries like India, Brazil and South Africa. This along with the prolonged recession in the Eurozone and the weak pace of recovery in the US has contributed to subduing the global economic growth.

The ruling classes in Europe have sought to maintain the neo-liberal policies by pushing austerity measures and squeezing public expenditure. This has contributed to high unemployment, depressed wages and fall in the standards of the working people. The lower commodity prices and fall in exports is affecting the economies of the developing countries. Even those countries which have been registering better growth rates in the past have witnessed popular outbursts of mass discontent. Two cases stand out in particular, Turkey and Brazil, though the causes for the mass protests are different.

Turkey Protests

In Turkey, the mass protest demonstrations began in Taksim Square in Istanbul. The proposed demolition of the Gezi Park in the square to give way for the construction of a mall led to the protests which soon spread to demonstrations in Ankara and 77 other cities. The protests drew a wide range of youth, secular forces, ethnic minorities and the opposition. The demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Erdogan was raised. The riot police made repeated raids to disperse the demonstrators using teargas and water cannons. Taksim square was finally cleared of all the protesters on June 15. The protests spread over weeks left three dead, 5000 people injured and arrests of thousands more.

The widespread protests were the first major challenge to the rule of the AKP (the Islamist Party) and the leadership of Erdogan. Discontent caused by the neo-liberal policies and the efforts to usher in Islamist values in a country with a staunch secular tradition contributed to the mass protests. The foreign policy and ambitions of the Erdogan government have suffered a blow due to this internal turmoil. The Turkish government's support for the Syrian rebels and intervention and involvement in the Syrian conflict is also deeply unpopular.

Brazil Mass Protests

Brazil witnessed massive protest demonstrations during the month of June. It was sparked off by the increase in the transport fares. A large number of people are dependent on public transport for going to work. Along with the opposition to the fare hike, other demands were raised like public housing, health care, education and stamping out of corruption. The government cancelled the transport fare hike but the mass protests continued. President Dilma Rousseff expressed sympathy for the aims of the protest and proposed reforms. But what is significant is the wide sweep of the protests and the spontaneous way they sprung up.

Egypt: Morsi Ousted

Another major popular movement erupted in Egypt. One year after the election of President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, massive protests engulfed the country. A mass petition for the recall of Morsi collected over 22 million signatures. On June 30 at the call given by a coalition of opposition forces, 15 million people took to the streets all over the country. Tahrir Square became once again the scene for the mass protests. On July 3, the army moved in to depose Morsi and to hand over powers to an interim government.

The Muslim Brotherhood which was the main opposition force during the Mubarak regime had sought during the one year in office to put in place its Islamist agenda. Despite protests from the secular opposition it pushed through the Constitution with Islamist features. The Muslim Brotherhood sought to put its appointees in various posts in the administration and the judiciary. It quickly reached an understanding with the United States and adhered to neo-liberal policies and began negotiating for an IMF loan. The economic conditions worsened for the people during this period.

The protests and the movement against the Morsi regime gathered strength and it culminated in the army intervention. The Egyptian army had been running the State for over five decades. It has an entrenched role in the economy. From the mid-seventies the army has been getting funds from the United States. It remains to be seen how the army will act in the

coming days. There have been major clashes between the army and police forces and the Morsi supporters which have led to hundreds of deaths. The United States, while not supporting the ouster of Morsi was also not unduly alarmed at the army take over. It has been doing business with both the forces. There is the danger of the army consolidating its rule through a pliable civilian government. This can lead to a return to the Mubarak era security-state institutions. For the popular democratic forces in Egypt it is crucial that a political course be opened up whereby a secular democratic framework is established which will break with the authoritarianism of the Mubarak era and steer clear of the sectarian Islamist path.

Syrian Conflict

The events in Egypt have been a major setback for the Islamist forces in the region who were hoping to achieve power. But the popular upheaval in Egypt and Tunisia and its repercussions including the western interventions continue to unfold. In Libya, where Gaddafi was overthrown with the help of the NATO intervention, the struggle between the various militias including the Islamist forces continue and the Libyan government is struggling to establish its control.

