



COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

Central Committee

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Report on Current Developments (Adopted By the Central Committee At its January 17-19, 2013 Meeting, Kolkata)

International

The period since the October 2012 Central Committee meeting has seen the following major developments: the reelection of Barack Obama as the US president; the continuing recession and economic difficulties in the Euro zone countries; the Israeli attack on Gaza which killed 140 Palestinians and caused large scale destruction to buildings and infrastructure; the recognition of Palestine as a non-member State of the United Nations; the continuing conflict within Syria and stepping up of external intervention; and the holding of the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Global Economic Trends

The IMF and World Bank annual meetings in Tokyo in October 2012 made an assessment of the global economic situation which was pessimistic. The IMF stated that "The world economic recovery continues but it has weakened further.....The advanced countries growth is now too low to make a substantial dent in unemployment, and in major emerging markets, growth which had been strong earlier, has also decreased." The IMF lowered its forecast for global economic growth in 2013 to 3.6 per cent from the earlier 3.9 per cent. The Eurozone economy continues to be in recession. According to the European Central Bank, the Eurozone economy will shrink by 0.3 per cent in 2013. Unemployment continues to mount in Eurozone countries and hit a record high in November 2012 with 18.8 million unemployed. The rate of unemployment was 11.8 per cent while youth unemployment was 24.4 per cent. Overall the 27 non-European Union nations' unemployment crossed the 26 million mark for the first time.

Obama Re-elected

Barack Obama won the presidential election on November 4, 2012 and was re-elected for a second term. This will ensure a continuation of the foreign policy direction set by the Obama

administration in the first term. While the more aggressive and bellicose Republican platform will not be put in place, the Obama presidency has shown that the pursuit of American hegemony will continue. Obama has sought to maintain the US leadership of the imperialist bloc by adjusting to the realities of a weakened American power. He has sought to rely on NATO and collective efforts to intervene in Libya, Syria and confront Iran. Having set the deadline of 2014 for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the US is banking on the Afghan army trained and equipped by it to fight the Taliban. The use of drones to carry out targeted killings which has become the hallmark of the Obama administration is the other instrument which will be continued. The long-term strategy to contain China and the strategic shift towards Asia-Pacific will be implemented. Any illusion about Obama's "peace-maker" role was shattered in the first term and what will unfold is a renewed thrust for US imperialist interests.

Attacks on Gaza

Israel launched a full-scale aerial bombardment and artillery attacks on the Gaza strip in mid-November. The bombardment continued for eight days in which 140 Palestinians including 44 children lost their lives. Many government and residential buildings were destroyed or seriously damaged. The rightwing government of Netanyahu provoked the fighting by assassinating Hamas military Chief Ahmad Jaabari. Rockets were fired into Israel and for the first time some of them reached Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The intense bombing of Gaza could not suppress the resistance put up by the Palestinian forces. A ceasefire was arranged by the United States and Egypt's President Morsi who belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Hamas is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Israel could not gain anything from this latest aggression. This action took place in the beginning of the forthcoming parliament election in Israel in January and it was seen as an effort by Netanyahu to refurbish his image. The Gaza people were not cowed by this attack and there were celebrations when the ceasefire was announced.

UN Recognition

Soon after the Gaza attack the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution to recognize Palestine as a non-member State. This resolution was moved despite stiff opposition from the United States. There was overwhelming support for the recognition of Palestine as a state. 133 out of 193 members of the General Assembly voted in favour, 19 against with 41 abstentions. The United States and Israel voted against the motion. Many of the European countries voted in support of the resolution while Germany and Britain abstained. The new status for Palestine will give it access to all UN bodies and will also entitle it to UN assistance in various fields. In retaliation, the Israeli government

has announced building of apartments in the occupied territory of East Jerusalem.

Syria

Despite all efforts of the NATO, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, the rebels fighting within Syria have not been able to make any major advance in the last three months except for some places in the north. On the US initiative, all rebel groups were brought together in Doha in November. They were told to set up a unified front if they wanted Western support. A National Council of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition forces was set up in place of the Syrian National Council. The fighting has led to 60,000 dead by end-December and there are half a million refugees in the neighbouring countries.

