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National Commission on Farmers

Blatantly anti-farmer

The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) was formed by the Central government to formulate ways and means to overcome the problems in the sphere of agriculture in the country in view of the on-going all-out economic crisis, so that agriculture could thrive and advance.

The NCF submitted four reports to the Union Agricultural Minister on December 29, 2004, August 11, 2005, December 29, 2005 and April 13, 2006. It placed its fifth and final report to the same authority on October 4, 2006. The major recommendations in the first three reports of the NCF were summarized under the heads of Land, Water, Credit and Insurance, Technology and Markets, — the five core areas which according to NCF need “urgent attention to make farming a viable activity for farmers.” The fourth report contains a “Draft National Policy for Farmers.” “Its main aim is to bring about a mindset change and the shift from an approach of patronage to partnership with farm and fisher families based on mutual respect. Progress in agriculture should be measured by the growth rate in the net income of farm families, if the human dimension is to be added to agricultural policies” — the draft stated. The fifth and final report “deals with some of the key issues confronting our farmers and farming such as the economic survival of farmers with small holdings in a globalized economy, shaping the economic destiny of farmers, strengthening the ecological foundations essential for sustainable agriculture. ... It presents an action plan for making hunger history.” This final report also contained a revised draft National Policy for Farmers. To facilitate speedy examination and action, the NCF provided suggestions relating to implementation. The NCF

felt that its suggestions would provide a positive step towards an evergreen revolution in agriculture, which would help to raise the overall growth rate in GDP to over 8 per cent.

One can conveniently divide these reports into two parts. The first gives a description of the miserable agricultural scenario of our country without any accompanying in-depth analysis and the second makes some recommendations and suggestions to overcome this situation and to make agriculture viable according to the needs of Indian and foreign corporate sectors in the present changed situation under globalization.

Present day agricultural scenario as described by the NCF

The salient features of NCF observations are as follows :

- a) “The low average yield is a major issue. According to the Government of India data, the average yield of foodgrains, covering 65 per cent of the gross cropped area was 1.74 ton per hectare in 2001-02. However, in 57 per cent of the area, the average yield was less than 1.5 ton per hectare. ... The yield growth ... covering 58 per cent of the area under foodgrains decelerated throughout the 1990s to about 1 per cent per annum from 3 per cent during 1980s indicating a potentially serious exhaustion of technological problems.”
- b) “Together with low yields, the other serious handicap faced by our farmers is the small and scattered operational holdings. The average holding size has come down from 2.67 hectare in 1960-61 to 1.3 hectare in 1990-91. The number of operational

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SUCI strongly opposes steep hike in fuel prices

Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in course of a statement issued on June 4, 2008 strongly opposed the steep hike in fuel as well as cooking gas prices announced by the Congress-led CPI(M)-backed UPA government. When the people are being torn apart by the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities due to spiralling inflation inevitable in the crisis-ridden capitalist economy, cascading effect of such a steep escalation in the retail tariff of petrol-diesel by Rs. 5/- and Rs. 3/- respectively per litre within three months of previous increase and a raise of as high as Rs 50 per cylinder of LPG at one stroke on the ascending price line will be devastating, he said. It will be akin to slaying the slain masses bleeding white under savage economic exploitation of ruling capitalism effected through one after another anti-people measures of the governments subservient to the ruling bourgeoisie, he added. He ridiculed the argument that the oil PSUs are incurring losses because of international spurt in crude prices and the government has exhausted all means for providing them subsidy to recoup the loss. It is bunkum, he said, since these very organizations alongwith private operators are now on a spree of overseas investment and acquisition. The Indian government, if it so desired, could easily provide some relief to the common man by lowering the huge dose of taxes and cess imposed on petrol-diesel. It could also take initiative to mobilize worldwide public opinion against this evil nexus of the rapacious oil barons, international oil cartel led by US imperialists and covetous rulers of OPEC countries which is unilaterally and whimsically jacking up international crude price to buttress its sinister agenda of maximizing profit by sucking out the blood of the toiling masses. Instead, the Indian ruling bourgeoisie, in connivance with the oil MNCs and international oil cartel headed by US imperialists, is trying to swell its coffers by taking advantage of the situation and silently passing on the burden of its crisis on the back-broken common people, observed Comrade Mukherjee. Like its predecessor BJP-led NDA government, the current Congress-led UPA government is also shamelessly hiding reality and instead merrily distorting as well as suppressing facts to serve the class interest of their masters, the ruling Indian bourgeoisie grappling with all-out insoluble market crisis, and to dupe the oppressed millions.

Comrade Mukherjee also condemned the utterly treacherous role of the CPI (M), CPI who on one hand are pretending disagreement with the rabid anti-people policies of the UPA government surviving on their unqualified support and on the other are spurning all possible moves to dissuade the government so dependent on them from playing ducks and drakes with the common people.

Strongly asserting that the ruling capitalist class and its pliant governments have no moral right to enforce such fresh load on the people wretched by their all-pervasive economic onslaught, Comrade Mukherjee called upon the countrymen not to accept this mounting economic assault affecting every sphere, lying low and instead rise in revolt against the oppressor UPA government and force it rescind the pernicious move.

NCF conceals that capitalist system is root of farmers' plight

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- holdings has increased by above 82 per cent in three decades.”
- c) “50 per cent of the small farmers’ produce is sold in distress.”
- d) “The total factor of productivity and the profitability in agriculture has declined in real terms in recent years. With the yields stagnating or growing very slowly, the prices of agricultural commodity remaining depressed in both national and international markets, the farmers have very little incentive for making investments in agriculture. ... As a matter of fact, low profitability and high risk are threatening the viability and sustainability of agriculture.”
- e) “The total farm income from average farm size in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, M.P., Rajasthan and West Bengal during the late nineties was not adequate to keep the family above the poverty line.”
- f) “The banks served primarily the needs of the richer rural borrowers. 44 per cent of the large farmers were borrowers whereas 87 per cent of the marginal farmers did not have access to credit. The interest rate charged by informal sources was invariably quite high.”
- g) “During 1997-2002 agricultural prices declined relative to prices not only of inputs but also non-food consumer goods. Purchasing power of agricultural incomes decelerated more than GDP at constant prices. Real farm incomes showed no per capita growth after 1996-97.”
- h) “Real per capita food consumption declined after 1998-99, despite fall in relative food prices. Per capita consumption declined absolutely in case of cereals, pulses and edible oils.”
- As a result of all these, “over one lakh farmers committed suicide in India between 1993-2003. Suicides continue unabated even now. ... Suicides have now spread to new regions and new crops. After cotton, paddy and onion belt in Maharashtra have also recently noticed suicides by farmers. According to the study, state’s suicide mortality rate, i.e., suicides per one lakh population, has trebled from 17 in 1995 to 53 in 2004.”