In Syria, after more than two years of internal war and conflict, the hopes of the United States and the West that the Assad government can be toppled has receded. After more than two years of the conflict fuelled by the support given by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, the rebel forces are unable to advance despite the widespread destruction and loss of lives. The Syrian armed forces recaptured Qusayr town a strategic point near the Lebanon border which had been occupied by the rebels. Syrian rebel forces are still disunited. Much of its fighting power is provided by the foreign Islamist fighters running into thousands drawn from Tunisia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Yemen and Libya.

The US President announced in June that arms would be supplied to the rebels since the Syrian armed forces have used chemical weapons. This claim has not been proved and there is evidence of sarin gas being used by the rebels. The Russian government has provided proof of this in the United Nations. The Syrian government has got the firm support of Russia and Iran. The Syrian government had agreed to the talks in Geneva which was to be sponsored by Russia and the US. However, the Syrian rebels have refused to join the talks with the implicit backing of the Western powers.

The support being extended to the Islamist network and terrorist groups by Saudi Arabia and Turkey with the full backing of the Western powers has exposed the hypocrisy of the United States which is using the drone

attacks to target the Al Qaeda and other extremist forces in Afghanistan, Yemen and North Africa. The very same forces are being encouraged and assisted in Syria.

Hence, history is repeating itself with American actions encouraging and supporting the Islamic fundamentalist forces. It started in Afghanistan when the Americans financed and armed the jihad against the Soviet-backed regime. The rise of the Taliban was the result. In Syria today, fighters from Afghanistan are in the field against the secular Assad regime. The US is helping them. America destroyed the secular states in Iraq and Libya and they have become the hotspots for the Islamic fundamentalists. Iraq is today riven by sectarian conflicts and terrorist attacks which is the result of the American occupation of Iraq. The other result of American intervention is to exacerbate the Sunni-Shia conflict in the region. The revolt against the Assad government has a sectarian character as Sunni extremists are fighting against the Alawite minority headed government which also has Christian and secular Sunni support.

Japan Militarisation

Shinzo Abe became the Prime Minister of Japan after the LDP's victory in the Parliament elections in December 2012. This was followed by the LDP winning the majority in the elections to the Upper House in July. This will enable the government to smoothly pass laws and even bring amendments to the Constitution which was promulgated during the US occupation after the Second World War. The rightwing, ultra nationalist approach of Abe is leading to augmenting the military strength of the Self-Defence Forces. Japan is also exporting arms. Abe wants to amend the Constitution which prohibits a regular military force and military operations abroad. This is causing alarm in the region, given the history of Japanese aggression in China, Korea and other countries in the past. The Japanese government is also for strengthening the defence alliance with the US. Under Abe, Japan is also taking a more aggressive position on the dispute with China over some islands in the East China sea. Abe will also vigorously advocate for the quadrilateral alliance between the US, Japan, Australia and India with the aim of countering China. We have to see how the Indian government responds to such a move, as India has been keen to forge a strategic partnership with Japan which includes greater military cooperation.

US Global Surveillance

The widespread surveillance and tapping of internet and telephone data by the US National Security Agency (NSA) was exposed by Edward Snowden who was an employee of one of the agencies contracted for this work. He has provided information of how major telecom companies

such as Verizon (AT&T) and internet companies such as Google, Microsoft, Yahoo and Facebook have in fact become tools of the US government under the Prism project. The revelation showed that India is a major target of such intelligence gathering. It is the fifth largest target for such snooping, even ahead of countries such as Russia and China. The American president has sought to justify this surveillance by saying that only foreigners are subjected to such spying and that the privacy of American citizens was not violated.

Further revelations have shown that the Indian Embassy in Washington is also under surveillance and in a programme called Xkeyscore there are 150 different locations in the globe that are nodes of surveillance. One of these locations is in India. By this surveillance, the emails, telephone calls and cables sent within India and by Indians are being collected.

These exposures have led to protests from various countries including the closest allies of the United States in Europe like Germany and France. But the Indian government has downplayed the affair and has not condemned this surveillance which violates the sovereignty of India and the rights of its citizens.