The UN Special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has been trying to get the United States and Russia to come to some common understanding but it has failed. Despite the Islamic fighters being sent in from Libya, Tunisia and other countries and the weaponry provided through Qatar and Turkey, hopes of overthrowing the Assad regime militarily have not materialized. The NATO has supplied Patriot missiles to be placed on the border of Turkey which would be manned by NATO soldiers. Russia has protested against this step and called it a provocation. So far both Russia and Iran have been steadfast in their support to the Syrian government.

President Obama has recognized the new Syrian opposition body as the sole representative of the Syrian people. At the same time the United States has blacklisted the Jabhat al-Nusrat, one of the main fighting contingents as a terrorist outfit. As noted in the October Central Committee report, increasingly the Islamist forces are dominating the forces fighting the Assad regime. They have openly proclaimed that their goal is to set up an Islamic emirate in the region.

The Islamist Tide

The Muslim Brotherhood has consolidated its position in Egypt. After the election of Mohd. Morsi as the President, he fended off the challenge from the old army establishment by removing key figures. The drafting of the new constitution was done without the participation of the secular and liberal forces. The constitution has been approved through a referendum, despite opposition and street demonstrations.

The Islamist forces unleashed in Libya by the US and NATO are now spilling over into the North African neighbourhood. In Mali, the rebellion in the north is headed by the Islamist forces. The Saudi and Qatar kingdoms have armed and financed these forces in Libya. The United States has contributed to their growth and influence by

backing them in both Libya and Syria. The United States has decided to accommodate and collaborate with the moderate Islamist regimes such as Egypt.

Pakistan Turmoil

The recent period has seen new strains and aggravation of conflicts in the political system and society. The stand off between the Supreme Court and the elected Federal Government continues. The Supreme Court recently ordered the arrest of the Prime Minister on a corruption case. The elections to parliament are due by end March, but a Canada based cleric organised a march to Islamabad demanding the resignation of the government and the dissolution of parliament and provincial assemblies. This attempt to destabilise the government and to short circuit the electoral process has been condemned or distanced from by most of the political parties. The hand of the army is suspected in this event. The internecine conflict on sectarian lines has got exacerbated. The killings of over a hundred Shia Hazaras in a series of bomb blasts in Quetta in Balochistan being the latest atrocity.

With contending power centres involving the political authority, the judiciary and the army, it will be a big challenge to hold elections smoothly and bring into being the next elected government which has a semblance of authority. It will be in the people's interest that the evolution of the democratic process is carried forward.

Chinese Party Congress

The 18th Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in November 2012. The Congress outlined the steps to be taken to further advance on the path of making China into a moderately prosperous country by 2020. The Congress called for deepening reform while reiterating "the basic economic system in which public ownership is the mainstay and economic entities of diverse ownership develop together".

The report presented by the General Secretary reiterated that "China opposes hegemonism and power politics in all their forms and will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion". The report also underlined the crucial need for combating corruption. It said: "If we fail to handle this issue well, it could prove fatal to the Party, and even cause the collapse of the Party and the fall of the State. The Congress also ushered in a new leadership.

The slowdown in the economy witnessed in the first half of 2012 was reversed by the later part of the year. Both industrial production and exports have picked up.

Venezuela

After the historic victory in the presidential elections in Venezuela, Hugo Chavez had a recurrence of cancer and had to undergo surgery in Cuba. His illness caused uncertainty and rightwing forces and sections of the media spread baseless rumours about his imminent demise. Chavez before his departure for medical treatment in Cuba announced that in case he is unable to return to office, the presidential elections would be fought by Nicolas Maduro, who is currently the Vice President.

While Chavez was hospitalized in Cuba, the provincial elections were held. The United Socialist Party-led alliance won 20 out of the 23 governorships, which is its best performance so far.

National

Economic Situation

The slowdown in the economy is continuing. In the second quarter – July to September, the GDP growth rate was 5.3 per cent compared to 5.5 percent in the first quarter. It was 6.7 per cent during the same quarter last year. The industrial production growth fell to 0.1 per cent in November 2012. Industrial output has grown in just three of the eight months – April to November 2012.