But why this pathetic condition? The NCF is practically silent on this

important question. It has presented the issue in such a way as if it is not the outcome of the capitalist system itself, but the result of the mistakes of the policy makers of the past, which can easily be rectified. That is why the NCF is placing new proposals and recommendations. We shall analyse the real character of these proposals and recommendations later in this article. But before that, let us have a glimpse of the way our agriculture developed since independence.

How Indian agriculture developed after independence

Even before independence, Indian agriculture started attaining three characteristic features, i.e., concentration of land in the hands of the few, increase of landless agricultural workers and commercialization of agriculture. This testified to its growing capitalist character. This process was accelerated with the independence of the country when the Indian capitalist class came into state power in 1947 through the transfer of power and became the ruling class.

In 1970, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh, one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of this era analyzed thus : “... the concentration of most of the lands in the hands of a few, the continuous decline of most of the village people to the level of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, the transformation of the land into a means of capital investment, agricultural production taking place on the basis of owner-wage labourer relation and, above all, the transformation of the agricultural produce into commodities of the national market – they go to demonstrate that the Indian agricultural economy is wholly capitalist economy. However backward and underdeveloped Indian capitalism is, except as hangover of feudal habits, conduct and behaviour in the cultural life of the country and in the rural relationship, no where in land relation or in agricultural production relation does feudal relation linger to the present. The capitalist agricultural production relation has taken its place, whatever may be its form on account of differences in the specificities and peculiarities of regions and people, and trade and commerce in agricultural commodity too run according to the laws of the capitalist national market.

However, on the grounds that farming in our country is not carried out with tractor-machines, or that there are the hangovers of old feudal habits and practices in the Indian cultural life and in the rural relations, those who deny that the agricultural economy of our country is capitalist economy actually display utter ignorance of how capitalism makes inroads into agricultural economy in a backward country in this era of imperialism and proletarian revolution.” (SW: Vol. III, 1st. ed., p.215-16)

One should bear in mind that capitalism in Indian agriculture is not a static phenomenon. It is an on-going process. It has had different phases of development and those different phases of development had different needs and planning requirement. With this in mind, we are to evaluate the development of capitalism in Indian agriculture and its present day plans and policies.

After Independence, condition of India, particularly in the food sector, deteriorated. Government of India made an urgent request to the USA in December 1950 for a food loan of 2 million tons. After about 6 months, the US Government agreed to provide on credit the foodgrains from its surplus. Very high prices were fixed and India had to pay transport costs unbelievably inflated. The loan had other bindings also.

The first Public Law (PL) 480 was adopted by the US Congress in 1954. India signed the PL 480 Agreement with the USA in August 1956. But in order to free itself from the bindings of the Agreement, the Indian bourgeoisie started on its own course of rural development by introducing Community Development Programme (CDP), which was an integral part of India’s early 5-Year Plans. Its declared aim was the re-building of India’s villages and village life. The lofty declaration of the Programme was not only for intensive agricultural development – land reclamation, irrigation, farm management, crop protection, application of scientific methods of cultivation like the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and better implements – but also for improvement of health and education, social welfare, road building, formation co-operatives and so on. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru then said, “We are now talking in terms of a big revolution, a peaceful revolution, not of turmoil and the breaking of

heads. It is in this manner that we shall transform our country. Peacefully, we shall remove the evils of our country and promote a better order.” The Programme started in about 25 districts of Punjab (Haryana included) and parts of the U.P., M.P. and Bihar.

This policy, especially a fertilizer based agricultural development involved the import of chemical fertilizer from metropolitan countries and side by side the import of capital goods and technology for building chemical fertilizer plants in India. The Indian Government adopted the agricultural policy that suited the interest of the Indian ruling class. They found merit in this Programme because it would help in mitigating the immediate food crisis and the dependence of the country on the USA. The big land owning class and its representatives in power welcomed this policy. This class looked forward to thriving with subsidized inputs like fertilizer, pesticides, electricity, etc., liberal credit and price incentives, just as the big bourgeoisie hoped to expand their industrial activities using state help and patronization.

This, the much trumpeted Green Revolution, took place in certain chosen areas in Punjab, Haryana, and Western parts of UP, which enjoyed irrigation facilities since the colonial days. The new “Agricultural Strategy” – the so-called Green Revolution was based on the rich land owners. Only the top 10 to 15 per cent, the rich peasants, were offered a package of subsidized inputs, HYV (High Yielding Variety) seeds, etc. As a result, “the strategy for intensive agricultural development involving massive investment for providing infrastructure facilities like irrigation, power and roads as also agricultural inputs have largely helped this section of land owners. Control over marketable surpluses has enabled the rich peasants to secure a price far higher than the cost of production. By linking their interests with those of the traders, the rich peasants are able to hold the rest of the population to ransom.” (Economic Crisis in India and the Fifth Five Year Plan, Social Scientist, December, 1974, p.84-85).

This Green Revolution succeeded in raising considerably the production of cereals, particularly wheat, in Punjab, UP and Haryana. Wherever possible,

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West Bengal panchayat election results

Might of democratic movement frustrates CPI(M)'s terror machinery

Publication of West Bengal panchayat election results has stirred everybody. The CPI(M) which hitherto considered itself unstoppable in the hustings and nurtured the arrogance of being as omnipotent as to get away with anything has, much to its discomfiture, suffered major reverses even in the areas it claimed to be its bastion. Stultified CPI(M) leaders found their 'invincible' election machinery powered by money-muscle-media-administration failing before the wrath and indignation of the people wrecked by their 31 year long misrule.

