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LONG LIVE
COMRADE STALIN



December 9, 1879 – March 5, 1953

“It is impossible to put an end to capitalism without putting an end to social- democratism in the labour movement. That is why the era of dying capitalism is also the era of dying social- democratism in the labour movement.”

— J. V. STALIN
[Problems of Leninism]

BJP’s Victory in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Portends a Grave Danger

Following the resounding success in the two assembly elections of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh held in December last, the BJP leaders are raising decibels with a euphoric tone. While anti-incumbency factor, exposed corrupt practices of the incumbent Congress chief minister and heightened infighting within the Congress party are stated to have worked in favour of the BJP in Himachal Pradesh, the victory in Gujarat has been totally attributed to Narendra Modi, the mascot of arch-communal Hindutva brigade in the state. It might be recalled that Modi won the 2002 elections for the BJP as well despite the worst Gujarat pogrom that remains as a blot in the history. This time also, both the parliamentarian opposition as well as detractors within the BJP trained their gun against Modi for inciting communal passion and leading the state to a bleak future. On the eve of the Gujarat polls, a six-month-long sting operation by the news

magazine *Teelka* exposed how the Sangh Parivar led by Chief Minister Narendra Modi carried out a pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and later subverted justice to ensure that “their men” eluded punishment for their heinous crimes. The role of the Modi government in the State-sponsored terrorism of 2002 was also laid bare. Even the Supreme Court had censured Modi for being “a modern day Nero who watched while Gujarat burned”. But Modi refused to budge. He went on spewing communal venom and even defended killing of Sohrabuddin, a Muslim boy, in a fake encounter as a right thing. So much inflamed he made the atmosphere with his frenzied communal rhetorics and anti-Muslim hate campaign that he could provoke the crowd to indulgently reciprocate with incensed shout “kill him, kill him” whenever a reference was made to the encounter killing. He dubbed every accusation against him into an “insult against five crore Gujaratis”

and alongside this rabid sectarian slogan projected so-called development of Gujarat as the main plank of electioneering. Neither the Congress and nor its poll partners like the CPI(M), CPI had any shot in their arm to combat Modi’s whipping of communal passion or veiled regional-parochial overtones. The Congress in fact kept silent on the expose by *Teelka*, because it was scared that any reference to the communal carnage would benefit Modi. Except making some personal attacks against Modi like calling him “merchant of death”, the Congress in fact acquiesced in his hate campaign from the fear of losing majority community votes in a communally surcharged environment.

Whose development it was

Let us turn to the ‘development’ plank that Modi adopted to camouflage his rabid communal face and hoodwink the people. Modi

Contd. on page 2

Tripura on the eve of election

The economic and socio-political situation prevailing in the north-eastern state of Tripura going to polls this month is extremely critical and complicated. Since independence there has hardly been any improvement worth the name in the socio-economic condition of Tripura under Congress regime. Rather, all through, the state had to bear a sticker of backwardness on its name. Disgusted, the common people of Tripura with much hope and aspiration ousted the anti-people Congress to install in governmental power the Left Front led by the CPI(M) claiming to be Marxist. But

in these long 25 years of CPI(M) rule, all hopes and aspirations have been razed to the ground. Plagued by all-pervasive corruption and maladministration, people are now in a state of utter destitute and despair.

History of Tripura state

Under the British Empire Tripura was a small state ruled by the local feudal lords. One part of the state is inaccessible hilly region – the habitat of the tribals leading a very simple life dependent upon forest resources. The fertile plain land constituting the other part,

which earned maximum revenue for the state, was inhabited by Bengali-speaking people. Even after India achieved political freedom in 1947 through vivisection on the basis of fallacious two-nation theory, the state of Tripura continued to be an independent state under the administration of a native king. On 15th October, 1949, the state of Tripura was annexed to the state of India.

After continuing as a union territory governed for 23 long years, Tripura won the status of a full-fledged state in 1972. From 1949 to 1972, it was under indirect

rule of the Congress which was saddled in power at the centre. Subsequently, a Congress government ruled the state till 1977. In between, a coalition government came to power for a brief period. Then a CPI(M)-led Front government took over in 1978. In 1988, the CPI(M)-led Front was defeated in the election by an alliance of Congress and Upajati Yuva Samiti, a regional party. But this alliance government could not last more than five years. The CPI(M)-led Front government was re-installed in 1993. Since then it is

Contd. on page 4

Covering up festering sores under false claim of development

Contd. from page 1

boasted that “Gujarat is India’s number one state in all aspects of development.” He has triggered industrial development by attracting investment to the tune of Rs.9, 40, 000 millions. He has made available 24-hour electricity in all 18000 villages. Narmada waters have soaked the drought areas of Kutch, Saurashtra and North Gujarat. However, facts do not corroborate the claim.

Firstly, the claimed industrial development of the state is not something that made its advent during the BJP rule. Compared to many other states, number of industrial set ups here had been more because of its long coastline congenial to rich trade and commerce. Such uneven development is typical in capitalism. But how far has this much-trumpeted industrialization helped increase people’s income or employment? The picture like any other state of capitalist India is equally dismal as most of these investments were in capital intensive highly sophisticated industries with least of employment opportunities. In keeping with the policies of capitalist globalization, large labour-intensive industries set up with people’s money after independence in the public sector have been handed over to private owners at throwaway price. Modi bragged that Gujarat has remained at the 4th position in terms of per capita income since 1990s. But even a layman understands that swelling coffers of a few monopolists like the Ambanis can jack up per capita income even if the common people experience steady dwindle in their earning. Reportedly, about 80,000 small industries have been wiped out in Gujarat throwing millions out of job. Whatever small number of jobs against massive retrenchment, lock-out, lay-off and forced retirement have been created are in informal or unorganized sectors mostly of casual nature and on contract basis with paltry salary, long hours of duty and no social security. While the working people are assailed by savage exploitation and pauperization, huge subsidies of as high as Rs.1,50,000 million have been dolled out to the big monopolists in Gujarat in last five years. What is in the offing is 38 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where, as we explained in the pages of *Proletarian Era* earlier, there will hardly be any gainful engagement.

On the contrary, bagful of tax and other exemptions and concessions would flow to the monopolists making investment in these SEZs.