The current account deficit widened to 5.4 per cent of the GDP in the July-September quarter. The trade deficit has widened with exports falling by 12.2 per cent in July-September quarter while imports declined by 4.8 per cent.

All this has not however affected the profitability of the big business houses. India's top 50 firms are likely to report a 12.2 per cent rise in net profits in the quarter October-December 2012 compared to the same period a year ago.

Price Rise

The price rise has been relentless. The Consumer Price Index inflation rate went upto 9.5 per cent in October, it was 9.9 per cent in November and 10.56 per cent in December. The wholesale price index inflation rate has come down to 7.18 per cent in December 2012, but the index shows rise in prices of wheat, rice and other food items.

It is at this juncture that the rail fares for all categories of passengers have been increased. The rise in fares for second class, sleeper and suburban trains has particularly hit the common people.

Neo-Liberal Push

The Manmohan Singh government is making determined efforts to push ahead with its neo-liberal agenda. The drive to cut down subsidies in the name of controlling the fiscal deficit; FDI in retail; the further liberalization of the financial sector and more disinvestment of public sector shares and tax concessions for the corporates such as the postponement of the GAAR rules implemented by two more years.

The announcement of the *de facto* deregulation of diesel pricing follows the earlier decontrol of petrol pricing. The government intends to increase the price of diesel by 50 paise every month. The bulk consumers, will have to buy diesel at market rates. This will have a disastrous impact on the public transport system. The rise in transportation costs will fuel inflation. Farmers will be badly hit.

After the notification of FDI in multi-brand retail in the winter session of parliament the opposition pressed for a voting resolution on the issue. The government at first resisted the move but had to give in after four days of disruption in parliament. The government managed to defeat the resolutions in both houses of parliament by managing some of the opposition parties. Though the motion was defeated, it showed that majority of the parties and members of parliament are against FDI in retail.

During this period, the UPA government succeeded in pushing through the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill. By these amendments, foreign banks can now have voting rights upto 26 per cent in Indian banks compared to 10 per cent earlier. It is now easier for them to get control of an Indian bank by resorting to various devices. More dangerously the amendments have opened the way for industrial houses to start banks. The 1969 bank nationalisation had taken over major banks which had been controlled by industrial houses like the Birlas and Tatas. The Finance Minister has been working hard to overcome the reluctance of the RBI to allow new private sector banks including those to be set up by big business houses. The amendments will affect the cooperative banking sector with the new restrictions and conditions. This Bill could be passed because of the BJP's support. The government agreed to drop a section on allowing banks to go in for forward trading in commodities in order to get the BJP's support. This underlines how there is no difference between the two parties as far as neo-liberal reforms are concerned.

Rangarajan Committee

The Rangarajan Committee has recommended total decontrol of the sugar industry. It suggested ending of levy sugar obligation under which mills are required to sell 10 per cent of their production to the government at a fixed price for distribution under the Targetted

Public Distribution System (TPDS) and for ending administrative control on non-levy sugar. States that want to provide sugar under the TPDS will have to procure from the open market through competitive bidding, and then fix an issue price. This move is going to have a cascading effect on the prices of sugar for the TDPS beneficiaries and in the open market.

The committee also suggested that the Cane Reservation Area and bonding must be phased out, which will promote monopolies of big corporate sugar mills and harm the interests of the sugarcane growers. Companies will no longer be bound by any agreement on Government fixed prices. The committee also recommended doing away with quantitative restrictions on import and recommends liberalization of sugar trade over a two to three year period. The share of farmers in the value of sugar and by-products have also been reduced to benefit the private mills.

Drug Policy: Increased Prices for Medicines

The UPA government has taken a major step through the national pharmaceutical pricing policy that will affect the health of the common people. This policy has been notified in the first week of December 2012. The mechanism for fixing drug prices will give sanction to the big drug companies to profiteer and not for an effective drug price control regime. For nine years, the drug control regime was not finalised despite repeated directives from the Supreme Court.

The final policy brings 348 essential drugs under the price control regime. But the method of calculating the ceiling prices of drugs has been changed. Now it will be "market" based pricing, in place of the existing mechanism which was a cost based pricing. By the cost based pricing, the cost of manufacturing the drug using the necessary ingredients was calculated and then a ceiling fixed, based on the post manufacturing expenses, which include the profit for the company.

