



NEWS/EVENTS

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CPI(M): A LEFT PARTY IN POWER

INTERVIEW WITH MANIK SARKAR¹



Q: Let us begin by congratulating you. Your state, according to latest statistics, has emerged with the highest rate of literacy. How could you achieve this apparently 'impossible' success?

A: We have adopted a clear and candid attitude as regards the spread of literacy and educa-

tion. We have come out with the declaration that education is the birth right of the people and everybody needs to be given the opportunity to educate himself/herself. In order to transform our attitude into action we have adopted a number of meaningful steps. We began by increasing the budgetary allocation for education which now accounts for 20% of the entire budget. This means out of every 100 rupees spent 20 rupees go for education.

Secondly, along with the increase in budgetary allocation we have given a great emphasis to child's education, beginning from the pre-primary stage. *Anganwadi* centres have now been transformed into schools for tiny tots where children aged from 3-5 receive education. We are trying to bring as many children as possible to these pre-primary schools. And let me claim modestly, we have achieved 100% success in this sphere. The importance of the pre-primary stage is great because children can start going to primary schools only after completing the pre-primary stage. To that ex-

¹ Manik Sarkar is the Chief Minister of Tripura and the leader of the CPI-M in that state. His regime has experienced the advance of the state in many directions. One of the most remarkable successes attributed to his regime is that Tripura has emerged with the highest rate of literacy among Indian states. Member of the party's Politburo, Manik Sarkar donates his salary to the party fund. He receives a subsistence allowance of INR 5000 per month from the party.

tent we can state that we have universalised children's education. Our calculation says that 98% of the tiny tots in the state pass through this pre-primary stage while the remaining 2% are educated in private kindergartens and nurseries. Along with imparting education we are providing food to the children at the *anganwadi* centres. We provide books and exercise books, medical service, slippers for the feet and meals for the mother also. In fact, as the preparation ground for primary level of education these *anganwadi* centres are performing excellently. Now, the question is, how are these schools being run? Well, these come under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of the central government. Supervisors placed under child development project officers look after the centres. We also direct them from time to time. Our instruction is candid to the core. We have told them that once the child reaches 5 years, he or she would have to be admitted in class I of the primary school. We issued this diktat 3 years ago; as a result all the children of the pre-primary stage are gaining admission in the primary schools. I need to mention here that the supervisors, who are government employees, have been clearly told that their career advancement would depend on the success they have achieved in bringing children to the pre-primary stage.

We also have laid great stress on infrastructure development. Let me recall the past in this context. When Nripen Chakraborty and Dasarath Deb were in the state cabinet, they announced that each square kilometre of area should have a primary school. During their days schools were few and far between. So their diktat sounded revolutionary and utopian but the process started under their leadership and today we can claim that each and every locality of this state has a primary school. The next stage was the setting up of secondary schools where children after completing their primary stage entered. At present we have around 9900 *anganwadi* schools and about 4800 secondary schools. These are all housed in *pakka* structures, they are served drinking water and clean sanitation facilities. The secondary schools are connected with electricity lines. As for the food that is given, it includes egg as well as meat. As for books and *khatas*, we give these to all kids irrespective of caste and creed. As for students in class IX to XI who come under the BPL, we give them all the textbooks they need.

All these initiatives and efforts have created a proper atmosphere and as a result we have almost attained universalization in literacy and education. One more point, we do not take any school fees from anyone. Added to this is the adoption of the campaign mode to get children admitted to schools. Every year in the month of January when the annual results are declared and the process of normal admission is completed, headmasters, representatives of the people and officers of education directorate inspect allotted regions to find out if any child is not going to the schools and also if some children are victims of child labour. These missing ones are identified and persuaded to go to the pre-primary schools. Some children who because of their age are reluctant to visit lower classes are given special coaching to cover their deficit. When they attain a required standard, they are admitted to the classes whose students are more or less of the same age. We have also identified physically disabled children who find it difficult to move about. We are sending teachers to their homes.