The arrogance and the lengths to which America will go to get Snowden was seen when the plane of President of Bolivia, Evo Morales was denied permission to fly over by four European countries while returning from Moscow. France, Italy, Spain and Portugal closed their airspace and the presidential plane was forced to land in Vienna where it was searched to see if Snowden was on the plane. This flagrant violation of international law by the US and western powers was condemned by all the Latin American countries. This incident shows how the United States considers itself above international law and will not respect the sovereignty of other countries. Snowden has since been given temporary asylum in Russia. An immediate fall out of this step has been the cancellation by President Obama of his meeting with President Putin during the G20 summit meeting to be held in September.

Bangladesh

As noted in the May Central Committee report, there has been an intense confrontation between the Islamist and democratic secular forces. The war crimes tribunal has convicted five *Jamaat e Islami* leaders so far. This led to violent demonstrations and attacks by the Jamaat in different parts of the country. It also saw the popular movements of the youth in Shahbagh.

The main opposition party, the BNP, has been backing the Jamaat movement which has been rousing religious passions.

The Awami League has been losing ground and it has lost elections in five city corporations to the BNP. The economic situation has been worsening for the people and corruption is rife. The general elections are due in early 2014. In a related development the Bangladesh High Court has stated that the Jamaat e Islami is disqualified from putting up candidates in the forthcoming elections.

The border agreement arrived at between India and Bangladesh has not been ratified. The Indian parliament has to adopt a constitutional amendment for the same. This cannot be done due to the refusal of the BJP to support such an amendment. This will put the Awami League government on the defensive and help the opposition to stoke up anti-India feelings.

Sri Lanka

The elections to the Northern provincial council are to be held in September. Prior to that, the Sri Lankan government sought to amend the 13th amendment to the Constitution. This was an amendment made on the basis of the India-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987 by which certain powers were to be devolved to the provinces. President Rajapakse wants to dilute these powers to exclude land and police from the purview of the provincial council. This would have diluted the powers of the council and was opposed by all the political parties among the Tamil-speaking people. The Party also opposed the move and asked the Central government to intervene in the matter. The Indian government conveyed its opinion against the dilution of the 13th amendment. So far the Sri Lankan government has made no change to the 13th amendment but it has to be seen whether any step will be taken after the provincial elections.

National Situation

Economic Situation

The economic situation has been deteriorating with an overall slowdown in growth, fall in industrial production, continuing high inflation and a widening current deficit on the balance of payments.

Industrial production has been growing at the rate of less than 1 per cent in the past year, industrial production contracted by 2.8 per cent in May and by 2.2 per cent in June. The GDP growth rate declined to 5 per cent in 2012-13 as against 6.2 per cent in 2011-12. The current account deficit (CAD) reached a record 4.8 per cent in 2012-13. The retail inflation rate as measured by the Consumer Price Index has been 9.87 per cent in June and 9.64 per cent in July.

The crisis building up has manifested in the steady depreciation of the value of the rupee. The exchange rate of the rupee to the dollar has breached the Rs. 60 mark; it is currently hovering between Rs. 60 to 61 per dollar. The steady depreciation of the rupee is a symptom of the worsening situation of the economy with the lower GDP growth and the continuing high inflation. The balance of payments position has worsened with the rising import bill and the fall in exports. The fall of the value of the rupee cannot be attributed only to the external factors. It is a result of the economic mismanagement by the government and the neo-liberal policies being pursued.

The economic difficulties have led to reduced capital flows from abroad. It was these foreign capital flows after 2009 that boosted the stock market and fuelled the real estate boom. This flow has declined now with the US deciding to rollback its easy money policy. In the month of June alone \$ 9 billion of foreign capital left the equity and debt markets. India has a foreign debt of nearly \$ 400 billion while its foreign exchange reserves have fallen to \$ 277 billion. Servicing of this debt will absorb nearly 60 per cent of the foreign exchange reserves i.e. \$ 169 billion in the coming twelve months. The bulk of the debt is short-term borrowings and extra commercial borrowings by Indian companies. The depreciation of the rupee will make servicing of this debt unsustainable for many of these companies.