Instead of this method of calculating the ceiling price for drugs, a market based mechanism relying on the existing price of drugs in the market and would be the simple average price of all the brands that have more than one per cent market share. This method will allow the fixing of high level of prices for essential drugs and ensure that the big pharmaceutical companies can continue to reap big profits. The decontrol of drug prices has sharply escalated the prices of medicines which is one of the major reasons for pushing people below the poverty line because of the medical expenses that they incur. The new pharmaceutical pricing policy is not going to lead to any effective drug price controls.

Cash Transfer Scheme

The government has announced the Cash Transfer Scheme for 23 government schemes and programme from January 1, 2013 which to begin with would cover 20 districts and in February and March will extend to 23 more districts. Most of these schemes are scholarships and pension related. However, the Rural Employment Guarantee scheme is also included. The government has also declared that this policy will be extended to food, kerosene and fertilizer. We have already strongly opposed the replacement of subsidized food grains, kerosene and fertilizers with cash. In a period of high inflation, cash transfers to replace subsidized goods is meant to actually cut subsidies since the cash to be transferred will not cover the increased costs of the same amount of subsidized foodgrains or fertilizers. Having cash transfers in place of foodgrains would end up dismantling the public distribution system and procurement from farmers. It will lead to increasing malnutrition and hunger in the country. We had earlier opposed the linking of *Aadhar* unique identification process to the social security schemes.

In the case of linking MNREGA wages to the *Aadhar* card, bio-metric identification for manual workers has a high 20 per cent margin of error as fingerprints of such workers change. The linking of MNREGA enrollment on *Aadhar* card holders will restrict the elasticity of the scheme.

The Bill proposed for the Unique Identification (UID) has not yet been passed but the government is going ahead with such a far reaching measure.

As far as scholarship, pensions etc are concerned, most of these schemes are already cash transfer schemes through bank accounts and are fiscally neutral. The amount and also the coverage should be increased and linked to the price index.

The UPA government expects the Cash transfer Scheme to give it electoral benefits as it calculates that people will be happy to get cash in hand. But even the limited number of schemes selected for cash transfer is liable to various problems in implementation. Already under the MNREGA scheme, in Tamil Nadu, because of the problems of getting their wages through bank accounts, administration has had to send bank officials and others to the villages to make payments in cash.

In our ongoing campaign for food security and for a universal PDS we should highlight the danger posed by the cash transfer scheme applied to food grains.

LOC Killings

The incident of the killing of two Indian soldiers on patrol by Pakistan troops on the Line of Control (LOC) in Jammu & Kashmir on January 8 has raised tensions on the border. The beheading of one of the soldiers has caused outrage among the people. The ceasefire on the LoC that was put in place in 2003 had served to keep the border peaceful for nearly a decade. However, the last year has seen growing violations with firings and artillery shelling across the border. The latest incident, if not tackled properly can have an adverse impact on the dialogue process which was resumed last year and the efforts to improve relations. The BJP is demanding retaliatory steps which can only further aggravate tensions. It is also calling for reduction of the level of relations with Pakistan. This should be rebuffed. The Indian government must take a firm stand that such incidents are unacceptable. It should initiate high level talks with the Pakistan government to ensure that such incidents and violation of the ceasefire do not recur.

Widespread Violence Against Women

The horrific gangrape and murder of a 23 year old para medical student in Delhi led to outrage and protests all over the country particularly among young people. What has been heightened by the tragic incident is the need for security measures for women, fast track courts, making laws against sexual assault more stringent and making non-implementation of laws and guidelines by the police or other officials a punishable offence. While the particular incident was the trigger with demands centred around justice for the victim, the protests also raised issues against the subordinate status of women and the deep rooted patriarchal attitudes towards women and girls, and denial of their rights as equal citizens. It was heartening to see the large numbers of young women and men taking to the streets for justice for the victim and against sexual harassment of women and their anger at the current state of affairs. The Party had demanded the accountability of the police and removal of the Police Commissioner and other senior officials involved in non-implementation of previously decided guidelines for security of women.