Equally distressed are the peasants. Forced to undertake cash-crop farming as ordained under capitalist globalization, the farmers of Gujarat have been devastated in the face of high inflation and unsustainable cultivation. Starved of adequate irrigation facility, they still depend on most irregular and insufficient rain water entailing repeated crop failures. While keeping the drought-affected villages parched by supplying negligible water of 0.20 MAF (million acre feet) violating the Narmada Tribunal’s allocation of 0.86 MAF, the Modi government allowed Sardar Sarovar Nigam (in May 2006) to increase the Narmada water supply from 0.2 MAF to 1 MAF to the monopoly-owned industries adding further woe to the peasants. Entrapped in debt, the farmers are pushed to self-killing. More than 500 farmers have committed suicide only in Saurashtra and Central Gujarat as per official record. Many more hundreds of such deaths have gone unrecorded all over the state during the last five years. Everyday a new suicide takes place in Gujarat. Claim of 24 hour electricity supply to villages too is a hoax as there is no cable, no connection barring a few poles. While most villages get only 6 to 8 hours of power in a day, many like Malugaon do not get that even for 2 hours.

The security in people’s life has reached to the dregs. Any time under slightest of provocation, a communal conflagration can break up. Open persecution of the Muslim minorities by the Hindutva zealots aided and abetted by Modi and his brigade has become a common experience of all. The criminal activities have increased over the years. During 2001-2006 crimes increased by 15.2% in Ahmedabad and 27.8% in Surat. Rapes, atrocities on women and women trafficking have shot up alarmingly. Just the other day, it came to light that a gang of teachers of a primary teachers training college kept on raping a student consecutively over a past few months. Even a BJP MP of this state was arrested on charges of women trafficking. Gujarat is a state where consumption of liquor is officially banned. But this exhibited ban notwithstanding, 9273 licenses were issued for opening new liquor shops.

This is the spectacle of Modi’s “vibrant Gujarat” and its development! And that is why those who rejoiced Modi’s victory have been the big monopolists, affluent NRIs and large business houses. There is nothing as ‘Modi magic’— a term coined by the bourgeois media— that fetched this victory for the BJP. To the discerning people, the sleight of hand of the ruling monopolists and foreign corporate houses operative behind is quite visible.

Modi faced no opposition

The Congress, the other most trusted representative of the ruling bourgeois also aspired to gain power in the state by playing on anti-incumbency sentiment. But the people could hardly recollect when in the last five years did the Congress raise any effective voice against the anti-people policies of Modi government. Nor was the party found to firmly stand by the people affected by the anti-Muslim carnage and fratricidal bloodbaths. On the contrary, just like the BJP, the Congress, whom the CPI(M) and its associates consider to be secular, too conducted their election campaign subtly tinged with communal and casteist overtones. On the one hand, it pretended to be so concerned about the persecuted minorities by shedding crocodile tears at their plight and panic and sought to project itself as their messiah. On the other, it engaged the *sadhus* (monks) to titillate Hindu sentiment. While its sole strategy was to take a dig at person Modi, its peevishness at growing corruption, malpractices and fusillade in verbal volleys with Modi and his party bigwigs being fake in essence, it sought to turn the appellation by romping in the dissident and disgruntled within the communal BJP through horse trading. On either count, it failed to catch imagination of the people as a viable alternative. Again, it could not win confidence of the ruling monopolists as well because of its tottering organization in the state as well as failure to project anyone as a suitable substitute for Modi capable of serving their class interest with equal if not better deftness.

It is true that the recent Gujarat elections have not been free and fair. In fact, no elections today in the moribund capitalist system can be free from manipulations and non-reflective of people’s opinion unless there is enormous pressure of

genuine conscious people’s movement on the edifice of higher ethics and culture. As reports say, hundreds of thousands of genuine voters were not issued the EPIC (Electronic Photo Identity Cards). Even the names of many genuine voters who had the EPICs were motivatedly deleted from the list. Fake cards with photos and dummies with photos were doing the rounds unabated and unchecked in front of the very nose of the election authorities. Even the culprits who were caught red-handed while indulging in malpractices like the ones in the Daskroi Taluka of Ahmedabad with 400 fake identities were let off. Minimum code of conduct was adhered to. Instances of tampering of the electronic voting machines (EVMs) were also not in short supply. Hate speeches, nasty SMSs, vulgar CDs were delivered and displayed by both the BJP and the Congress throughout the election campaign. Added to this was the deliberate appointment of the ruling party men and their closed confidants as presiding officers so that the voting machinery could merrily function as proxy for the ruling party. But the BJP could get away with all these in absence of any serious challenge from anyone. While other bourgeois outfits had hardly any presence, the pseudo-Marxists like the CPI(M) and its associates preferred basking under the Congress umbrella.

Modi’s triumph also had an impact on the Himachal elections. Faction-ridden Congress and abysmal corruption of the party leaders and ministers including the chief minister coupled with skyrocketing of prices intensified the anti-incumbency factor and laced with strong undercurrent campaign of Hindutva the BJP clinched the issue quite comfortably suppressing successfully internal squabbles within its fold.

Dark cloud on the horizon

Upbeat following this twin success, the BJP has already begun dreaming of a return to power at the Centre in the next hustings. As a prelude to that, it has not delayed to declare the name of L K Advani, known for his crass communal outlook, as its prime ministerial candidate. Buoyed by the decisive win in Gujarat, it is now openly flaunting, what it calls, ‘Modi line’ to wrest victory both in the

Contd. on page 3

Absence of left-democratic movement allowing communal BJP to bounce back

Contd. from page 2

parliamentary poll as well as the assembly elections to take place in Rajasthan, Karnataka and other states. We have already shown what this so-called Modi line is a euphemism for whole hog pursuance of rabid communal doctrine of Hindutva and Muslim-bashing. It may be added that once dislodged from power, the party became ridden with factional feuds and mutual bickering with individual aspirations crudely manifested. Accusing the BJP leaders of distancing from Hindutva basics, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an important constituent of the Hindu communal Sangh Parivar led by the RSS, taking snipes at them. At times it seemed that a rupture in their relations was imminent. Groupism and inter-personal conflicts surfaced with all nakedness both at central as well as regional levels. But the RSS top brass sensing that chances were brightening in Gujarat and that might in turn reopen possibilities at national level swung in some patch up activities so that the squabbles and group conflicts do not assume that proportion as to mar the future prospect. So it was noticed that the VHP and others in whose eyes BJP's fealty to Hindutva basics looked suspect suddenly toned down their voice of criticism and after Gujarat results, practically silenced themselves. This indicates that the Sangh Parivar is trying to regroup and consolidate its position centring on the possibility of the BJP's coming back to power in a big way treading the path Modi has shown in Gujarat ratcheting up the Hindutva sentiment. This is fraught with grave danger. If the reins are back with the BJP following Modi line, the country will witness exacerbated communal polarization, surfeit of communally explosive events, orgy of violence, fratricidal bloodbath and fresh weaving of the gory images of Gujarat carnage. Warped mindset will rule over rationality, bitterness over fraternity, disunity over solidarity, bigotry over tolerance. Such divide among the people on communal line that the protagonists of Hindutva intend to perpetuate in order to ride to power would be a stumbling block before building up the desired democratic mass movement involving all sections of toiling people over the burning problems tormenting them day in and

day out. And in absence of this movement, ruling capitalist class and its lackeys of different hues would become more despotic in running their wheel of oppression and suppression making life yet more unbearable for the toiling millions irrespective of caste, creed or religion. So thwarting this emerging menace poses the greatest challenge today.