Along with all these efforts we are also emphasizing the importance of adult literacy. The standard Indian lifespan for adult literacy begins from 15 years and ends in 45 years. We however, have extended 45 to 50. If someone above 50 also expresses the desire to visit adult school, we encourage him. I must state here that the entire action of child literacy and education is a great collective endeavour in which gram panchayat, town panchayat, municipalities, volunteer organisation, NGOs and government departments of education, social education and social welfare are involved. With the help of so many organisations and departments, we can ensure evening classes for the adults. Moreover, we nominate a particular school to launch motivation campaign in a particular area. These campaigns have borne fruits-the illiterates are now gaining literacy. As a result of all these



we have attained 88% literacy, according to the 2011 Census Report. You know, after attaining 88% literacy, a state can claim to be fully literate. But we have refused to accept this honour. We want the full 100% to be literate and that is why we are now approaching the remaining 12%.

We conducted a survey and found out that 1 lakh 31 thousand men/women within the age group of 15 years to 50 years are illiterate and most of them are women and tribals. This has to be the case because when we were conducting the campaign in the tribal areas, insurgency was at its peak. It was difficult to run even a normal school. We however were determined to break this stagnation and accordingly we established 8500 teaching centres and close to 9000 volunteer teachers (VTs). We attained 95% success from these efforts. What I need to stress is that this entire education campaign was conducted with the help of the common people. We spoke with them, discussed with them and took their advice. They also tried to appreciate our efforts. In short, imparting education turned into some sort of people's movement. We have also cut down the rate of dropouts drastically. In the past, 65% of school goers turned into dropouts; now the dropout rate from class I to V is 2.9% and from I to VIII 8.5%. At this moment our rate of literacy is 94.65%. We are not complacent. We are now concentrating on the remaining 5%. This remainder is our target now.

Q: Like Education, another important Human Development Indicator is health. According to latest statistics, Tripura has been able to bring down the child mortality rate remarkably. Efforts are being made to improve the condition of health centres and hospitals. How would you evaluate and explain this progress?

A: Our target has been development of human resources, and we also know that education and health are intrinsically related. In fact, these two are the two different sides of the same coin. You see our focus has been on nutrition. We have concentrated on child and mother care. While discussing education, I have said that 100% of children are going to the schools, along with them 85% of mothers also coming to the schools, and there we attend to the health of children and mothers. We are providing food to both. Sometimes mothers prefer to have uncooked food which they cook at home. To them we give what they want. We are also providing folic tablets to women which would increase their iron content. These tablets are given to fulfil different needs of the mothers, which means we are giving the tablets twice a week as well. We also organise blood donation camps regularly. In fact, in this sphere, we have been most successful among states in India. We have stood first in two years, consecutively. Many come to donate their blood and that is required to combat the anaemia of the women.

Before the Left Front came to power in this state, mothers used to sell their children to gain morsels of food. The fathers were without job and they used to leave their state with only a few returning. The families thereby got broken and fragmented. But all this is part of history, such happenings do not take place now. At present, no one dies out of hunger, mothers do not sell their children and fathers don't have to venture to other states to find work. Indeed, people from other states come to Tripura to get work. But in spite of these major reversals, I am not going to claim that we have been able to eradicate fully the problem of malnutrition. There are people still suffering below the poverty line and we are attending to them.

We are trying to bring health infrastructure to grassroots. We have 1100 village panchayats in the state and around 20 wards in the city. And, our aim is to set up health centres in every ward and panchayat. We have already accomplished 75% of this mission. Wherever we have found finished buildings and big rooms, we have set up health sub-centres in which two health workers function. They conduct the preliminary investigations and they have received training for this job. When the ailment is beyond their power of examination, they take the patients to primary health centres. According to the norms of the central government, we need not have more than 60 such primary



health centres (PHCs). But our target is to establish 150, out of which 100 have been already established. Construction work is progressing in 34 more proposed primary health centres. We are also increasing the bed strength of these PHCs. When the doctors think that the patients have to be examined for one to two more days they are encouraged to stay back. It goes without saying that all these facilities are provided free of cost.