The government had attracted foreign capital flows both in portfolio investment in the share equity and debt markets and through FDI. The repatriation of profits and dividends on these investments constitute a big part of the outflow of the foreign exchange.

The depreciation of the rupee has added to the costs of oil imports which is the largest single item of import. The rising oil prices is increasing the production cost of all other items and fueling inflation which in turn adds to the falling value of the rupee.

Another major item in the import bill has been gold imports. Gold and jewellery imports cost \$ 70 billion last year. The government policy encouraged gold consumption. In the last budget, the limit of gold imports without duty was raised for individuals. Now the government has imposed additional duty of 10 per cent on gold to curb imports.

Faced with the difficult situation, the government has been desperately trying to woo foreign capital investments. Recently, the UPA government relaxed caps and eased norms for FDI in 12 sectors including 100 per cent FDI in telecom sector and 26 per cent in defence production. The cabinet has relaxed the norms for FDI in multi-brand retail which it had announced ten months ago. The government hopes that increased flow of foreign capital will help bridge the current account deficit. But this is unlikely to happen. Given the economic difficulties, the lack of growth and high inflation, foreign companies and investors will be chary of putting their funds into India. They would wait to extract further concessions from the government. Moreover past experience has shown that the repatriation of profits and dividends and outflow of hot money will far outstrip any gains from such investments.

Poverty Line

According to the Planning Commission people living below the poverty line have declined from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 21.9 per cent in 2011-12. These specious statistics have been decided on the basis that a person is below the poverty line if he or she spends less than Rs. 27.20 per day in the rural areas and Rs. 33.40 in the urban areas. As per this criteria, people living below the poverty line have declined from 41.8 per cent to 27.5 per cent in the rural areas and from 25.7 per cent to 13.7 per cent in the urban areas between 2004-05 and 2011-12. These statistics are convenient for the UPA government to claim that there has been a big fall in poverty during its eight year rule. However, these figures have been greeted with derision. The urban poverty level definition cannot provide for even one decent meal if the cost of urban daily transport for a working person is deducted. The index of poverty does not take into account the relentless price rise which has affected the livelihood of the people nor does it take into account the needs of basic nutrition, health, shelter, clothing and other essential requirements.

The claims of poverty reduction have only exposed the callousness of the government towards the poor.

Gas Price Hike

That the UPA government works in the interests of big business is well known. Despite this, the government's decision to double the price of natural gas is the most brazen display of favouring the biggest corporate house in India. The Reliance company has been demanding an increase in the price of gas which it extracts from the K.G basin and it has kept the production of gas below the set target waiting for the price increase. The UPA government has based the price increase on the irrational grounds of linking it to the international price of gas which has no relation to the cost of domestic production of gas. In 2008, the government increased the price of gas from \$ 2.4 per mmbtu to \$ 4.2 which was itself a bonanza for Reliance. Now by the new formula the price of gas will increase from \$ 4.2 to \$ 8.4 per mmbtu from April 2014. It is estimated that every dollar increase in price of gas will increase the profit of Reliance by \$ 74 billion.

The government has also to bear the additional subsidy to maintain the price of fertilizer and power at the present rate for a five year period which will amount to Rs. 71.250 crore. The government will pass on this burden to the common people. The hike in gas price will lead to an increase in the prices of fertilizer and power and the cost of public transport using CNG.

While the CPI(M) and the Left strongly opposed the gas price hike, it is significant that the BJP was conspicuously silent on this harmful decision.

Petrol Price Hikes

The petrol price has been hiked five times in the last seven months amounting to over Rs. 7.30 per litre. The last three successive hikes have taken place with the steep depreciation of the rupee. However, this is a vicious cycle with the petrol hikes leading to across the board increase in the cost of production which in turn fuels inflation. The high inflation in turn affects the value of the rupee.

The successive increase in petrol and diesel prices has contributed to the continuing high inflation. The consumer price index went up to nearly 10 per cent after a three month reduction. The prices of food items such as vegetables and onions have shot up.