Results at a glance

Results show that the party has lost control of nearly 50% of gram panchayats signifying that despite every effort to rig the elections with unbridled terror and administrative manipulation, nearly half of rural Bengal has turned face from it. While in zilla parishad (district council), the upper tier of the 3-tier panchayat system the CPI(M) and its associates suffered a loss of 17.6% compared to what it had won the last time, the loss in the second tier panchayat samiti has been as high as 30%. Four districts of North and South 24 parganas, Nadia and East Midnapur in south Bengal have completely gone out of its hand. Trouncing in South 24 parganas has been overwhelming with the CPI(M) managing just 26 out of 73 zilla parishad seats and 235 out of 815 odd panchayat samity seats. The cracks in the traditional stronghold of Howrah have been decisive with the CPI(M) front accounting for only 4 out of 14 panchayat samitis. What has caused elation among the fighting people is the complete routing of the party in both in Singur and Nandigram which have been in the headlines for last two years for mighty peasants' movements against forcible acquisition of fertile land in the name of industrialization by its government. Notably, Haldia, the fiefdom of Laxman Sett, the local CPI(M) MP notorious for his brigandish activities in the area and reportedly having masterminded the Nandigram carnage has also gone to the opposition. The overall tally of the CPI(M) front is down from 622 to 518 in zilla parishad, from 284 to 189 in panchayat samitis and 3220 to 1633 in gram panchayats. But for some specific reasons that we shall discuss later in this article, things could have been much worse for it.

While the CPI(M) has received hammering, our performance in the limited seats we contested has been markedly improved—a fact which even the media could not but

acknowledge in their report. Compared to 2003, our gain has been from 2 to 6 in zilla parishad, from 41 to 105 in panchayat samiti seats and from 258 to 510 in gram panchayats. This verdict has important bearing, not only in the state politics but even at all India level. It is not just that CPI(M) has lost considerable ground in terms of seats. Significance is much more and ramifications are wider. And to comprehend that, it is necessary to recall the background in which this election was held.

The Backdrop

West Bengal had allthrough been a blazing protest against all kinds of oppression, repression and injustice. The state carries rich legacy of anti-imperialist freedom struggle as well as powerful left-democratic movement. So it has always been a sore in the eyes of the ruling capitalist class who has been hatching conspiracy day in and day out to dissuade people from the path of genuine movement and instead keep them doomed to perpetual passiveness so that there is no threat to its progressively intensifying exploitative class rule. When its chosen political representatives proved to be incapable of carrying out the task in the state, its choice shifted towards the CPI(M) masquerading as Marxist-leftist but pursuing hated politics of compromising social-democracy. From its class instinct, the ruling bourgeoisie could make out that if saddled to power and assured of its backing, the aspirant leadership of the CPI(M) would deliver in so far as articulation of its class design is concerned. So the class threw its gauntlet behind the CPI(M) which in turn did not disappoint its patrons at all.

With the blessings of the ruling class, the CPI(M) leaders after ascending to power in the state in 1977 unleashed a well-calibrated strategy to cripple the protesting mentality. At the outset, their advice

was that since they had assumed power, there was no need for the people to build up movement on the burning problems of life. Gradually, their endeavour had been to deeply entrench in the minds of the people that movement and agitation are disorders which disturb the process of 'development'. Hence, prudence lies in getting out of the old mindset, spurn the path of struggle and instead collaborate with the ruling capitalist owners and government to foster 'growth'. Such volta face of the self-proclaimed leftists-Marxists who earlier were found to be rending the sky with high-pitched slogan of movement, precipitated lot of doubts and confusions among the people. Misled, they shied away from the path of struggle to put a rein on the surge of legitimate democratic movement much to the glee of the ruling bourgeoisie. Bolstered by this initial success to diffuse the pro-movement mentality, the CPI(M) leadership having been able to earn abiding confidence of the ruling class went a step ahead to announce its siding with the monopolists, both domestic and foreign. In order that the ruling class does not face any hostility from the semi-starved semi-clad have-nots pestered under ruthless capitalist exploitation, the CPI(M) leaders unleashed a false propaganda that any sort of disengagement or confrontation with the monopolist investors would send a 'wrong message' and scare them away from investment in the state. Thus the CPI(M) not only tried to render the soil of West Bengal infertile for sprout of any movement but came forward like any other reactionary bourgeois outfit to ruthlessly crush democratic mass movement. And more dampened was the spirit of movement, more despotic became the CPI(M) in submitting people to its dictates by terror, intimidation and indiscriminate use of a totally pliant administration. Enamoured by this splendid service, the ruling monopolists made it a point to see the CPI(M) cling to power in the state. To ensure that the CPI(M) over these years has concentrated all power in its hands, made the police-administration take orders only from the party functionaries and put in place with alacrity a crooked mechanism of manipulating election results to its favour.

How the CPI(M) manipulates elections

Unless one is familiar with this multi-pronged manipulative mechanism, he can not understand how difficult it is to drub the CPI(M) in the polls. It starts from preparation of the voting list. The CPI(M) leadership with the help of the administration tampers the voters' list with impunity. Omission of genuine names and inclusion of false names take place on a large scale. Another fact will be revealing. There are about ten million fake ration cards in circulation. It not only helps the unscrupulous dealers and blackmarketeers but also helps the ruling CPI(M) set up its false voting machinery. Among a population of 80 million, if even 5 to 7 million fake voters are created, the results can be decisively manipulated. Next is creation of 'vote bank' particularly in the rural areas through indulgence in wide-scale nepotism and selective distribution of favours on a quid pro quo basis. First of all, compared to the need of the masses, the benefits from the panchayats have been so pegged down as to be grossly inadequate. Naturally, there is a perpetual want among the downtrodden. Now, there is a lure of getting something extra provided one completely surrenders to the ruling party satraps. Battered by the miseries and maladies of life, it practically becomes impossible for the rural poor to spurn such offers. Thus the otherwise legitimate, due benefits are used as carrots to make people servile to the ruling dispensation. Corruption not only crept in but became a buzzword of the panchayat system. All recent surveys even by quarters allegiant to the bourgeois system could not disapprove this stark reality. Those intending to defend the CPI(M) in their articles and write-ups could also not hide the fact that all benefits of the panchayat are being cornered by the rich peasants, privileged and local party leaders. This is how panchayats have been turned into dens of vested interest. This rich powerful lobby of the landed gentry is coercing the poor to 'buy peace' by remaining aligned with the CPI(M). Under the camouflage of 'empowering' the