Fallout was anticipated

It may be added that when the BJP faced reverses in the 2004 parliamentary polls, the Congress and its allies including the CPI(M), CPI claimed that march of communalism has been halted. The CPI(M), CPI even made this a point that in order to keep communalism at bay, it has become incumbent on them to keep the BJP out of power by aligning with the Congress. On the other hand, our party firmly held that an election defeat of the BJP is no indicator of retreat of communalism. Equally perilous was the logic of forging alliance with the Congress, a party which all along under pretentious show of secular credential helped communalism to grow and get entrenched, to make BJP stay out of governance. Repeatedly we asserted that it was only by building up a massive surge of united organized prolonged left-democratic movement on the burning problems of the people stemming from the worn out capitalist system and simultaneously releasing a sustained painstaking ideological movement right from the grass roots level that the BJP and other arch communal forces could be cornered, isolated and ultimately defeated. Otherwise, the BJP and other communal forces even if trounced in an election would soon stage a comeback using alongwith other bourgeois tricks same communalism as their main prop as the ruling capitalist class in order to keep people disunited wholeheartedly back these divisive forces and make them saddled in power as and when such opportunity arises.

History has vindicated the correctness of our stand in no uncertain a term as events in the aftermath of 2004 parliamentary polls would bear out. In the assembly elections of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Punjab and Uttarkhand, BJP and its allies romped home with comfortable

margin and formed governments. They had clear edge over their rivals in Jharkhand as well. Results of municipality elections of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra also went in their favour. And now Gujarat and Himachal are also added to the tally. Danger inheres here.

Time and again we have pointed out that chafed at the fetters of compulsion to serve the ruling class as its most confident political agents, both the Congress and BJP are out to implement the disastrous policies of capitalist globalization wreaking havoc in people's life. In order to ensure that people's wrath and grievance against gruelling oppression in every sphere of life does not get crystallized in any movement that might pose threat to the very capitalist system, the Indian ruling class is making every effort to firmly entrench a 2-party democracy so that people's ire is ventilated only in ballot in a kind of manipulated franchise and the choice remains limited to two principal contenders vying with each other in serving best its class interest but outwardly appearing to be at loggerheads with overflowing concern for the people. The opposition of the Congress and BJP to each other is on outsmarting each other in the power game and manoeuvred to promote two-party system of rule. Both these parties take the same ploy to serve their masters, the capitalist class, by creating cleavage among the people on line of casteism, parochialism, communalism, as well as rule the state with repressive machineries. Both of them are equally adept in suppressing people's democratic movements. Only difference is that while the BJP as the political face of RSS openly panders to rabid communal politics, the Congress prefers to have an apparent non-communal posture.

Treachery of the pseudo-Marxists

Now, the pseudo-Marxists are also in the fray as formidable contenders in this selection process of 2-party democracy. Under the garb of fighting BJP's communalism, theirs of late has been a policy of partnering with the Congress to stay afloat at national level and at the same time work hard at regional level to show to the ruling bourgeoisie that given a chance, they would prove

themselves superior to the chosen bourgeois parties like the BJP, Congress in subserving bourgeois class interest. While BJP does it with its communal Hindutva slogan, the CPI(M), CPI perform the task waving red flag. The performance of the CPI(M)-led governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura bear testimony to that fact. That is why, the CPI(M), CPI are so loathe to develop legitimate people's movements on leftist line and take on BJP's communalism in the scientific course derived from genuine Marxism-Leninism. Faced with questions from its rank and under people's pressure as well as being unable to refute the impeccable logic provided by our party from the correct Marxist-Leninist standpoint, the CPI(M) leaders are now saying that deep-rooted communalism cannot be fought just by momentary electoral tactics, however well designed. It requires the mobilisation of the working people through struggles. This struggle has to be carried forward by the Left and democratic forces and all those genuinely committed to secularism. (vide Prakash Karat's article in *People's Democracy* of 30-12-07). But that no realization has dawned upon the CPI(M) leaders even after such a slap on the face is amply manifest in their renewal at the same breadth the pledge to perpetuate relationship with the Congress or exploring possibility to forge alliance with erstwhile partners of the BJP or the Congress and regional-parochial-chauvinist forces in the name of building a third front solely for electoral exigency. On one hand, Karat and his colleagues are talking of left-democratic struggle seemingly for public consumption while in reality they are planfully and brutally suppressing people's legitimate struggles as was of late seen in Singur-Nandigram in West Bengal. Not only that. In order to drive a wedge between the Hindus and Muslims and thereby break unity of the fighting people of Nandigram, they without least of hesitation toed the Modi line, so to say, by sending Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid to Nandigram as their emissary. This is how Karat and his party work to eradicate communalism.

Defeat communalism-ideologically and organizationally

In view of this fresh danger looming large on the horizon

Contd. on page 8

Destitution, deprivation, fratricidal feuds plague Tripura today

Contd. from page 1
in power without interruption.

Prior to annexation with India, the feudal rulers of Tripura in order to encourage Bengali-speaking people to come and settle at the inaccessible hilly regions used to provide them land as well as financial assistance. Intention was to have farming and settlements there. In this way, a good number of Bengali-speaking people came up from erstwhile eastern part of undivided Bengal and settled down in Tripura. Not only this. Many Bengali-speaking persons occupied high posts even in the royal administrative set up of Tripura. The Maharajas of Tripura being admirers of Bengali language and culture, Rabindranath Tagore had come to Tripura several times upon invitation. Sachin Dev Barman, the well-known singer and musician belonging to the royal family of Tripura came to fame through his rendition of Bengali songs. After partition, Bengali-speaking people from across the border, fleeing out of fear, had taken refuge in West Bengal and Assam. So also, Bengalees from the districts of Cumilla, Chattagram, Noyakhali and Sylhet located in former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on the other side of Tripura border, sought refuge in Tripura. The simple-soul, hospitable tribal populace gladly granted them the refuge. It was in absolute peace that these two groups of people were living on. But it must be admitted that some self-seeking businessmen and greedy moneylenders took advantage of the simplicity of the tribals to grab their properties and push them towards the depth of the forests. These self-seeking shrewd people also used to look down upon these backward tribals and humiliate them with taunts and sneers.