Food Security Bill

The UPA government promulgated the Food Security Ordinance even though parliament was to meet in a few weeks time. The ordinance which is now in parliament as a legislation is flawed as it does not effect a universal public distribution system.

The ordinance and the Bill, legalises the targeted system by automatically excluding 50 per cent of urban population and 25 per cent of rural population from its ambit at a time when in many States the coverage of the population is near universal. The present 35 kgs entitlement to BPL families will now be cut down by 10 kgs to just 25 kgs for a five member family and even less if the family is smaller. This is punishment for a State like Kerala, where the family size may be three or four and therefore the entitlement will be only 15 kgs to 20 kgs. The CPI(M) had demanded that the minimum should be 35 kgs per household and increased if there are more members but the Government has preferred to cut down on existing entitlements. This is food insecurity not security.

The Bill is highly centralized and gives all powers to the Centre and all responsibilities including a substantial share of the financial responsibility to the States. The ordinance ordains that the entire process of identification of beneficiaries according to guidelines yet to be issued by the Central Government has to be completed within 180 days. This has been done without any consultation with the States. The ordinance, in a mischievous addition, gives the Central Government the right to introduce cash schemes instead of food in the Rules as and when it decides, in other words to impose its anti-people scheme even if the State Governments oppose it.

The CPI(M) has moved concrete amendments to the Bill to make it universal with a minimum entitlement of 35 kgs at maximum two rupees a kg (rice and wheat) and move for deletion of all the centralizing clauses and make it mandatory to consult State Governments on all issues of cost sharing. It has also moved for deletion of the clauses in relation to cash transfers and linkages with AADHAR.

Telangana

The Congress Working Committee decided on the division of Andhra Pradesh and the formation of Telangana in its meeting held on July 30. It also stated that Hyderabad will be the common capital for these states for a period of ten years. This decision of the Congress party and the UPA government has been impelled by the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The Congress has been prevaricating on this issue since 2009. It also did not act for more than two years after the Justice Sri Krishna Committee

report was submitted. Now the decision has been taken keeping in mind the dismal position of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh where the YSR Congress has been able to erode its mass base. The Congress hopes it will make gains in the Telangana state after its formation and offset to some extent the loss it may suffer in Seemandhra.

The CPI(M) has consistently upheld the linguistic basis of the formation of states and this is what determined its stand on Andhra Pradesh. The other parties like the Congress, TDP and the YSR Congress took opportunistic positions. In recent years, popular sentiment in the Telangana region favoured a separate state.

The announcement on Telengana has led to widespread protests in Seemandhra with the demand that the state be kept united. Normal life has been paralysed in the coastal districts and Rayalseema with strikes and demonstrations.

Now that the decision has been taken for the division of the state, it is important that amicable relations are maintained between the peoples of the two states. The issues of river waters, sharing of assets and resources must be done in an amicable manner. The basic problems of the people concerning their livelihood, land, employment and basic services remain given the policies being pursued. The Party will take up all these issues and work in a manner to prevent disunity and division among the people.

Fall out in Other States

The decision on Telengana has sparked off renewed agitations for separate states. In Darjeeling, the GJM called for a three day bandh and the agitation is continuing. In Assam, the agitation for Bodoland saw bandh and disruption of communications. A serious situation developed in Karbi Anglong where the demand for a separate state led to clashes and the army had to be called in. The demand for Vidharbha state has been voiced by some political leaders.

Our Party reiterates its stand that states which were formed through linguistic reorganisation based on the linguistic principle should not be broken up. Where necessary, regional autonomy should be provided.

Communal Violence

There has been a flare up of communal violence in the period of the Id festival. In Kishtwar town in Jammu communal violence erupted on Id day. Two people died and many shops were burnt. The riots affected some other places in Jammu too. Kishtwar was under curfew for a week.

The BJP and RSS elements were active in fanning the riots. The administration was also late in intervening effectively.