Neo-liberal policies have further marginalized women's economic rights while market cultures promote women as sex objects. Sexual assaults and rape is the fastest growing crime in India, but the conviction rates are extremely low at just 25.9 per cent in 2011. Even where there are convictions, the main problem is the propensity of the courts to give only the minimum sentence and sometimes in the name of extenuating circumstances even less than the minimum. The Party gave a memorandum to the Verma Commission suggesting various measures including life imprisonment for cases of rape and rigorous life imprisonment with

no remission in cases of aggravated sexual assault such as gangrape, child rape etc.

However there were some outrageous and sexist and anti-women comments from a range of public figures including political leaders, elected representatives and so-called spiritual leaders. The RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat led the pack with his statement that there are no crimes in rural India against women as it is only western lifestyles which lead to rape. He also made demeaning comments that women's place is in the home. The most reactionary views were expressed by Asaram who runs a huge enterprise in the name of religion supported by the BJP blaming the victim of the gangrape for what happened. Some Congress and BJP leaders made sexist comments that these things happen because women go out at night. All these statements reveal a highly objectionable mindset which must be fought at all levels.

In the October CC meeting, we had given a call to observe a protest day on October 30 against the rising crimes against women. This was a timely call and the Party had observed the day all over the country. The Party and mass organizations should take the lead to fight patriarchal notions and male chauvinism in all spheres of society. This is part of the struggle to ensure that women are treated as equal and independent citizens.

Communal Violence

We had noted in the October CC report that a number of communal incidents have taken place in Uttar Pradesh in recent months. Subsequently, there was a major outbreak of communal violence in Faizabad on October 24. The trouble started during the procession carrying idols of Durga for immersion. In a pre-planned way on the pretext that some girl was teased, the processionists went on a rampage. 42 shops belonging to Muslims were targeted and burnt down. It was not a Hindu-Muslim riot but a planned attack on the Muslim minority. Two persons were killed. Attacks took place in two other sub-divisions in the district the same evening. This confirms that there were plans to extend violence to the rural areas. Faizabad is the twin town of Ayodhya which saw no communal violence even at the height of the Ram Temple movement and the Babri Masjid demolition. The hand of the RSS and its outfits is evident. The Samajwadi Party government has not been taking these communal incidents seriously and it has failed in promptly intervening to check such violence.

In Hyderabad the issue of extending the construction around the temple constructed adjacent to the Charminar monument has led to communal tensions with the Muslim community strongly objecting to it. There have been some incidents in the city due to tensions generated by this issue. Here again the Bhagyalaxmi temple did not exist till the 1960s. The Congress government has failed to

intervene effectively to check Hindu communal forces from utilising the “temple” issue. The speech made by the MIM leader Akbaruddin Owaisi inciting communal hatred is another instance of how the Muslim fundamentalist forces are seeking to stoke communal passions.

There was an outbreak of communal violence in Dhule town in Maharashtra in January. While some shops or the majority community were looted, the main brunt has been borne by the Muslims in terms of loss of shops and houses. Police firing has led to the death of six Muslim youth. It appears that the police have indiscriminately targeted the Muslims and those who were shot were innocent people. Dhule had a major communal riot in 2008.

The death of Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena chief saw a concerted attempt to project his reactionary and chauvinistic politics in a positive light. The leaders of the BJP, the Congress and other bourgeois parties and the corporate media were involved in this exercise and deliberately ignored the communal and Hindu chauvinist politics that he propagated.

Reservation in Promotions

To ensure reservation in promotions for the scheduled castes and tribes it became necessary to bring a constitutional amendment in view of the Supreme Court judgment. The CPI(M) supported the Bill for amending the Constitution. This has been passed by the Rajya Sabha. The Samajwadi Party has strongly opposed the Bill. It is yet to be adopted by the Lok Sabha. The BSP and the SP are ranged against each other on this issue. Within the BJP there has been opposition to the stand taken by the party of supporting the Bill. This has mainly come from the BJP unit in Uttar Pradesh where the state government employees went on strike against providing reservation in promotions to the SCs & STs.