Plight and Misery of Tripura people

Despite being long in power in Tripura, from 1949 onwards, Congress, the most trusted party of the ruling capitalist class made no earnest efforts whatsoever for the economic upliftment of the tribal people. Nor had they planned for providing these poor tribals any permanent source of income, education, healthcare or for upgrading their language and culture. Even no attempt was made to improve communication in these hilly terrains through construction of roads. This gross neglect

naturally generated resentment and grievances among the tribal populace who as citizens of free India had equal right to development. At that time, the undivided CPI endeavoured to spread its political influence among these poor suffering tribals. Any student of Marxism is aware that all the miseries and sufferings of toiling working people irrespective of nationality, religion, language, caste or creed are stemming from the exploitative capitalist system of the country. Without exposing this objective reality of class exploitation and treading along the Marxist line of building up firm unity of all the exploited classes, the undivided CPI and later on, the CPI(M), with a view to fulfilling their sectarian party interest of deriving electoral mileage, sought to project before the oppressed tribals as if the majority Bengali-speaking populace were responsible for all their misery and penury. Thus these parties only paved the way for driving a wedge between the tribals and the Bengali-speaking people, generating mutual distrust and a kind of animosity between the two communities hitherto cherishing a very cordial and harmonious relation.

Later on, by pursuing the same wrong and disastrous line, the CPI(M), directly and indirectly, helped emergence of extremist regional-parochial organizations such as the TUJS among the tribal people. As everyone is aware, Assam witnessed severe onslaughts including killing and arson on linguistic minorities, when in the name of ousting of foreigners a fanatic parochial-chauvinist movement under the leadership of AASU to drive out the Bengali-speaking people, gripped the state. Drawing sustenance from that, the power-greedy TUJS leadership started attacking the Bengali-speaking people. As taking a cue from the AASU movement, extremist forces like ULFA was born later, so also was born Tribal National Volunteer (TNV) within TUJS. This TNV under the leadership of Vijay Rankhal blood-bathed Tripura in a terrible fratricidal strife in 1980. As a reaction to that, sectarian ultra-communal mentality grew among a section of the Bengali-speaking people and in a violent retaliatory action on their part, many innocent tribals lost their lives. Senior CPI(M) leaders like Nripen

Chakraborty and Dasarath Deb took no appropriate scientific step to prevent this fratricidal bloodbath. Subsequently also, the CPI(M) leaders in order to stay in power by taking advantage of this lurking conflict between two communities, did not strive for any scientific solution to this problem.

So instead of being mitigated, the problem became further aggravated. TNV got split into two factions, ATTF and NLFT, both being armed ultra militant anti-Bengali outfits. Both these extremist communal groups have been indulging in mindless violation including perpetration of mass killings by dividing the tribal-dominated areas into their respective spheres of influence. In order to corner tribal votes in the tribal-dominated areas, the CPI(M) is covertly giving support to ATTF and trying to handle these militants by luring them of some material gains against surrender. Clearly, instead of working for resolving these racial-ethnic problems in the correct way, it, too, like any other bourgeois force, is only interested in reaping election benefits by nursing group conflicts among such divisive forces. On the other hand, Congress, aspiring to get back governmental power, has entered into a seat adjustment with NLFT which is consolidating all the tribal subgroups forming an Indigenous National Party of Tripura keeping Vijay Rankhal in the forefront. INPT however has undergone a further split and one of the groups of the split faction has formed an alliance with the BJP. As a fallout to this, Tripura today is clearly divided between two distinct territories—one inhabited by the tribals and the other by the Bengalees. This is causing serious hindrance to free movement of both the tribals and the Bengali people making it extremely difficult for them to protect their life and livelihood. Due to such power-hungry, delusive parliamentary politics practised by the Congress as well as the CPI(M), restoration of unity between the Bengali-speaking and tribal people, is being seriously hampered.

Like people of any other Congress or BJP ruled states, the Tripura people under prolonged rule of the CPI(M), are also equally oppressed under ruthless capitalist exploitation, being afflicted by appalling poverty, destitution, massive unemployment and sky-high price-rise. More than half the

population is either unemployed or semi-unemployed. There is no thorough railway link between the different corners of the state. Road transport is also much underdeveloped. Owing to lack of proper infrastructure what little industry could have developed even under the decadent capitalist system, could not also come about. There is hardly any scope of employment in government sector. In their desperation, unemployed men and women are, in the hope of getting loan or other facilities, running after the ruling party, the CPI(M). In turn, the CPI(M) by luring them with promises of job and other privileges, getting them enmeshed in election politics. Thus, on one hand they are squandering public money, while on the other turning the youth into opportunists bereft of any ethics or values. Starved of jobs, the rural poor are migrating to the cities, even to other states. Failing to match competition, large number of unemployed youths who started small business with loan are getting entangled in debt trap. Neither the Central nor the state government has initiated any step to set up industries in the state putting into use its endless forest resources and natural gas reserves. Instead, the few medium-scale industries so far developed with public money have folded up due to rampant corruption and petty party politics.

While income of the majority of the people of the state is on a steady dwindle, prices of all essential commodities including rice are soaring sky-high. Given the geographical location and underdeveloped transport system, prices in Tripura are always higher than those in other states. If the transport system is disrupted by inclement weather or some other reasons, instantly the dishonest businessmen create artificial scarcity and push the prices further up. Villages are worst affected. Yet the CPI(M) government is not on record to have penalized any dishonest businessmen. This government, too, like the central Government has kept the public distribution system operative just in name. In 2007, the CPI(M) government reduced the ration quota for APL (Above Poverty Line) cardholders to half. Nor are the BPL (Below Poverty Line) card holders getting their allotted quota of rice regularly. In open market, the price of rice is going up by leaps and bounds.