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Money-Muscle-Pliant administration- Ruling class-backing powers CPI(M)'s rigging machine

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poor through the panchayat system, what the CPI(M) has been after is creation of a power centre of its own replacing the traditional power base of the Congress. The only difference has been that while the Congress was bluntly depending on the support of the rural kulaks, the CPI(M) instead concentrated initially on carving out a privileged section among the poor to rally behind it and thus successfully employed one section of the poor to work against the cause of the poor. This is where the CPI(M) scored over the Congress in articulating the class need of the ruling bourgeoisie which seeks to keep the toiling masses disunited and pitted one against the other.

The third and most demonic weapon the CPI(M) leaders use to manipulate elections is large scale terror of different forms. Those refusing to be purchased with 'favours' and 'crumbs' are not only being deprived of whatever little relief available through panchayat but becoming victim of widespread violence and terror. From burning houses to destruction of property, molestation of women and even murder – they are spared of nothing. It is akin to medieval edict of the slave-masters—obey or perish. Before election, it flexes muscle to frighten people from filing nominations on behalf of opposition. Even intending opposition candidates are kidnapped at gun point. Instances of intimidating opposition candidates and their family members of fatal consequences are galore. White saris symbolizing widow dress are sent to the houses of opposition nominees to scare their spouses. The threatened and tortured have no place to go, no door to knock at for justice as the entire administration is in the captivity of the CPI(M). If police complaints are lodged, no action is taken. Rather opposition nominees and their families are harassed and implicated in false cases. The police act at the behest of the CPI(M) leaders only. Our party is the worst casualty of this pre-poll sweep of the police-CPI(M) combine. On the polling day, this terrorization reaches the peak. Mass stamping, forced capturing of the booth, insertion of fake ballots, driving away opposition poll agents out of the booth, false voting,

scaring away genuine voters by charging bombs and explosives, free movement of lethal arm brandishing criminals — name anything that does not feature in the election day agenda of the CPI(M). A neutral stance on the part of the polling administration has become a kind of utopia since the whole voting machinery is constituted by hand-picking those government employees and members of teaching community totally subservient to the CPI(M) and its associates. A further screening takes place before deputing them to sensitive booths which according to the CPI(M) leaders are not favourably disposed towards the ruling party so that definite ruling party affiliates are entrusted with the responsibility of securing 'positive mandate' even from the antagonists by sleight of hand. Many of these booths are taken over by the armed hooligans of the ruling party with pliant police in tow and then after the bona fide voters are chased away, the stooge polling administration does the rest.

These are some glimpses of the horrifying spectacle of rural West Bengal under the CPI(M). The choice is quite open. Either one has to succumb to these threat and intimidation and accept perpetual servitude of the ruling party, be pawns at its hands or face death and ruin. Very few, it goes without saying, can afford to stay rebel in this situation unless having appropriate ideological tuning and courage spawning therefrom. Concomitantly, while one section bereft of adequate consciousness is bending before the CPI(M)'s brutality, the another section is forced to surrender in absence of any tangible redress in sight. With the people terror-stricken, not daring to voice protest, democratic movement at a low ebb and an evil nexus of the landed gentry-privileged section combine alongwith puppet police-administration and arch criminals calling the shots, the CPI(M) had been hitherto brooking no worry in the elections whether of panchayat or of assembly-parliament. However, the silver lining has been that despite the condition being so stifling, wherever we could involve the toiling masses in organized sustained movement on the burning

problems of life pursuing correct base political line of revolution, the people did not bend before the fascistic onslaughts. Instead they fought back to valiantly resist the attack.

Singur-Nandigram set things in motion

But when everything seemed to be dark, deep-rooted frustration swatted at everything in sight, first Singur and then Nandigram showed that the ruling capitalist class and its political agents of different hues did not succeed to render the fighting people of West Bengal bereft of human essence and spirit of protest. Left-democratic movement no doubt had been considerably harmed but its base could not be uprooted altogether. Defying the red eyes and savagery of the CPI(M) government completely sold out to the ruling monopolists and articulating their class desire through neat implementation of the ruinous prescripts of globalization by vending false dream of prosperity, the brave peasants of Singur-Nandigram fought back valiantly shedding blood, sacrificing life and setting high standard of struggling morality. Nandigram peasants drawing inspiration from Singur movement offered a united organized prolonged determined resistance to the sinister move to establish Special Economic Zone (SEZ) by destroying long stretches of arable farmland, hearth and habitat and forced the government to retract. Their valour and spirit crumbled the decade-old inertia and the people got the courage to be vocal against the tyranny of the CPI(M) rule and the noxious bourgeois machination it was instrumental in giving effect to. Our powerful presence at the core of the movement has helped providing the fighting people the correct ideology and organizational direction. Thus the legendary movement was steered along the right course and drew even the uninitiated into the vortex of struggle. History once again proved that the people's power does lie in united democratic movement if it is channelized along the correct course under correct leadership. It showed how surge of genuine democratic movement can awaken the dozing dormant masses, pull them out of all stupefaction and bewilderment, spur them on to assert their power and

make the mightiest of the oppressive rulers bend before their organized strength. Spirit of this landmark movement stimulated anti-capitalist class and mass struggles throughout the state. Renowned artists, educationists, writers, poets, film and theatre personalities, scientists, teachers, jurists, journalists, law and medical practitioners, cultural activists and thinking people from all walks of life came down to the streets in protest against the bestial savagery of the power that be and expressed solidarity with the struggling peasants. The intellect of Bengal blossomed. People burst in protest against the killing of Rizwanur Rahman allegedly by a nexus of his business tycoon father-in-law and top brass of Calcutta police. Then a row over ration scam shook the ruling party and its administration. Augury of a new era was glaring.

