

## **WE WANT A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PATH AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH TRAJECTORY THAT WON'T DIVEST THE POOR FROM THE FRUITS OF THEIR LABOR**

Interview given by comrade Bimal, Politburo member of the CPI (Maoist) to correspondents from the daily, *The Times of India*, from the issue of April 27, 2009.

**You are one of the most wanted persons of the country. Even Left Front Chairman Biman Bose announced months ago that you have entered Bangal from Jharkhand. What made you come here?**

(Smiles) I am not new to this terrain. I first came to Bengal from Dandakaranya in 1995. I have been to the villages in Lalgarh in West Midnapore in 1998. The Bengal-Jharkhand-Orissa (BJO) border zone, as well as North Bengal, has been our priority. North Bengal — which would give us access to the North-East, Bangladesh and Bhutan. But we chose the BJO because that is part of a contiguous forest cover spread over Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bengal and Bihar. I joined politics in my student days in Karimnagar College, North Telengans, from where I did my graduation in mathematics. Kondapelli Sitaramaiah was our political guru. We took military training from the LTTE in 1981. Today our party has an uninterrupted presence in this 800-km corridor up to Bangriposi in Orissa, except of short patch of 30 km.

**West Bengal has been a traditional Left bastion for decades. What made you concentrate on this state?**

Bankura, Purulia and West Midnapore are three of the most backward districts of the state. Our organizers have been working in these areas since long. We have some organizers in Mayurbhanj and East Singhbhum as well. What I find unique in Bengal is the hegemony of political parties. True, there are no big landlords here as in Andhra Pradesh. But here political leaders have turned oppressors. Earlier, it was the Congress, and now it is the CPM. Power-hungry CPM leaders – some of them even coming from *Dalit* or poverty-stricken families – are now disowning their roots. They have become lackeys of the state machinery and are controlling everything from business to social institutions. They are social fascists. Asim Mondal, who was killed in Bhulabheda, was a CPM leader-cum-timber trader. He used to decide prices of kendu leaf and was also raising a force against us. It's the same with others. The villages and villagers' lives are under their control. We warn them to mend their ways and only after extreme provocation do we pull the trigger. Unfortunately, their daily misdeeds and acts of repression are not reported by the media. It is only when they are killed that the news gets highlighted. CPM leaders such as Dipak Sarkar (West Midnapore CPM district secretary), Lakshman Seth, MP from Tamluk and Anuj Pandey, CPM zonal secretary have turned tormentors. They want to have the area under their control. People are scared of them. Men like these and their henchmen are our targets. Worse, they have lost the political courage to win hearts. Instead, they come with the police and torture the villagers in the dead of the night. They have recently formed a Ganatantra Suraksha Samiti, and police distribute their posters. How else do you expect us to challenge CPM leaders who are armed to the teeth? They are a counter-revolutionary force and have to be politically exposed.

**While creating your bases in these areas, your party had come to the aid of the CPM in 2000 and then went with the Opposition. How do you reconcile this role reversal?**

Yes, we joined the CPM ranks to fight the Trinamool-BJP offensive in Keshpur. That was in May 2000, when the Trinamool chief announced that Keshpur would be CPM's graveyard. Armed men were

setting the huts of the poor villagers on fire. We sided with the poor. I distinctly remember that I collected 5,000 cartridges from the CPM party office. CPM leader and Minister Susanta Ghosh would have been nowhere today, had we not been with them. But the CPM atrocities in Suchpur, Nanoor in Birbhum and Chhoto Angaria and Garbeta in West Midnapore did not lose our sight. We started working among the poor, voiced against corruption in the panchayats and started mobilizing the poor on social issues. We did not kill any CPM activist till 2000. It was only when CPM came to grips with the situation in 2001 and began targeting our men that we struck back. Finally, when Nandigram villagers rose against the State's land grab move, we took on the CPM's armed brigade. This time, Trinamool supplied us the ammunition. We kept up with the resistance along with Trinamool ranks for months after the Nandigram carnage. During the final assault in November, we ran out of stocks and had to beat a retreat. The CPM men captured 300 of the local militia, and literally treated them as slaves like war prisoners with their hands tied behind.

**Even if one were to accept your logic of summary punishment, how do you justify the killings of low-rung party men who come from the poor families?**

In most cases, killings have happened after all means of persuasion and reasoning failed. What may appear to you as a simple low-rung CPM leader is actually his mask that outsiders get to see. But believe me, we check many times in our committees, trying to gauge the people's pulse before taking any such final action. But yes, there have been mistakes. In 20% of the cases, there could have been more persuasive attempts. In 50% cases, we could have campaigned better, politically. The blast that killed the medical team was clearly a mistake. A rectification process is currently on in the party and we hope to emerge as an outfit that takes more judicious decisions.

**What about the landmine blast that targeted the CPM's convoy in November?**

Till the Nandigram carnage, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not on our hit list. The villagers of Nandigram were fighting CPM politically when the massacre was ordered by the CM. That changed everything. Now, he is our target. So are CPM strongman and MP Lakshman Seth, West Midnapore district secretary Dipak Sarkar, zonal party leader Anuj Pandey...

**The Maoists are also seen as anti-industry. The perception about the outfit, particularly in cities, is that it will not allow industrialization. How can class struggle happen sans the working class?**

We are not against industry. But we are opposed to the neo-liberal policies pursued by the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government. The neo-liberal bubble has burst. The deviated Marxists (CPM) are only giving lip service to it and at the same time are looking at options to come to postpoll adjustment with the Congress. The CPM government is pursuing the industrial projects dumped by advanced capitalist countries. People all over the world are rising against the most polluting sponge iron units, construction of big dams, chemical hubs that affect the environment. Even the proposed car factory in Singur is to create an assembly line and has low direct employment potential. Tell me, how do these projects help the sons of the soil? These are projects advocated by the IMF and the World Bank and the CPM government is trying to implement them. We will oppose Nayachar because a chemical hub will destroy the livelihood of 2.5 lakh fishermen. No developed country sets up chemical hubs now. Why should we? We will oppose Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's dream project in Nayachar, the steel project in Salboni. As for Singur, industry will not happen there. The land was forcibly acquired from farmers. We will take over the acquired land, if the locals want it and return it to the tillers. But if the government chooses to usurp the rights of the poor and forest dwellers, we can't but resist the move. We are waiting for the response from the Opposition — Trinamool and Congress. Instead, we want a sustainable development path and inclusive growth trajectory that won't divest the poor from their fruits of labour.

**But how can you distribute government acquired land when the law says to the contrary?**

I don't care what the law says. Has the law come of any help in booking the culprits who burnt men alive in Chhoto Angaria? Let law take its course, we will have our own if people want it.

**There are allegations that your party has been extorting businessmen and salaried persons and terrorizing villagers.**

This is far from truth. Our leaders lead a simple life. On the contrary, we have been resisting efforts by contractors to plunder the forest wealth. Why should we fleece common people? If we need money, we will loot banks and collect the arms from the state armory. This is no secret. Our party has a written resolution on this. At times, some of the government officers have tried to lure some of our supporters with contracts. In such cases, we have pointed it out to them in presence of their guardians, who are also our supporters and asked them to fall in line.

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