Above the PHCs we have community health centres at the block level. This is the stage between PHCs and sub-divisional hospitals. Frankly speaking, we need more such health centres and we are constructing them. Our aim is to have at least one community health centre in every block. We shall need some time to achieve this. In short, we have fulfilled the need of primary health centres and we are at present engaged in the effort to build more community health centres as well as PHCs.

Now we come to sub-divisional hospitals which are placed above the community health centres. Previously these hospitals had bed strength of 50. We have now increased this number to 100. District hospitals and tertiary hospitals function in tandem with sub-divisional hospitals. We know mere construction is not enough; we need doctors, nurses and paramedical staff. In the past there was a big deficit in this sphere. In order to cover this deficit and be self-sufficient, we have established two medical colleges in the state. The regulation is very strict- those who pass out from these colleges have to serve five years in villages. If the students concerned leave the state they have to pay a hefty fine. We think that we shall reach the cent per cent appointment of doctors inside the state within the coming five years. In the past women went outside the state to receive the training of nurses. Only a few could avail themselves of this opportunity as the quotas were insufficient. But by building institutes for the nurses in the state, we have successfully encountered these deficits. Not only female nurses but also male attendants are being trained. Even the paramedical staff is receiving training inside the state. In other words, we are making a concerted effort to build health centres and hospitals and train doctors as well as nurses. We hope, we shall be self-sufficient in this very crucial sphere within the next five years.

Our aim is to treat the patient on the spot in his or her house. For this we need nutrition, clean drinking water and sanitation. We are providing clean drinking water in all the regions. In some areas the force of the water is not up to the mark, we are trying to remove this problem. We have calculated how much water a person needs per day, for bathing, cooking and other purposes. Accordingly, we are trying to supply the needed quantum of water. We have also received 100% cover for sanitation. What I need to stress and re stress in this connection is the fact that we have been receiving full people's cooperation in our work and we aim to have a flawless health infrastructure within the course of next five years.

Q: Identity politics has emerged as a major issue in the Indian political scene in general and in north-east in particular. How did you and your party deal with this issue, specifically the tribal question, at the political and ideological levels?

A: We do believe in Left politics, we do not view 'identity' from the perspective you are implying. We intend to regard this problem as one of class outlook. This however does not mean that we are ignoring or undermining 'identity'. In fact, we think that if we ignore the class outlook we may cause confusion or even step back to a dangerous position. The following truth in this context is unavoidable; namely, that those who are poorest in our country, they are tribals, scheduled castes, minority communities and OBCs. 85% or 90% of those who are struggling below the poverty line belong to these disadvantaged groups. Indeed, it is this inescapable reality that has prompted us to adopt the class outlook. Hence there is a basic difference between our standpoint and the standpoint of others who propagate identity politics as a separate issue. We feel we are correct in our estimate as far as Tripura is concerned.