Our initiative to articulate people's aspiration

We duly took note of this welcome change. We also took due cognizance of the intense anti-CPI(M) mentality sweeping across the state and the people's keenness to remove the CPI(M) from power at the earliest. It was clear to us that to articulate legitimate aspiration of the people, it was imperative to intensify people's struggles in every sphere and channelize the same along right track. That could be possible if there is a genuine left consolidation in unity with all other non-left forces who are seriously engaged in anti-CPI(M) movement in the state. Accordingly, we took initiative for forming on the Singur-Nandigram model a broad based combination of all genuine left parties and groups as well as non-left forces minus Congress and BJP, the two trusted representatives of the ruling bourgeoisie pursuing same set of anti-people policies of capitalist globalization, having some role in stimulating extra-parliamentary struggle against the savage attack of CPI(M) government in the state and CPI(M)-supported Congress-led government of the Centre. This combination with a genuine left core, we believed, in course of accentuating the pace of extra-parliamentary movement could also face election, if any, that might

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Green Revolution intensified hunger, destroyed diversity of Indian crops

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the kulaks (rich peasants) have made use of the state support to improve their margin of profit. This Strategy of Green Revolution has increased inequalities between class and class, between region and region. It is the kulaks who made use of this state support and reaped the benefits of the revolution. The benefit of subsidies hardly trickled down to the poor or marginal farmers. The poor and landless agricultural workers, even lower middle peasants got almost nothing, rather their condition worsened. Many poor, even lower middle peasants were dispossessed of their lands and increased the number of the landless agricultural labourers.

But in the long run, how green was the Green Revolution? Initially, for some years after the introduction of costly techniques, there was an almost spectacular rise in the foodgrain production, specially in wheat production in the areas in question. But the growth soon tapered off and then began to decline.

Instead of eradicating hunger, the Green Revolution Strategy intensified it. Instead of improving the nutritional level of the majority of the people, it created greater impoverishment. The percentage of population below the poverty line in the country remained almost unchanged at around 40 per cent.

The greater loss to India and mankind has been the loss of genetic diversity of crops caused by the Green Revolution. It caused a narrow genetic uniformity as a few high yielding dwarf varieties of rice – IR-8, Padma, Jaya, Pankaj and a few more have been made widespread, eliminating the rich genetic diversity. In Bengal, many varieties of rice used to be grown earlier, some of them of the scented type. Today, many of these have almost disappeared, yielding place to a few much inferior exotic varieties, inferior as regards nutritional qualities, taste, etc.

The dependence on a few exotic varieties of HYV seeds which require heavy chemical fertilizer and pesticides also leads to the degradation of soil. The indigenous method of replenishing the soil fertility relying on the use of available organic fertilizer has been discarded.

Who reaped fruits of Green Revolution?

The main beneficiaries have been the transnationals who produce exotic HYV seeds or manufacture fertilizers, pesticides, farm sets, etc. And the toiling people of India had to bear the burden of implementing this so-called Green Revolution.

The second phase of the Green Revolution has started in the period of globalization. In this phase, the control by a handful of Western transnationals on the world's agricultural system is being further intensified. In the early 1960s, a well-organized campaign for "protecting Plant Breeding Rights" (PBR), i.e., patenting seeds, has started and the Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) has been set up as a semi-official organization affiliated to the U.N. Later, an agri-business consortium called the Industry Co-operative Programme was formed. It set up the Commercial Seed Industry Development Project (CSIDP) to act as a co-ordinating body for a consortium of seed multinationals interested in establishing partnership programmes in the Third World.

Transnational corporations or their subsidiaries have entered India's seed business in a big way in collaboration with Indian MNCs. Seeds are sold usually as a part of a package – together with fertilizer and pesticides which these MNCs themselves manufacture.

With India's signing of the treaty under GATT in 1994, the second phase of the Green Revolution began. It had already been seen in the early 1980s that the Indian private seed corporations had surpassed the National Seed Corporation both in seed production and sale. In fact, the NSC was now selling the seeds of the private seed companies. These seed companies then raised the demand for withdrawal of the state itself from the seed business. To fulfil their demand, the Indian Government introduced "National Seed Policy – 1988" which stated that the seed companies could produce or import HYV seeds and could fix their prices as the situation demanded. As a result, 70 per cent of the seed market went into the hands of the private seed companies. Only 15 private companies captured 25 per

cent of the total seed market of the country.

With the interest of these Indian MNCs is to be added the interests of the foreign multinational corporations like Cargil, Du Pont, Monsanto, ITC-Zeneca. It is their estimation that if 50 per cent of the conventional seeds could be replaced by HYV seeds then their profit could be Rs.6000 crore per annum.

During the GATT negotiations, the World Bank and IMF stepped in to strengthen GATT's efforts. In April 1991, in its document "India : Country Economic Memorandum, vol.II- Agriculture, Challenges and Opportunities", the World Bank issued dictates to India, similar to those of the GATT. It insisted :

- (i) Eliminate subsidies and phase out budgetary support for fertilizers in four years.
- (ii) Shut down inefficient fertilizer plants.
- (iii) Open up the Indian food market to allow free imports.
- (iv) Allow the private players in the food business.
- (v) Stop creating buffer stock of foodgrains.
- (vi) Abolish Land Ceiling Act.

The ruling Indian monopoly capitalists responded favourably to these prescriptions as these fitted in with their interest of maximizing their profits in collaboration with foreign monopoly capital under globalization. But as these prescriptions along with other plans and programmes were put into action, the crisis intensified more and more in Indian agriculture. Referring to this crisis, the NCF is on the stage with a new prescription in its hands in the name of development. This prescription, they say, will bring about an 'Evergreen Revolution' in our country which, according to them, will solve all the problems that our agriculture is facing at present.

NCF prescription – a panacea !

But what is their prescription? It covers a variety of fields. But, for the present, let us consider only three of these – seed, water and land. If the true character of their prescription is analyzed, it will be easy on the part of even a lay man to understand the real motive of their much vaunted report. Let us take up these one by one.