Assam Situation

Some killings have taken place in Kokhrajjar and the BTAD area. In the recent round of violence, Bengalis who returned to their homes from the camps have been subjected to attack. 8 Muslims were shot dead in mid-November. A member of the Executive of the Bodo Autonomous Council was arrested for possessing two AK 47 rifles and other ammunition. Currently there are over 36,000 people still living in the refugee camps. Most of them are Muslims.

West Bengal

The TMC government and the ruling party have taken steps which are adversely affecting the interests of the state and the people. The cargo handling company in the Haldia port was forced to leave as the TMC leaders disrupted operations and abducted some of the

officers and their families. The TMC was openly working for a rival company headed by a businessman with TMC links. This incident has seen the confidence of many companies who are working in West Bengal eroding. The non-payment of salaries and pensions to state transport employees is causing distress and has led to the suicide of five employees and pensioners. Nine workers of closed tea gardens died due to starvation. The politics of the TMC and the approach of the Mamata Banerjee government are giving a fillip to the communal forces. The law and order situation is worsening. Extortions and crimes are growing including attacks on women.

Infighting within the TMC has broken out and is sharpening at various levels. After the cabinet reshuffle one of the ministers from Hooghly district where Singur is situated has revolted and refused to accept the new portfolio. He has openly criticized Mamata Banerjee. Significantly, there is anger and a sense of frustration among the people in Singur who rallied behind the TMC on the land issue. They are feeling cheated.

The attacks on CPI(M) cadres and violence against the Left Front continues. The latest illustration is the assault on Abdur Razak Mollah, former minister and senior leader of the Party. People going to the protest rally the next day in South 24 Parganas district were also attacked with three people suffering bullet injuries. The vehicles carrying people were set ablaze. Even sections of the intelligentsia who supported the TMC have now come out protesting against the goondaism of the TMC. More and more people have come out in the protest actions against the violence and terror tactics.

Political Situation

The winter session of parliament was the first which the government faced after the TMC withdrew support from the UPA and the government. As decided in the last Central Committee meeting we pushed for the voting resolution in parliament on the FDI in retail as against the Trinamul Congress's move for a no-confidence motion. The TMC motion could muster only 22 MPs, three more than their number and the motion failed to be admitted. We were successful in getting most of the opposition parties to push for a vote under Rule 184 of the Lok Sabha and 167 in the Rajya Sabha. Faced with strong opposition demand and the disruption of proceedings for four days, the government finally gave in after an all party meeting.

The government decided to go for the vote after getting an assurance from the Samajwadi Party and the BSP that they would not vote for such a resolution. The DMK which had expressed reservations on voting for FDI in retail finally agreed to stand with the government. The debate in the Lok Sabha saw most parties opposed FDI in retail while only four supported it. But the

government could manage to get the resolution defeated in both houses despite the majority expressing themselves against it.

In the 20th Congress Political Resolution we had noted the opportunist positions and inconsistencies of the regional parties.

The role of the Samajwadi Party has highlighted once again that it has no consistent policies and is engaged in manoeuvres and bargaining with the Congress.

On FDI in retail, the AIADMK, BJD and the TDP took a stand and voted for the resolution (though three TDP MPs in the Rajya Sabha did not participate in the vote).

Developments in Some States

In Karnataka, Yedduyappa quit the BJP and launched a new party, the Karnataka Janata Party. 14 MLAs and 3 MPs of the BJP were present at the rally announcing the new party. The split by the Yedduyappa group is certain to damage the BJP in the forthcoming assembly elections.

In Andhra Pradesh, the YSR Congress led by Jaganmohan Reddy has steadily gained ground. The Congress base has got eroded and there have been desertions from the TDP also to the YSR Congress.

In Odisha, the expelled leader of the BJD, Pyarelal Mohapatra has announced the formation of a new party the Odisha Jana Morcha. So far he has not been able to rally any major chunk of the BJD.

In Jharkhand, the BJP-JMM coalition government collapsed after the JMM withdrew support from the government. They were protesting against the failure of the BJP to hand over the Chief Ministership after completing two and a half years. The Governor has recommended President's rule while keeping the assembly in suspended animation. The Party has demanded dissolution of the assembly and holding of fresh elections.