Contd. on page 7

The Iraqi Resistance Struggle

Salah Al Mukhtar

[Salah Al Mukhtar, the chairman of the friendship, peace and solidarity organization, Iraq and the coordinator of free trade unions and NGOs, Iraq could not make it to attend the last international anti-imperialist conference held in Calcutta on 28th and 29th November last under the aegis of All India anti-imperialist Forum. So he sent the text of his prepared speech which contained details of the resistance struggle in Iraq against illegal US occupation. Considering importance of the issue, we are publishing the same. – Ed. Board, Proletarian Era.]

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of all supporters of the freedom fighters of Iraqi resistance and progressive Iraqi people, we wish your conference all the best and success in mobilizing forces to fight against American imperialism which represents the worst kind of invaders and colonialism in the history of the mankind. It is a great opportunity for me to present direct information about Iraqi armed resistance because much wrong information about the nature and composition of Iraqi resistance is being spread.

Historically, real and organized preparation for popular resistance started in 1991 when war of aggression on Iraq was waged by 33 states led by the USA.

The Iraqi leadership, namely the martyr president Saddam Hussein, took the following steps :

1. Members of the popular army, established in the seventies of the last century, as well as a big number of the republican guards were reorganized to acquire the skills of urban guerrilla warfare as well as classical warfare.
2. Number of volunteers in the popular army was increased.
3. Leaders of the Baath party and the state were trained for guerrilla warfare.
4. Arms of different sizes and quality were distributed; guns and ammunition were stored by millions at different places in Iraq.
5. Alquds army was formed with six million volunteers trained in urban warfare.
6. Fedaeo Saddam was established with thousands of young Iraqis trained in all kinds of fighting.

After 11th September, 2001 when the President of the United States of America, Mr. George Bush declared that Iraq was behind the attacks and the government of Iraq should be removed from the power, the Iraqi leadership reached the conclusion that the invasion of Iraq by the USA was imminent. It then put together a complete strategy to confront effectively the US plan. It entailed in addition to the steps

already taken, developing secret party organization, ideological and military and parallel intelligence organization, forming a Mohammed Army to be the basic freedom fighter organization after the invasion and saving of three billion dollars for the armed resistance.

When invasion took place, fighting started in two different styles. First the civilian armed organizations started urban warfare immediately after the first attack. It started from Umkaser, a small city in southern Iraq, which put up heroic resistance to the invasion. It then extended to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, which was occupied on the 7th of April in face of heavy and heroic steadfastness shown by the Iraqis. Secondly, the Iraqi army, despite overwhelming advantage the American army possessed in terms of highly sophisticated technology and developed arms and equipments, engaged themselves in unique fighting against the invading forces.

After Baghdad had been occupied on 9th of April, the martyr President Saddam Hussein issued orders to put aside classical warfare and depend solely on urban warfare. The guerrilla warfare started with collective attacks waged simultaneously in different parts of Baghdad by thousands of Baathists against the American troops. At the beginning, it was mostly a Baathist resistance, with some initiatives on the part of small non-Baathist groups. Later some non-Baathist, especially Islamic organizations was established with the support of arms, men and money from the Baath party. The latter further ordered its members to join all non- Baathist organizations for the purpose of making the armed revolution reach every corner in Iraq as soon as possible.

This Iraqi armed resistance has the following characters:

1. The Iraqi resistance is the fastest armed resistance in the history of the urban warfare, developing from the first day of the attack and occupation.
2. It is the first armed resistance,

transforming the regular army of an occupied state, into freedom fighters waging guerrilla warfare.

3. It is the first armed resistance which does not depend on any foreign support, military, financial, diplomatic or political. It can be described as orphan revolution.

4. The Iraqi resistance is the first armed resistance, taking place in a country without jungle, forest, marshes and mountains, usually used by the freedom fighters to hide themselves from the eyes of the enemy. Geographically Iraq is an even land without mountains or forest. So, here freedom fighters and people supporting them are like fish and water respectively. This relationship is not just one requirement of guerilla war, but in Iraq, according to the experience of the Iraqi resistance, this connection is the basic, most decisive as well the precondition, for the success and advancement of armed revolution. The Iraqi resistance depends solely on the people's support.

5. Elaborate preparation in advance, in terms of people trained and arms-ammunitions stored, enabled the Iraqi resistance to wage attacks with hundreds of freedom fighters immediately after Baghdad was occupied by the invaders. When the American mass media was concentrated at the site where the statue of President Saddam Hussein was being demolished, there where at least five major battles taking place in many quarters of Baghdad. In one of them, the martyr President Saddam Hussein was personally leading the fight.

6. As a result of its progressive, patriotic and socialist nature and identity, the Baath party included in its organization all components of the Iraqi society: Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Christians and Muslims, both Shia and Sunny, and so on. This feature does not exist in other political parties. For example, the political organizations supporting occupation includes Shia organizations, such as the so called 'high council of the Islamic revolution' in Iraq, or

Sunny organizations, such as the Islamic party or Kurdish parties. At the national level, these political organizations lack mass bases, whereas the Baath party has branches in every city and village in Iraq.

The Iraqi resistance has two wings: the first is the national progressive force represented by the Baath party and its allies like some communists rejecting the submission of the communist party of Iraq to occupation, Arab nationalists, heads of tribes and some religious leaders. The second wing is the Islamic wing, characterized by just Sunny groups and by its being elitist. There was strong and constructive cooperation between the two wings till the year 2006. Since then it has weakened, because of the sectarian culture of the Islamic organizations fighting against occupation, resulting even into armed clashes between the two wings.

The most important remarks we should throw lights on in order to understand the reality of Iraq under occupation and the armed resistance, are the followings:

1. The American occupation force and its partner, the Iranian occupation, are waging since beginning genocidal campaign against all the Baathist, the civilian and military cadres, who are fighting against the occupation. The Baath party is suffering from great losses. The occupying forces are also demonizing the Baath party, by fabricating lies designed to distort the image of the party among the people of the world, to justify the occupation and the genocidal campaign to exterminate the party.

The clear picture of that fascist campaign against Baath party is the so called Debaathification law, issued by Mr. Paul Brimmer, the so called American civilian ruler in Iraq. It deprives all Baathists, forming a 6 million strong force, of every kind of political and administrative rights. Also the law obliges the puppet government in Iraq as well as the occupation forces to eliminate the socialist-national ideology and the organization of Baath party by all means including mass media campaigns to distort the image of the party.

Contd. on page 6

The Iraqi Resistance Struggle

Contd. from page 5

2. The USA and the Iranian Government are supporting directly, and indirectly, the sectarian Sunny organizations inside Iraqi armed resistance, beside the support from some rich Arab circles. They are fomenting sectarianism with the main objective to convert the Iraqi resistance from a national liberation movement to a sectarian Civil War, after dividing the resistance.

