

West Bengal's Stalinist government mounts terror campaign to quash peasant unrest

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Through a murderous campaign of terror, the Stalinist government of West Bengal, India's third most populous state, has reasserted control over Nandigram, an area 160 kilometers southwest of Kolkata (Calcutta) that has been convulsed by peasant protests for the past 10 months.

At least eight persons were killed and scores more injured in a week of violence, beginning November 6, mounted by armed goons organized by the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The CPM is the dominant partner in West Bengal's Left Front government.

At least 10,000 villagers—some reports put the total closer to 18,000—have fled the Nandigram area, finding refuge in relief camps or with relatives.

While the CPM goons initially prevented their entry, the area is now being occupied by hundreds of troops from the Central Reserve Police Force, which is answerable to the Congress Party-led Union or federal government.

Last January, the peasantry of Nandigram rose up to prevent the state government from expropriating their land and transforming it into a special economic zone for the Indonesian-based Salim Group. While some local leaders and members of the CPM and its close ally the Communist Party of India (CPI) joined the rebellion, many of those who did not subsequently fled or were chased from the area. Nandigram then became off limits for government representatives, with villagers digging up roads and burning down bridges to keep them out.

On March 14, a more than 4,000-strong contingent of police—including para-military, Rapid Action and Combat Commando forces—mounted an armed assault on Nandigram on the orders of the Left Front government. The predictable result was a massacre. Fourteen peasants were killed and many times that number injured, but ultimately the attack was beaten off. (See: West Bengal Stalinist regime perpetrates peasant massacre)

This time, the CPM goons, who reportedly had been exhorted by senior party leaders to crush their enemies,

were even more ruthless. Eyewitnesses claim that they impeded or outright prevented the injured from getting medical attention. The East Midnapur Superintendent of Police has said that two teenage girls have been admitted to hospital after allegedly being gang-raped by CPM goons.

According to the right-wing *Indian Express*, "In a move reminiscent of medieval warfares [sic], the CPM organised a huge rally placing 500 captured BUPC members, all tied up, on the forefront as human shields."

The BUPC (Bhumi Uched Pratirodh or Resistance Against Land Eviction Committee) has been leading the anti-government protest in Nandigram. It is led politically by the Trinumul Congress, a right-wing Bengali nationalist split-off from the Congress Party and the official opposition in the state parliament. But other tendencies are also active in the BUPC, including the Socialist Unity Center of India (SUCI) and CPM dissidents.

The brazen and bloody CPM terror campaign in Nandigram has provoked a storm of opposition in West Bengal and across India.

On Monday, daily business in the state was largely paralyzed as the result of a *bandh* or general strike called separately by the Trinumul Congress and the SUCI.

Large numbers of intellectuals, many of them previously publicly known as government supporters, have denounced the CPM-orchestrated violence.

On Sunday police used baton charges and arrests to break up a peaceful protest against the Nandigram violence mounted by artists and academics, many of them well known, outside the 13th Kolkata Film Festival.

The protesters—who included film directors Rituparna Ghosh and Anjan Dutta, poet Joy Goswami, and the painters Sanatan Dinda and Samir Aich—demanded the "immediate stoppage of mass killing by CPM cadres in Nandigram."

Film director Aparna Sen warned the Left Front regime its repression would fail: “The truth can’t be suppressed. Questions are coming out and will continue to flow. The government must answer.”

The CPM’s principal Left Front allies, the Forward Bloc (FB), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the CPI, are, for their part, desperately seeking to distance themselves from the Nandigram atrocity.

State Public Works Department Minister Kshiti Goswami has sought the permission of his party, the RSP, to quit his cabinet post.

Commenting on the CPM offensive in Nandigram, Goswami stated: “I don’t know if I would call this genocide. But this is definitely an expedition of killing, plunder and destruction.”

Goswami claimed that the CPM had “deceived” its allies when it had claimed last week to be seeking a peaceful resolution to the Nandigram crisis and announced a relief package for the area. “One thing is being said, another thing is being done.”

Following an emergency meeting of RSP, CPI and FB leaders Sunday, the CPI state secretary Manju Kumar Majumdar told a press conference, “All the three Left Front allies hold the CPI-M solely responsible for the present situation in Nandigram. We do not support what has been going on there and unequivocally condemn the barbarism and spiraling violence taking place in the area.”

West Bengal Chief Minister and CPM Politburo member Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has arrogantly rejected the criticism from within and without his government. On Tuesday, he smugly declared that the “Opposition has been paid back in the same coin” and on Wednesday he blamed the violence on the central government’s failure to rapidly deploy the Central Reserve Police Force to Nandigram.

Bhattacharjee and the CPM leadership have claimed no delay could be brooked in reasserting the government’s authority and “law and order” in the area because Maoist insurgents or Naxhalites had begun to develop a base in Nandigram.

In the name of “industrializing” West Bengal, Bhattacharjee has been spearheading a drive to woo Indian and foreign capital to the state by pursuing “investor friendly” policies, including establishing special economic zones and effectively banning strikes in information technology and IT-enabled industries. For this, he has been rewarded with an official invitation from the Bush administration to visit the US and recently Henry Kissinger, the *eminence grise* of US imperialist

geopolitics, called on him.

There is no question that the CPM leadership and the Left Front government bear political, if not criminal, responsibility for the Nandigram bloodbath. Acting on behalf of Indian and international capital, they have sought to coerce peasants into ceding their land, their sole source of livelihood.

That said, India’s workers, toilers and socialist-minded intellectuals must beware: the Indian bourgeoisie intends to make use of the Stalinists’ crimes to pressure them, and politics as a whole, still further right.

L.K. Advani, the parliamentary leader of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party, is calling on the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government to impose “president’s rule” in West Bengal, that is for the central government to dismiss the state government.

The UPA, which is dependent on the Left Front for its parliamentary survival, is rather likely to use the crisis in the CPM and the Left Front to pressure them to be even more accommodating to its right-agenda, especially in respect to operationalizing the Indo-US nuclear treaty.

Indeed, there already newspaper reports claiming that there has been a breakthrough in the Left-UPA logjam over the treaty. According to these reports, the Left Front may now be ready to allow the government to proceed with the next stage in operationalizing the treaty, that is, in seeking International Atomic Energy Agency approval for giving India a unique status within the world nuclear regulatory regime.



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