In Bihar, the break up of the JD(U)-BJP ruling alliance has led to a series of communal incidents in the past six months. The latest has been the serious riot in Nawada which has a past history of communal incidents. Two young men have been killed, one Muslim and the other a Hindu. Shops in the main bazaar have been burnt. It is significant that these incidents after the BJP had to leave the government, point to its efforts to stoke communal tensions. It is reported that a mob was shouting slogans praising Narendra Modi and attacking Nitish Kumar. In Bettiah too, provocative placards against Muslims along with Narendra Modi's figure were carried in a religious procession which led to trouble.

Along with the earlier series of communal incidents in UP, these indicate the BJP-RSS game plan to create communal polarization in view of the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

CIC Order

The Central Information Commission gave an order declaring that the six national political parties are "public authorities" and therefore would be brought under the purview of the RTI Act. By this, anyone can file for information regarding a political party's decision making process, criteria for selection of candidates, source of funds etc. The CIC order has wrongly characterized political parties as public authorities. Giving information about a party's internal deliberations on decision making will affect the functioning of the political parties. It is wrong to consider political parties to be public authorities on the basis that they are wholly or substantially funded by the government.

Our Party opposed this decision and asked the government to bring an amendment to the RTI Act to clarify that political parties do not fall under the purview of this Act as being "public authorities". The government has since prepared an amendment to be adopted in parliament to amend the RTI Act.

Supreme Court Judgments

A bench of the Supreme Court gave two successive judgments. The first is on striking down the clause in the Representation of People Act which allows convicted sitting MLAs and MPs to continue if they appeal against their conviction to a higher court and get a stay. The Supreme Court order means that now they will be disqualified instantly. The principle that a legislator who is convicted for offences listed in the Representation of People Act, should be disqualified, is valid. However, there should be a

safeguard in case an appeal to the higher court results in an acquittal. Hence, there should be a provision for suspension of the member from the House pending an appeal that should be disposed off within a specified time limit.

The other judgment is more harmful. It states that no person in police custody or in jail even for a day will be allowed to contest elections, even if the said person has not been convicted. This can be misused on a large scale by ruling parties and governments to put political opponents in jail on flimsy charges to prevent them from contesting elections. Our Party wants this judgment overturned either through judicial or legislative intervention.

Tensions in the LoC

The incident of the ambush of the Indian army patrol at the Line of Control in the Poonch sector which caused the death of five soldiers has come in the background of the rising number of ceasefire violations this year. There are reports of casualties on the Pakistani side too in this period. The government got into a needless controversy with the Defence Minister's statement at variance from the army statement and it being corrected later. There was a vociferous campaign by the BJP, defence experts and sections of the media to halt talks with Pakistan and to take pre-emptive action. Narendra Modi and the BJP are harping on this issue, given their propensity to link the "weak approach to Pakistan" with the "appeasement of minorities" by the UPA government. It must be remembered that the ceasefire agreement was arrived at by the Vajpayee government in 2003. Since then, the number of casualties of Indian soldiers and civilians on our side came down substantially.

The strategy of engaging with Pakistan and of holding talks should not be abandoned because of this rightwing pressure. It must also be seen in the context of the expressed desire by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to improve relations with India. The government should continue the dialogue with the Pakistani leadership while taking a firm stand about ending the ceasefire violations and countering any infiltration by the extremists from across the border.

Uttarakhand Disaster

The massive floods and landslides in Uttarakhand have led to large scale loss of life and destruction of property. As per figures released by the state government 582 people have died in the calamity, while 5100 people are still reported missing. This means that the loss of life may be very high. Our Party and the mass organisations are collecting funds for relief and rehabilitation work.

Political Developments

Modi & BJP

The BJP appointed Narendra Modi to head its election campaign in the Lok Sabha elections in its National Executive meeting held in Goa in June. This came after the nomination of Modi to the parliamentary board and the growing demand to project him as the prime ministerial candidate. L K Advani who resisted the move, announced his resignation from all party positions. However, this was short-lived after the RSS intervened and got him to withdraw his resignation. Narendra Modi has begun his campaign which is getting wide coverage from the corporate media. Modi is concentrating his appeal to the middle-class in the urban areas and among the educated youth.