First, about 'seed'. The NCF

recommendation says, "Globalization and competitiveness are facts of life. ... Given India's vast plant and animal bio-diversity and varied agro-climatic conditions, farmers need not go into a defensive mode, provided the following recommendations are kept in mind." And what are the recommendations regarding seed? Nothing new. Their prescription is just to introduce Genetically Modified seeds (GM seeds) by replacing conventional seeds and even HYV seeds. According to them, these seeds will increase productivity. And if productivity increases, the condition of the rural population will improve automatically. What a beautiful argument! Earlier, HYV seeds increased productivity, but why did the condition of the peasantry deteriorate? So, the argument that increase of productivity will, ipso facto, make the peasantry well-to-do is not tenable.

What is our experience in this field?

1. Bt. Cotton growers in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have been severely affected financially. They are mostly small farmers. The major disaster happened in Vidharbha in rain-fed monoculture of Bt cotton. The major reasons for the unprecedented malady of the poor farmers are high cost inputs (seeds and pesticides), uncertain performance of Bt. hybrids, price fluctuations, no or low profit and heavy indebtedness for years to the private money lenders, in case of Bt. Cotton especially in Vidharva and several other places. The circumstances left no option to the poor, small and marginal farmers but to commit suicide.
2. When multinationals like Monsanto started marketing GM seeds, they said in their sales propaganda that if these seeds were used, pesticides would no longer be required. But it has been found in practice that GM seeds do not produce high crop yields unless pesticides are used. Bt cotton growers, during the past several years, did not get the required minimum support price and so incurred losses.
3. Unhealthy and unequal competition with imported

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NCF recommendation is for privatization and commercialization

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American cotton with nearly 50 per cent subsidy for cultivation in the USA and reduced rate of import levy by the Government of India (presently 5 per cent compared to the earlier 35 per cent) have caused immense distress to the poor farmers who have to sell their produce incurring losses. When production increases, market price goes down causing heavy losses and debts.

4. In 2007, nearly 58 Bt. Cotton hybrids and innumerable illegal and spurious Bt. Hybrids were sold by seed and input dealers and the consequences have been disastrous.

These are the experiences of the peasants of our country already engaged in cultivation with GM seeds.

But it does not end here. It has its other impacts also. Increased cross pollination between GM and non-GM crop cultivars and related species is a distinct and serious hazard. Accumulation of transgenes results in many untested products, which cannot be segregated from non-GM crops. This creates adverse effect in soil organisms due to toxic exudates from GM crops. Increasing adoption of herbicide resistant crops has already led to the development of herbicide resistant weeds, converting them into super weeds which cannot be eradicated by conventional methods.

Studies have revealed that mice fed with GM soyabean developed deformed or misshapen nuclei in their liver cells possibly due to high levels of toxins in the GM feed. Further, there was a significant reduction in enzyme production in the pancreas of GM-soya fed mice.

Many such types of problems can be cited. The anxious scientists exclaim, "Beware! Once you have discharged them into the environment, you cannot turn the clock back."

But the Indian and foreign MNCs have no such concern for the future of mankind. They are only after profit and super profit. So, the Monsanto, an American multinational company, which owns over 90 per cent of all GM crops worldwide in association with Mahico and others is trying its best to introduce GM seeds in a variety of fields and the NCF is echoing

that desire in the name of farmers' interest and development.

Let us take up 'water' next. What is the recommendation in this area? These are as follows :

1. "New water infrastructure will need new forms of institutional management."
2. "Water user associations ... must be developed to foster sustainable and equitable use of water."
3. "To evolve programmes for recharge and management of the ground water reserves of the country, so that extraction is limited only to what we can annually recharge."
4. "The private investment in ground water needs supportive and affirmative programmes to address recharge and long term sustainability."

Apart from all these, "River linking programme" of the previous NDA Government was endorsed.

We all know that the National Water Policy of 2001 stated :

"Private sector participation should be encouraged in the various aspects of planning, development and management of the water resources projects for diverse users. Private sector participation may help in introducing innovative ideas, generating financial resources and introducing corporate management in improving service efficiency and accountability to users. Depending upon the specific situations, various combinations of private sector participation in building, owning, operating, leasing and transferring of water resources facilities, may be considered."

Thus, one can easily see that the recommendations of the NCF and the earlier accepted water policy of the Central Government are identical in essence. Both recommended private participation and considered water not as a human right but as a commodity.

This is because the multinationals considered 'water' as their most profitable area. The World Bank estimated that in this sector, a hundred billion dollars' profit was certain. The Monsanto once stated : "In the area of water we will be well positioned in these business to profit even more." (Sustainable Development Sector Strategy – Monsanto, 1991, p.3). Indian multinationals like Bisleri and others see eye to eye on this.

The position is that the multinationals are engaging themselves in grabbing the lion's shares of the water market. Practically, a 'water war' has begun. Anticipating this, the then Vice President of World Bank Shera Geldin said in 1995 : "If these wars of this century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water." (See Economist, September 15, 1995, p.34)

Already, there are 30 joint ventures in this sector. Their plan is : "First is the focus on commercial orientation through institutional reforms and restructuring. For example, a first step may be restructuring the water and sewage department on a profit centre basis. Over time, corporatization of the utility or separate joint venture companies to manage the water and sewage system will help to bring the necessary commercial orientation." (A Review of Public-Private Partnerships in the Water and Environmental Sanitation sector in India. p.7) So, obviously the goal is 'commercial orientation'; all talk of 'innovative ideas', 'improving service efficiency' etc. are mere empty words.

"The second aspect relates to the need for an appropriate regulatory framework. The basic object of such institutional reform is to move towards a commercial and consumer orientation in service provision. The entire outlook changes from publicly provided free services as a right, to a consumer orientation with access to service." (A Review of Public-Private Partnerships in the Water and Environmental Sanitation sector in India. p.7) It means then they are not against 'regulatory' measures. Only that, those must favour commercialization. Public and private interests must not compete freely!

Now, after sewage, irrigation has been added. The recommendation of the NCF only adds to the dimension of commercialization of water and nothing else.

Henceforth, private players will control, manage and distribute ground water by forming a nominal "Pani Panchayat". They will decide from where and in what quantity "the ground water" will be "extracted". The peasants will be wholly dependent on the multinationals for the water required

by them for cultivation. And as everyone knows, cultivation is impossible without water. In this way, by controlling water, the multinationals will control everything. They will become the masters of the soil, of the agricultural commodities. They can and will dictate everything. Peasants will become the modern slaves and the multinationals their masters.