Gujarat & Himachal Elections

The BJP won the Gujarat assembly elections getting 115 out of 179 seats for which elections were held. This result has boosted the image of Narendra Mod and his claim to be the prime ministerial candidate of the party in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Though the BJP got 1.2 per cent less votes than that polled in 2007, the Congress could not make gains. It only increased its tally by 2 seats to 61 and got 0.7 per cent less vote than in the previous election. The Gujarat Parivartan Party headed by Keshubhai Patel failed to make headway and won only two seats.

In Himachal Pradesh the Congress won the election ousting the BJP from power. The Congress got 36 seats out of the total 68 seats while the BJP could win only 26 compared to the 41 in the last elections. The Congress party could benefit from the anti-incumbency against the BJP. The CPI(M), despite expectations, could not win any seat and it came 3rd in the two seats in the Shimla region.

Congress Party

The Congress leadership has come out categorically in support of the policy measures of the UPA government such as FDI in multi-brand retail. It is also echoing the need to curb the fiscal deficit and therefore backing decisions like increasing the price of petro products. The November 4 rally held by the Congress at the Ramlila Maidan in Delhi saw the full throated support of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi for these measures. The Congress is hoping that it will retain the people's support despite these anti-people measures, by endorsing the cash transfer scheme and adopting the food security law. The Congress party has begun preparations for the Lok Sabha polls. It has set up a five member committee headed by Rahul Gandhi for its election strategy and another two committees headed by A K Antony for preparing the election manifesto and finalizing its poll alliance. The Congress Party is holding a *chintan shibir* in mid January in Jaipur which is also part of the gearing up for the Lok Sabha elections.

BJP

The BJP was plunged into a crisis after the exposure of Nitin Gadkari's dubious business dealings. Some leaders from within the party demanded that he step down. Of them Ram Jethmalani has been suspended from the party. Yashwant Sinha and Shatrugan Sinha were among those who took a public stand on this matter. The RSS intervened to ensure that the BJP leadership repose confidence in Gadkari and rejected demands that he resign. The RSS is insisting that Gadkari get another 3 year term as President, which is meeting with opposition.

With Narendra Modi winning the third assembly election in succession in Gujarat, the issue of his being projected as the future prime ministerial candidate has once again come to the fore. A section of the BJP leadership in Uttar Pradesh is proposing that he contest from either Lucknow or Varanasi for the Lok Sabha election.

Movements & Struggles

In the three month period since the last October Central Committee meeting, a number of struggles and movements have taken place in the various states. In Kerala, there was a unique protest action against the limitation in supply of gas cylinders. On December 1, a

agnisrinkila was organised. From the north to the south along the national highway food was cooked on the roadside in earthen ovens. This form of struggle attracted wide support and nine lakh people participated. This period has also seen a land struggle in January with volunteers entering the surplus lands and building huts and occupying them.

On social issues also the Party has been active. In Karnataka, three jathas were held in Dakshin Kannada culminating in a protest programme in Udupi against the caste discrimination practiced while serving food at the Sri Krishna mutt. The protesters were lathicharged and 176 comrades including the state leadership were arrested. In Tamilnadu, the Party intervened after the atrocities against dalits in Dharmapuri district. For relief work, Rs. 13 lakh were collected by the mass organisations. In Andhra Pradesh, the Left parties have organised demonstrations outside the Bharati Walmart stores all over the state in November. In West Bengal, there have been protest rallies and demonstrations against the attacks by the TMC on CPI(M) leaders and cadres.

On December 6, the Party observed a day against communalism and for communal harmony on the occasion of the anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition.

Party & Left Actions

The CPI(M) and the Left have during this period taken steps to expand their political campaign and interventions. The Left parties have conducted a campaign against FDI in retail by holding conventions in many state capitals and cities. The Left parties are conducting a mass signature campaign on the issue of food security and for a universal public distribution system. Five crore signatures are being collected.

The Party is working for the success of the two-day general strike called by the central trade unions on February 20-21.

The CPI(M) will be conducting all India jathas to highlight the Party's stand and alternatives on the following issues: food security; land and house sites; unemployment; education; health' and fight against corruption. Four jathas will traverse the country and reach Delhi from Kanyakumari, Kolkata, Mumbai and Amritsar in the month of March. This massive programme will take the message of the Party on the major issues facing the people and the alternative policies of the Left.