3. Here we should refute the claim that Iran is opposing the American occupation to Iraq. The reality in Iraq strongly supports the fact that Iran was and is the major partner of American occupation to Iraq. The most important evidence is the confession of Mr. Mohammed Khatami, the President of Iran, who said in the end of 2004 that without the help of Iran, it was not possible for the USA to occupy Afghanistan and Iraq. This confession was repeated by most distinguished leaders of Iran. The whole potentials of Iran were used to help implementing the major objectives of the occupations, such as establishing government, army, police, and security apparatus to guarantee complete control of Iraq by the occupation forces, whether American or Iranian. Also the highest authority in Iran and the President of Iran said on many occasions that Iran is ready to help America get out of the quagmire of Iraq if the USA accepts the preconditions of Iran, and gets involved in a direct negotiation between the two countries about determining the future of Iraq.

4. Now, while I am concluding, please permit me to speak about the crucial and the most important issue, for the liberation movements and anti-imperialist parties; the role of the Iraqi armed revolutionary in determining the course of the development of the whole world. After the USA guaranteed its full hegemony over the world as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the isolation of China voluntarily, the liberation movement and the progressive governments faced deadly challenges, because of the absence of the parties who could support them and provide

whatever these movements and governments needed to resist imperialism, represented by the USA and supported by the European Union.

Thus most liberation movements were defeated, and the progress governments were surrounded and subjected to worst kind of embargo and isolation, paving the way for the USA to establish a new world order, controlled by it and serving its interest. There seemed to exist no party which could dare to challenge America. For that reason most governments and political parties changed their policies and ideologies to be in harmony with the so called American age or the American century.

But the invasion of Iraq has changed the strategic balance upside down and has exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the USA. It has opened the doors towards liberation of the states and nations all over the world from American hegemony. The failure of the US to defeat the Iraqi armed revolution on one hand, and the total success of the Iraqi armed resistance to contain and defeat all American strategic choices has determined the course of the war and has emphasized the fact that America is losing the war and the Iraqi resistance is marching towards the final victory tomorrow or day after tomorrow.

The question should be asked always is the following: what are the results and consequences of victory of Iraqi revolution on the region and over the world? The American defeat in Iraq will lead, definitely, to the collapse of the universal American empire project. Confronting two options, either the USA should return to the isolation policy and limit itself to the American continent, or it should accept the emergence of a multi-party new world order. In both cases America would be obliged to stop invading other countries and give up imperialist policies.

Knowing these strategic facts, the USA has mobilized and concentrated all its potentials and might, and uses it in the Iraqi arena to avoid the total defeat by trying to divide Iraqi resistance, as the only option to get out of Iraqi quagmire. The Iraqi national progressive resistance, knowing this American tactics, has reached the conclusion that Iraq's battle will determine the fate and the future of the whole Middle East as also the world for decades or may be centuries to come. By adopting that belief the Iraqi

resistance is fighting fiercely rejecting any kind of retreat before or compromise with the invaders in spite its heavy loses in terms of a human factor. In the light of what we have already mentioned above, the major battle and the major contradiction in our world is the gigantic conflict between the Iraqi armed resistance and the USA. All other conflicts in every region of the world, like the Arab-Israel conflict, the tension in Lebanon, the crisis in Somalia, the war in Afghanistan, the aggression on Cuba and all other Latin American countries, the scrambles among Russia, China and the USA, the political game between Iran and the USA etc. are secondary and attached to Iraq's battle. Their future will be determined by the result of the gigantic battle in Iraq. Comrades and friends:

It would be a big mistake, for any liberation movement or progressive entity, if they ignore the above mentioned strategic facts about the role of the Iraqi resistance. The worst consequences may be losing the greatest opportunity to inflict a major, and may be the final defeat on the American imperialism. If we look at and analyze the role of other conflicts over the world, we shall reach the conclusion that none of these conflicts is a major battle for the USA, and even if it is defeated in any of them, it will be a kind of losing limited and secondary battle. Only in Iraq, the liberation movements of the world can defeat the USA in the final battle in the war still going on since the emergence of the US as the major imperialist power after the Second World War.

After defeating American imperialism in Iraq, we shall witness the most important strategic change since the collapse of the Soviet Union, or maybe since the Second World War.

In the light of that analysis the major question should be dealt with is: how the progressive political powers, liberation movements and anti-imperialist forces can participate in the final defeat of the US imperialism? We believe that by supporting Iraqi armed resistance, by all means, we all together can guarantee the defeat of America in the major battle of the war, and consequently, we shall witness the collapse of the American influence and bases in all other parts of the world. To change the course of the historical development, we should concentrate mainly on supporting the Iraqi armed resistance. The gate of the history will be opened to have all nations enter the age of freedom, justice and socialism.

Long live the struggle of the national armed resistance of the people of Iraq against the worst kind of imperialism, invading forces, and colonialism ever witnessed in the history of mankind.

Long live the solidarity among liberation movements of the world.

Long live the anti-imperialist camp.

Long live the patriotic and the progressive governments in all continents.

Let us adopt the major slogan : defeating America in Iraq is the gate to enter the new age of freedom, democracy and socialism.

Chinese people bleed under unprecedented price rise in capitalism

Rising prices are making life more difficult for working people in capitalist China. It is dragging down their living standards. "I used to stew meat soup everyday, but now we can only afford to have soup twice a week," said Huang, an old lady living in Shenzhen in south China. Reducing soup supply is no trivial matter for her family. In this part of China where meat soup is regarded as a major source of nutrition and good taste, people would not have given up soup unless they really can't afford it. Ms. Huang can't afford it now, nor can many other Chinese people. Since pork price soared in May, the overall food costs have been

escalating across China. Compared to the same time last year, this November there's a 56 percent price increase for pork, 38.8 percent for poultry, 35 percent for cooking oil, and 28.6 percent for vegetables, to list a few. As income sees little increase, the surging in food costs has an obvious impact on people's standards of living. For lower income classes, meat is becoming rarer and rarer in their daily menu. Ms. Li, a resident of a small city in Yunan Province near China's border with Myanmar, said on December 12 in a telephone interview, "Pork cost about 14 Yuan per kilogram (US \$0.86 per pound) earlier this

Contd. on page 8

Both Congress and CPI(M) befriending divisive forces for electoral gains

Contd. from page 4

Despite much drum-beating about providing 100 days' work compulsorily, rural unemployed is hardly getting work even for 25 days. The fertile hillocks produce world class tea, coffee and rubber. In absence of any initiative on the part of the government, the rich private owners are making huge fortunes through rubber plantation on lakhs of acres of land evicting small land holders. Despite crying hoarse of development, the government has not been able to bring most of the cultivable lands under irrigation. Nor can the farmers preserve agricultural produces for want of cold storages. Since there is no window for availing easy loan at lower interest with assistance from government, farmers get shattered by their debts to the moneylenders. The CPI(M) government did not offer least of compensation to the thousands of farmers affected by the severe flood of 2007.