The projection of Modi is not just on the “development” theme, it is also the pushing for a more aggressive Hindutva platform. Modi has called himself a “Hindu nationalist”. The notorious Amit Shah has been dispatched to UP to oversee the party there. He has visited the Ram idol site where the Babri Masjid stood in Ayodhya. The RSS is actively mobilizing its forces to aid the projection of Modi.

JD(U) Splits with BJP

This decision on Modi led to the JD(U) walking out of the NDA and the break up of the JD(U)-BJP alliance in Bihar. Nitish Kumar won the trust vote in the assembly with the help of independents and also got the support of the five Congress MLAs and the lone CPI MLA. While the RJD voted against the motion, the LJP of Ramvilas Paswan abstained in the vote.

Prior to this split, in the Maharajganj Lok Sabha bye-election, the RJD was able to retain the seat and win with a big margin defeating the JD(U) candidate. The JD(U) alleged that the BJP refused to support its candidate and worked against him.

Congress Moves

The Congress party has also been making moves to strengthen its position and to stem the loss of ground which it has been suffering. In Jharkhand, where President’s rule was imposed after the collapse of the BJP-JMM coalition government, the Congress negotiated with the JMM and now a government has been formed with the JMM leader Hemant Soren as the Chief Minister. It is understood that the Congress has arrived at an

understanding with the JMM that it will fight the bulk of the seats for the Lok Sabha in this election.

The other significant step taken by the Congress leadership is the formation of Telangana state. This has been done with a view to make electoral gains in the Telangana state as the Congress position is bad in coastal Andhra and Rayalseema regions.

The UPA government promulgated a Food Security Ordinance under pressure from the Congress party. This bypassing of parliament was done with the political calculation that the Congress would get the credit for the food security law and its implementation before the Lok Sabha elections will help the Congress.

Kerala

We had noted in the last CC meeting political report that the UDF is failing to tackle the urgent problems in the state and rifts within the UDF and Congress are developing. Subsequently, the groupism within the Congress sharpened and the differences between Chief Minister Oommen Chandy and KPCC President Ramesh Chennithala became public, including on the question of the induction of Chennithala in the Cabinet.

It is at this juncture that the Solar Panel scam erupted. The involvement of the Chief Minister's office and the role of the Chief Minister himself in the fraudulent business of solar panels was exposed. The LDF demanded the resignation of the Chief Minister and the appointment of a judicial enquiry. The government abruptly adjourned the assembly which was in session. Protests on this issue have been met with brutal police repression. The LDF announced an indefinite struggle demanding the resignation of the Chief minister and the ordering of a judicial enquiry. In the first phase, from July 22 for two weeks there was round the clock day and night mass dharna outside the secretariat and the district collectorates, which saw the participation of a large number of people.

The second phase of the movement began on August 12 with the siege of the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. The UDF government called for Central paramilitary forces. It took extraordinary measures such as the police ordering hotels not to keep protesters as guests. But the blockade of the Secretariat saw nearly one lakh volunteers assembling. There was wide appreciation among the people and the media for the disciplined manner in which the struggle was conducted. On the second day, the state government announced a judicial enquiry by a sitting judge on the solar scam. The LDF withdrew the siege and announced that a part of the demand has been achieved. However, the LDF will continue the struggle for the removal of the Chief Minister.

West Bengal

The West Bengal panchayat elections were held in five phases from July 11 to 25. The election dates were decided after a prolonged tussle between the state government and the state election commission and the matter went up to the Supreme Court. It was as per the court's instructions that a five phase polling was held and central para military forces dispatched to the state.

The entire election was marred by widespread attacks, intimidation and rigging. Around six thousand CPI(M) and Left Front candidates were physically prevented from filing their nominations. In 6191 seats in the three tier panchayat, TMC candidates were declared elected unopposed. During the campaign, TMC ministers and leaders made most provocative speeches inciting violence against their opponents. During the campaign, many Left Front candidates and their supporters were attacked, beaten up and injured including women candidates. The violence during and before the election campaign led to the death of 24 CPI(M) workers and supporters.