This is true about "land" as well. The NCF has stated: "The Government should provide necessary fiscal and other concessions to the private sector. The move will create a good number of both on farm and non-farm jobs. If successful, the model should be widely adopted. The recent initiatives of some of the leading corporate houses, the moves on farmer friendly contract farming, and Rural Business Hubs should converge within Rural Economic Zones." Clear as daylight! It proposes to form Agri-Export Zones and Rural Economic Zones. What will be the products of these Agri-Export Zones (AEZ)? The NCF has stated: "Fruits, vegetables, potatoes, flowers, medicinal plants, Basmati rice, quality wheat, sesame seeds, vanilla, seed spices, and Darjeeling tea." Where would these agricultural commodities be grown? Definitely in the fertile lands of the country. So the NCF has recommended to hand over fertile land to the corporate houses and at the same time to "provide necessary fiscal and other concessions." No doubt, this is the prescription for a kind of Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Along with this, the proposed setting up of 'Rural Business Hubs' is nothing but the planning to introduce Indian and foreign finance capital on a large scale in the sphere of retail business. What will be its impact on the small traders and their workforce, who are already in a sorry plight, can better be imagined rather than mentioned in detail.

It is clear from the above discussions that in the name of tackling the crisis in the agricultural economy and promoting agricultural development in the country, the NCF framed its recommendations to suit the requirements and aspirations of the multinationals in the present globalized imperialist-capitalist economy. The recommendations,

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Spirit of Democratic Movement provides grit and guts to dare the devil

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come about. It is with this clear objective that we opened talks with all left parties and outside CPI(M) front as well as RSP and Forward Bloc expressing in the media disagreement with the CPI(M) on basic policy matters. Simultaneously, we approached the Trinamool Congress (TMC) who from its parliamentary end has been in the vortex of anti-CPI(M) movement with an open declaration of having no truck with the Congress or the BJP. The TMC responded favourably and it was decided to launch joint movement based on a 37-point charter of demand. This was heartily welcomed by the oppressed people of the state. In fact, with two of the parties joining hands, the people derived enough confidence to take on the CPI(M) and bend it down.

Immediately after some programmes of the joint movement were rolled out, election to the panchayat was announced. Our suggestion was to join the fray forming people's committees at the grass roots level on the Singur-Nandigram model. But we could not make the TMC agree to this. Instead, it preferred facing the election jointly on seat sharing basis and build up movement on the lines of our proposal after the polls were over. In the greater interest of preserving unity and honouring the wishes of the people bent upon drubbing the CPI(M) in the hustings, we consented to this. However, even in regard to fighting elections unitedly, things did not materialize well in keeping with the demand of the situation because the TMC could not reflect the expected outlook in regard to seat adjustment based on equity and fairness because of apparent lack of cohesion inside it. Had that not been, the CPI(M) could have been on a far more tottering base.

Orgy of violence in and after panchayat poll

In any case, we had to go to the polls in alliance with the TMC. The CPI(M) leadership, it could be made out, was visibly unnerved despite boasting of 'impeccable' election machinery in place. So it planned wanton violence on an unprecedented scale to 'elicit' people's verdict in their favour. This was apparent when on the eve of the

polls, the CPI(M) state secretary said that poll would be blood-curdled. And he meant what he said. Thoroughly exposed in the Singur-Nandigram incidents and substantially isolated from the people, the CPI(M) leaders had no other way. Of the widespread violence that the CPI(M) resorted to in making their talks walk, two incidents are worth mentioning. Since 1989, the CPI(M) has unleashed worst kind of terror in the Maipith-Baikunthapur area of Kultali constituency in South 24 parganas. Starting from arranging life imprisonment of Comrade Prabodh Purkait, nine times MLA and revered mass leader, through implication in false case to perpetrating all kinds of diabolic fascistic attacks, the CPI(M) leaders tried everything to bend the fighting people there but in vain. This time also the CPI(M) sensed their inevitable defeat as the toiling people organized in a citizens' committee evolved in the course of class and mass struggles were ready to face the challenges of election as a part of the ongoing movement. So they arrayed their entire arsenal in connivance with the police-administration to descend on the people a fascistic armed attack and thereby capture the panchayat by force countermanding free and fair poll. Two days before the election date, the massive onslaught began with all ferocity. Houses were torched and shops ransacked. Bombs and bullets reigned without relent. Under police protection, hired criminals armed with all lethal weapons were let loose on the poor villagers from all four sides resembling war of attrition. Despite informing highest level of administration and the election commission, no intervention on their part came about.

On the polling date, these armed criminals abetted by the police forcibly captured the booths and turned election into a mere farce. One bona fide voter was so severely beaten that he succumbed to his injury on way to the hospital. Unperturbed even in front of movie camera, the CPI(M) candidates and leaders openly direct the voters to stamp on their symbol inside the booth as was shown on the electronic media during the elections under review. Polling officers have been photographed

live while undertaking mass stamping. Even Comrade Debaprasad Sarkar, our leader in the state assembly was attacked by armed CPI(M) goons when he was rushing to one of the troubled booths. His car was smashed. But there was no remedy to all these as neither the police nor the election commission was prepared to play any role other than that of indulgent onlookers to this hooliganism of the CPI(M). Such strong has been the class-backing of the party in power. After so 'conquering' the people and 'snatching' their mandate, there was another round of bombing and arson to keep the atmosphere surcharged with tension and threat. The name has been "free and fair exercise of franchise by 'empowered' poor" in the regime of the CPI(M). In adjacent Basanti area, the CPI(M) and its associate RSP were locked in a pitched battle that took a toll of five lives including a female near-relative of an RSP minister. More than 20 people died in the poll day clashes in Murshidabad district.

Same strategy was adopted in Nandigram. But when the DIG of CRPF deputed there to oversee security arrangement tried to handle things in a firm way and refused to play second fiddle to the CPI(M) as has become customary for the state police, the CPI(M) leaders were furious. Seeing that CRPF is not allowing their hired criminals and false voters to enter the poll areas and disturb the proceedings, no one else but Laxman Sett, the local CPI(M) MP and notorious for his brigandish activities in the area who reportedly masterminded the Nandigram carnage lashed out at the DIG. It was shown live on the electronic media as to how Sett was openly ordering him not to venture

out of his camp implying covert threat. When Sett refused to oblige, a false FIR of molesting women was lodged against him to create pressure.