Education and healthcare in the shambles

Despite tremendous advancement in medical sciences, the condition of healthcare is abysmally dismal in the state. Common people have to go to other states to receive treatment of serious diseases. Expenses for medical tests and medicine, too, have to be borne by patients themselves. So pathetic are the conditions of the hospitals that in the first three months of 2007, 138 babies died at Agartala IGM hospital. In most of the villages, infrastructure for medical treatment is almost non-existent resulting in death of hundreds due to enteric disease and malaria every year. Nursing homes which can be afforded only by the rich are mushrooming in the urban pockets. While showing pretentious opposition against privatization, the CPI(M) has handed over the Agartala District Hospital built up with crores of rupees contributed by the public to Z-net organisation, free of cost and that organization is mopping up crores of rupees as capitation fees from the students, by opening a medical college there.

The CPI(M) Front government in the state is following the Central government's policy in the field of education as well—hiking fees at all

levels of education; introducing self-financing course in higher education, and leading primary education to the ruins by introducing Central Sarba Shiksha Mission financed by World Bank. Following NCERT directive to effect changes in curriculum, and by abolishing pass-fail system up to class eight, there is an odious move to degrade the standard of education. Sex education is being introduced at the very school level disregarding the opinion and opposition of the right-thinking people. There is a spree among the ministers and CPI(M) leaders to inaugurate private schools and colleges. Thus government help is extended to raise the number of private schools and colleges. Even though a medical college has been established under government initiative, a student there has to spend minimum 5 lakhs of rupees for completing an MBBS course – something beyond the reach of the lower middle class families. Thus, higher education is being made elusive to the common people. At the same time, there is lack of minimal infrastructure in the schools and colleges. Colleges are run with part-time teachers.

Degeneration and corruption galore in every sphere

By implementing the Central Electricity Act, the state government has turned the Electricity Department into a Corporation and in course of one year, raised the tariff twice. Even after 60 years of independence, no progress has taken place in the transport system. There is no town bus service in any city of the state, including the state capital, Agartala. Even now, Agartala is not linked to other parts of the state by rail. Of late, there is another constraint. As because police escort is provided to road transport on the pretext of preventing terrorist attacks, no vehicles ply after 12 noon from Agartala to other states and towards North and Dhalai districts. After six in the afternoon, communication with other districts and subdivision police stations also stops. Despite there being no attempt on the part of the government to improve transport system, it continues to surrender to the unjustified demands of the vehicle owners and raise the fares. Even the transport employees' union under CITU leadership has been used to voice the demand of fare increase in the interest of the

owners.

In the name of promoting education and culture and flaunt the success of government in this regard, fairs and exhibitions of all kinds are being organized in both rural and urban areas. In reality, these are nothing but means to provide engagement to the stooges of ruling CPI(M) by spending government fund. On the other hand, under the plea of revenue generation to the government slated to be cash-starved, on-line lottery has been introduced to encourage gambling on a massive scale. Grant of license for sale of liquor is going on a full swing. Tripura has come to be a state which occupy a special position in so far as the number of cases of rape, trafficking and outraging the modesty of women are concerned. Recent incidents of rape of a student in the police lock-up and of a lady employee of the state Secretariat provide testimony of the extent of plight and insecurity of women in Tripura. Sheltered by the CPI(M), even rapists merrily escape punishment. Tripura has borders with Bangladesh on its three sides. For demarcating the border with barbed wire fencing, thousands of families have been evicted from their hearth without compensation and rehabilitation. On the pretext that this is an issue that pertains to the Central government, the CPI(M) government of the state trying to wash off its hands. Yet, when movements surged forth in demand for compensation to and rehabilitation of the affected thousands, the CPI(M) government did not hesitate to brutally crush the same with its police. Similarly, the state government in the name of effecting the Rural Roadways Project of Prime Minister is forcibly grabbing lands without compensation.

Central allotment funds, as well as the amount of tax imposed by the state government on the people, already back-broken in shouldering increasing taxation, direct and indirect, by the central government, are being squandered away both by offending bureaucrats and ruling party leaders. On the other hand, the leaders are boasting of development by inaugurating housing complexes and shopping malls. There is not even an iota of administrative neutrality. In course of its long uninterrupted tenure, the CPI(M) has practically made the police and administration totally subservient to its dictates. Starting with the

topmost level of administration down to the panchayat level, corruption has become rampant. Though scams involving crores of rupees have come to light, the CPI(M) is covering up the offending bureaucrats and party leaders. No complaint of corruption has been attended to. For each and every work, whether related to contracting or land transactions, the CPI(M) goons and middlemen are to be bribed. Lest this gets exposed, there is a full scale publicity to project a clean corruption free image of the state government.

In order to ensure that mass movements do not surge forth in the state, an ambience of panic has been created with the democratic atmosphere destroyed. Any possibility of development of legitimate students' movement is sought to be nipped in the bud by threats and intimidation. A situation is so created as to endanger both pursuance of studies as well as lives of the protesting students. Government employees, apprehensive of being transferred to terror-stricken areas in case of opening their mouth, keep mum. Such an atmosphere as under fascism is naturally inimical to democratic movements. Also, taking advantage of absence of strong mass movement, anti-social activities like drinking, gambling, corruption and blackmarketing have become rampant throughout the state.

The election scenario

In such a suffocating atmosphere, the Congress, as principal opposition party has not stood by the people on any issue. It was futile to expect that the Congress, the most trusted party of the ruling Indian bourgeoisie, would work in public interest or practice politics complementary to mass movements. They can be heard thundering only at the time of vote. In a frantic bid to regain power, the Congress is now showering torrents of promises. It is enticing the Bengali-speaking people with heavenly dreams. Side by side, to influence the tribal masses constituting one-third of the population of the state and being a determining force in vote politics with 20 out of 60 seats reserved for them, the Congress, as mentioned above, has entered into a seat sharing with the extremist communal INPT under Vijay Rankhal who too is nurturing

Contd. on page 8

Corrigendum

Venue of last Karnataka AIMSS conference was inadvertently mentioned as Bangalore instead of Mysore in last issue. Mistake regretted.