During the polling in all the districts, a total of 4470 booths were completely or partially captured, such as 909 booths in Burdhan, 750 in West Midnapur, 429 in South 24 Parganas and 400 in Coochbehar.

During the counting held on July 29 also there were widespread attacks and rigging of counting itself. In many counting centres, Left Front candidates' agents were driven out and the results nullified. The state police which was stationed at the polling booths or counting centres refused in many instances to intervene when attacks took place. In a planned manner the central police forces were not deployed in many of the hypersensitive and sensitive booths. The Trinamul Congress has won 13 out of the 17 Zilla Parishads and a majority of the panchayat samitis and gram panchayats. But these results are distorted and do not reflect fully the will of the people. The TMC has perpetrated a brazen attack on democracy and the rights of the people in these panchayat elections.

The Party and the Left Front have to patiently and determinedly work among the people to mobilize them in defence of democracy and democratic rights, unleash struggles on the demands of the working people and revamp the Party organization to forge close links with the people. At the all India level, the Party and the Left should mobilize the widest democratic sections to protest against these attacks on democracy and to extend support and solidarity to the struggle of the Party and the Left Front in West Bengal.

Non-Congress Non-BJP Parties

After the JD(U) split away from the BJP, the NDA now consists only of the BJP, Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal. In the UPA, there is only the Congress, NCP and smaller parties like the RLD and the National Conference.

In such a situation there has been revival of the talk about a third front and focus on the role of the various non-Congress, non-BJP parties.

Mamata Banerjee called for a Federal Front and stated that she had got in touch with Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar and Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister of Odisha. She stated that a common basis of all three states being backward and discriminated exists and they should unitedly fight for their rights with the Centre. However, nothing much has come out of this move.

Naveen Patnaik has expressed himself in favour of a third front but stated that so far concrete talks or moves have not been made.

Whatever discussions we have had so far with the leaders of these parties show that most of them are concentrating on strengthening their own position in parliament from their respective states which will help them to manoeuvre and forge the necessary post-election alignments. The Samajwadi Party is concentrating on trying to get the maximum number of seats from Uttar Pradesh. The AIADMK is also concentrating on this and Jayalalitha has said that by winning the maximum number of seats she will be in a pivotal position in the formation of the next government.

We had made an assessment in the January CC meeting about the political situation in the various states and the tactics we should follow. We have to pursue the possibility of having an understanding with these parties in certain states.

In the present situation, we should continue with our preparations to fight the seats we have selected for the Lok Sabha elections in the various states. Apart from that we should maintain our relations with the various non-Congress secular parties with some of whom we shall be able to have an electoral understanding at the state level and with some even though we may not have an understanding in the election, we will have to have some cooperation in the post-election situation.

It is keeping the present situation in mind that the Left parties held a national convention on July 1. We set out an alternative platform of policies around which we would like democratic and secular forces to

rally. We did this so that the focus is brought on to the alternative programme and policies.

As per the decision of the Convention, the Left parties are to hold rallies in the state capitals in the next three months. We should utilise this opportunity to put forth our political understanding and our idea of an alternative before the people.

Assembly elections are due in five states in November-December – Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh Chattisgarh and Mizoram. In Rajasthan a five party alliance has been formed consisting of CPI(M), CPI, Samajwadi Party, JD(S) and the JD(U). Our Party intends to contest around 40 seats. In Delhi, we will be contesting three seats; in Madhya Pradesh around 9 seats and in Chattisgarh 4 seats.

Conclusion

In the coming period, the Party has to take up the various class and mass issues concerning the people's welfare, whether it be price rise, issue of food security, land, wages, social justice and employment. The Party should conduct struggles on local issues based on these demands. In view of the intensified communal activities and intensified communal violence, we should conduct anti-communal campaigns and expose the designs of the RSS-BJP. The Party should make organisational preparations for the Assembly elections in the four states and the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The Party should propagate the alternative platform of policies through the joint Left rallies to be held in the state capitals. The Party should continue to highlight the attack on democracy in West Bengal and conduct solidarity campaigns.