There was no let up to rig the elections even during counting. When one of our candidates in Joynagar block 2 secure majority votes despite rejection of a good number of valid votes cast in his favour, the counting officials skillfully removed 5 ballot papers to reduce the figure on the tabulation sheet and declare the CPI(M) candidate victorious. Though the erring official was caught red-handed, the authorities ignored the misdeed completely and upheld the manipulated result. In another incident, one of the victorious candidates has been abducted by the CPI(M) criminals and still kept in their custody. When another triumphant lady candidate refused an offer of Rs 6 lakhs to switch sides, the CPI(M) goons pounced upon her husband with lethal weapons. He had to be rushed to hospital with grievous injuries. In both these incidents, connivance of police is laid bare.

People asserted power to inflict decisive blow to CPI(M)

Despite all this, the CPI(M) could not avert receiving a decisive blow. Judged in the background discussed above, one can understand how difficult, if not virtually impossible the task was to defeat the CPI(M) in the election let alone dislodging from power. What kind of courage and determination it needed of the rural poor to come out of this evil axis and challenge the CPI(M)'s overlordism thriving on money-muscle-media power,

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NCF silent on disastrous environmental consequences of their measures

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when implemented, will turn the whole agricultural and agri-business spheres into unfettered hunting grounds for Indian and foreign monopoly capital, further enrich the rich peasants (kulaks), the rural capitalist class, at the cost of the common peasants and the agricultural workers – the vast proletarian and semi-proletarian rural masses, to take their poverty, pauperization, destitution and misery

to new heights unprecedented even in this country. This is the only kind of development that the crisis-ridden, decadent capitalist economy can offer. Some of the NCF recommendations have been implemented. Some others are being implemented. As a result, tens of million more people in the countryside are becoming jobless, shelterless. The need of the hour for the oppressed rural masses is to rise up, unite and resist!

West Bengal panchayat election results

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completely subservient administration and full backing of domestic as well as foreign capital ? But the toiling people of the state have shown the grit and guts to do that in the panchayat poll. Before their determined effort and daring venture, the all-powerful election machinery of the CPI(M) was razed to the ground. It once again showed that if people assert their power righteously, no despot, no brute force can stand before it. The resurrection of people's movement centring round Singur-Nandigram struggle has to a great extent contributed in turning the table in the panchayat polls and send chill down the spines of the arrogant power-mad CPI(M) leaders who can ill-afford to see their empire cracking. People also found in the SUCI-TMC alliance a formidable force to depend on and confide in. If the election could be fought by forming people's committees as suggested by us, results indicate that there could even be a landslide victory for the alliance. From this perspective, the outcome of this panchayat election has been of so much significance.

Task ahead

The task is therefore to consolidate the gains and strive for releasing this people's power on a much wider scale. It is true that in deference to the people's verdict, the panchayats under the control of the opposition must be run by with a genuine pro-people outlook free from any corruption and without any discrimination. But to guarantee that, there should be an effective pressure of continuous mass movements on the functioning of the panchayats. In the interest of the people and their legitimate movement, the CPI(M) must be weakened further in every sphere. There is no reason to believe that the attack of the CPI(M) would be stymied. It would just be reverse. Being defeated, it would now be more desperate to regain its position resorting to all foul means. Behind the apparent mellowing down, it will work out its stratagem in a much heinous way. The ruling class will also pull strings from behind to stage its comeback. The only way to counteract this machination is to augment people's power, intensify the extra-parliamentary movements and appropriately coordinate the same with the parliamentary battle. Hence, the TMC must come forward with more sincerity and determination to spearhead the joint movement based on definite charter of demand, build up innumerable people's committees and volunteer corps on the Singur-Nandigram model as instruments of struggle. Pursuance of this correct course in right earnest will also pave the way for inflicting yet more crushing a defeat to the CPI(M) in the ensuing parliamentary and assembly polls. Only in this way, we can honour the faith reposed on us by the people.

SUCI protests against price hike of petro-products



From top (left) West Bengal, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and (right) Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala

Comrade Manik Mukherjee attends international solidarity conference in Germany

On 24 and 25 May, an international solidarity conference was held at Cologne, Germany, purported to mobilise world public opinion against atrocities perpetrated by capitalist-imperialist rulers of different countries of the world, holding activists of mass movements behind bars without trial, getting them implicated in false charges thereby making their lives wretched, at times even resorting to abduction and secret-killing or subjecting them to intolerable physical and mental torture. Representatives from countries like Turkey, Belgium, Iran, Italy, Palestine, Germany and others, participated, with India being represented by Comrade Manik Mukherjee, General Secretary, International Anti-Imperialist and Peoples' Struggle Coordinating Committee and Central Staff, SUCI.

Addressing the Conference, Comrade Mukherjee said that despite incessant campaign by the capitalists-imperialists that the bourgeois democracy is the best of all forms of democracy, it, in reality, is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, in which the only right of the exploited common people is the right to be and act as slave. Whenever and wherever there is a movement

involving the masses under the leadership of a genuine communist party, the latter gathering strength therefrom, the ruling class stops at nothing to suppress it, its sole aim being to nip any revolutionary movement in the bud. Comrade Mukherjee emphasized the necessity of building up intense militant movement against war in one country after another. The Conference ended with the pledge of building up intense anti-imperialist movements and demanding immediate release of all political prisoners in different countries.

Corrigendum

The opening line of the Central Committee statement greeting Nepalese people published in last issue of *Proletarian Era* should read as follows : Comrade Nihar Mukherjee, General Secretary, SUCI, in course of a statement issued on 30 May, 2008 warmly greeted the fighting people of Nepal for bringing down **the autocratic absolute monarchial regime** through successful conduction of different forms of struggle including armed battles braving medieval ruthless repressions and sacrificing thousands of lives.

Omission of the highlighted portion through inadvertence is regretted.

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