Tripura Elections

Contd. from page 7

parliamentary ambitions. The BJP, too, having used the weapon of communal politics in Tripura, is aiding and abetting politics of disruption by aligning with a faction of the extremist NSPT. Another group with Leftist inclination and known as Naxalites too has appeared in the fray with catchy slogans and is trying to woo the tribal people by fanning up parochial-separatist sentiments which, as we have shown, obstruct the very process of growth and development of democratic mass movements..

Given such a political situation, Forward Bloc, a constituent of the CPI(M)-led front, hitherto content with allotment of one Assembly seat in the last 25 years, suddenly pleaded with the CPI(M) for conceding additional seats to it. Denied favour from the CPI(M), it is contesting the elections from without the Front combination. Having been able to gain trust and confidence of the ruling bourgeoisie, the CPI(M) never treated its Front partners with dignity. Yet, during this long period, neither Forward Bloc nor RSP or CPI had ever been vocal against the domineering attitude of the CPI(M). Nor has any of these partners protested against the CPI(M) when it went on introducing anti-people policies one after another. Now with election impending, the revolt of the Forward Bloc over allotment of seats does not indicate any ideological or policy difference. However, this incident clearly brought out the domineering attitude of the CPI(M).

SUCI is holding aloft banner of revolutionary Marxism

As against such bourgeois, petty bourgeois politics, the SUCI is contesting in four seats on the basis of the politics of mass movement. Right from the outset of spreading

its revolutionary organizational work, SUCI has been attempting to develop mass movements. Movements have been developed against price and fare hike, electricity tariff hike, fee-hike in education and also against the introduction of on-line lottery and on such demands as for plying of town buses. In certain cases, demands have been achieved too. This struggling image of the party has exerted deep influence on the people nurturing a leftist mind and has earned love and respect from them.

At present, the principal task is to forge unity between the Bengali-speaking and tribal peoples. It must dawn upon each and every section of the toiling people groaning under the yoke of savage capitalist exploitation cutting across caste, creed, ethnicity or religion that only by releasing a series of united organized prolonged mass movement on the burning problems of life, conducive to anti-capitalist revolution could they could get out of this strangulating situation. With this clear objective, the SUCI is struggling to forge unity of the tribals and Bengali-speaking people in united movement, abandoning the path of mutual hatred and animosity. It is also attempting to convince the people that unless they are united, the opportunist, power-loving stooges of the ruling capitalism, the roots of all evils, like the Congress or the CPI(M), will make use of their disunity to turn life yet more miserable. So is the fervent appeal to the toiling downtrodden people of Tripura to vote for the SUCI candidates, the trusted soldiers of democratic movement, they strengthening this politics of mass movement that only can cement the unity of the people, stop the internecine strifes and work towards speedy development of the revolutionary struggle to smash the exploitative capitalist system.

Make SUCI candidates victorious in Tripura assembly polls

Constituency

Agartala
Badharghat
Dharmanagar
Radhakishorepur

Candidate

Comrade Shibani Das
Comrade Subrata Chakraborty
Comrade Sanjay Chowdhury
Comrade Bibhulal Dey

A Grave Danger

Contd. from page 3

following Modi line 'doing the trick' for the BJP, it has become imperative on the part of all genuine left-democratic forces, sincere on combating communalism-fundamentalism, to come forward, unite and develop democratic mass movements throughout the country on various people's issues and undertake a sustained ideological campaign against all vile bourgeois doctrines including the menace of communalism. As a genuine communist party on the soil, the SUCI has been striving hard for intensifying this twin movement. In Gujarat also we have been trying this with all our strength at command. In the course of conducting the struggles, we also took part in the last election to uphold the voice of revolutionary politics. While fighting and exposing the communal agenda of the BJP as well as the surreptitious politics of the Congress and simultaneously unmasking the opportunist policy of the pseudo-Marxists like the CPI(M), CPI backstabbing people's cause for pelf

and power, we, depending on our organizational strength, contested from three constituencies of the state with an appeal to make victorious the trusted soldiers of genuine left-democratic movement and pave way for reflecting voice of movement on the assembly floor. The response from the people was overwhelming. Knowing fully well that our party was not a contestant in formation of the government and despite there being a strong polarization created by incessant propaganda of bourgeois media, a large number of people stood by us. We got 13,600 in the Chowringee of Surat and garnered sizeable votes in the other two constituencies of Ellisbridge of Ahmedabad and Sayaganj of Vadodara. These are the positive support towards our attempt and also promising sign of left-democratic movement on the edifice of higher ethics and culture assuming further dimension to intensify the struggle of freeing Gujarat from the tenterhook of noxious communal and other bourgeois thoughts.

Plight of Chinese people under Capitalism

Contd. from page 6

year, but now it's around 28 Yuan (\$1.73)." She stopped for a sigh, and then added, "Chicken used to be 20 Yuan per kilogram (\$1.23 per pound). Now, it's 33 Yuan (\$2). Prices of vegetables have also gone up quite a bit." But food is not the only thing in people's daily life that's getting unaffordable. This winter gas price is also going up. In the city Ms. Li lives, most people use liquefied petroleum gas as the fuel for cooking. So when the LPG price rose by 50 percent this year, many started to panic. The rising LPG price is driving many people back to more traditional fuels like coal. In Guangzhou City, for example, many residents have switched to honeycomb briquettes for heating and cooking. A Guangzhou briquettes store owner said that in the past few months he had been selling 5,000 pieces of briquettes a day, twice as many as last winter. From January to November of 2007, housing prices in 70 major Chinese cities jumped

7.3 percent year-on-year. Housing prices were up at a rate of 10.5 percent in November alone, a report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), a top government think-tank, showed. The report also predicted that housing prices in China would keep on rising this year and the increase rate would roughly equal that of 2007.

As a result of the escalating prices, this November China's consumer price index, an important inflation indicator, rose to 6.9 percent from the same time last year, hitting a 11-year high.. Food prices which account for one-third of its CPI basket gained 11.3 percent in the first 10 months, accounting for 84 percent of the nation's consumer price gains. Experts say the CPI is highly likely to surpass 7 percent in December. Incidentally, The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences forecasted China's CPI would reach 4.5 percent for 2007 and 4 percent in 2008. (Source : Li Tu, Epoch Times Special Correspondent, 16-12-07 and Beijing Times 13-12-07)

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