The tribal population here took part actively in agitations and movements associated with the spread of education and public literacy. When the Tripura tribals formed the majority in the state, they were initiated into this 'politics of education'. At the next stage, an elevation was attempted to bring them to the level of democracy. You see, both the spread of education and the nurturing of democratic attitude can only proceed if the subjects vote for a responsible political party. The tribals did not fight the king directly but at the same time struggled for full democratisation. This led to the establishment of the state legislative assembly and the formation of a complete state. Once this was established slogans were raised to build a prosperous Tripura where education, health, economy, and infrastructure would flourish. There was no identity politics per se in the voicing of the above demands. I would rather describe it as a total movement which incorporated at times class struggles and at other times mass struggle. As we know, class content is always present in mass struggle and mass approach is present in class struggle. There is no point in compartmentalising the two. It needs to be stressed strongly that the tribals of Tripura participated in this struggle with full enthusiasm and to that extent fulfilled their historic responsibility. Even when they were a majority they voiced their demand for a separate state. They have also fought for the establishment of industry and laying of railway lines. Indeed before all this, they resisted Tripura's inclusion into Pakistan and the merger of Tripura into Assam. This, in short, is the historical background of the tribal masses of Tripura who played a very important role in the class and mass struggles. I shall not deny that some elements tried to fan the issue of identity politics but they always constituted a microscopic minority. The broad base of Tripura tribals refused to go along with them. Even when some elements tried to create trouble following the declaration of Telangana as a separate state, they failed to influence the tribals, who did not extend any support to them. What is to be noted in this context is that Tripura tribals think in a modern manner and independently. They possess a modern outlook and form the backbone of the communist movement in the state. In point of fact, under the influence of the most advanced ideology, they were the first to raise the red flag in the state.

Q: We have heard a lot about rubber plantation in the state. Does this proliferation of rubber plantation prompt tribal land displacement, that is, challenge the tribals right over their land?

A: In our state the tribals are most eager about rubber plantation. Sometimes this creates problems. We cannot deny that rubber plays an important role in the state economy; for example those lands which are not suitable for normal cultivation are now being used to plant rubber trees. We on our part are encouraging them to adopt modern technology. A rubber tree starts giving latex seven years after planting and it continues giving till it is thirty three years old. The wood of the tree which was formerly used as firewood is now being used for other commercial purposes. The price of rubber in the international market is also lucrative, INR 90 for one kg. We have to admit that this urge to extract more rubber has affected paddy and vegetable cultivation to some extent. We have explained to the cultivators that they should not concentrate solely on rubber. What needs to be stressed in this context is that rubber cultivation has changed the livelihood of the tribals and led to their commercial gain.

Q: Do you think that as a result of land concentration some people would come to own more land?

A: Such a possibility is remote because the Left pressurised the central government to pass the Forest Right Act, which is now being implemented in Tripura. In our state forest area comprises more than 60% of the total landholding. This is also our problem because no one has the right to touch these special regions. In fact, problems are intermixed with benefits. For example, we have been



able to distribute land and give *patta* to one lakh twenty thousand inhabitants. Out of the latter, only two families are non-tribal. We cannot call this land transfer in the exact sense of term. The clause is as follows: the recipient will not be able to transfer the designated land and it has to be cultivated through the generations. To put it simply, we provide *patta* to the father of the family; after his death the son will get it but he will not have the right to sell it and after the son's demise the grandson will come to acquire it. Rubber, tea, coffee, paddy, wheat and other crops may be cultivated in these lands and along with this pisciculture as well as poultry farming can be practised. Because these landholdings have been divided in this way among one lakh twenty thousand recipients, there is no scope for land concentration. We sent a project proposal of INR 440 crores to improve the earning potential of these people. Well, we have not heard anything from the Centre till now on our request. And we ourselves at present are providing financial incentives to improve their conditions. In short, we will not hesitate to label our program of distribution of land as unique when one takes into consideration the population as well as the quantum of land.

Q: We have a few questions on the tribal issue. For example, we come to the language issue on which the state government has pondered a lot and then taken steps ahead.

A: Language, as you know, is the means to determine the identity of a human being. Neither clothes nor attire nor food habits are dependable symptoms but language is. The Left Front government has given recognition to the language of the tribals and at present the state language is Bengali which is followed by Kokborak, the language of the tribals. Children of the *adivasis* learn this language till class 8 and we are trying to move further upwards with this language. Even at the level of colleges and universities we have retained this language in the form of an optional subject.

The question of script needs to be resolved. Some would say that Kokborak should adopt the Bengali script while others including the missionaries favour the Roman script. We are not opposing the second view. We are saying that imposition of any language, especially at the administrative level, is not correct. We need to keep this issue open and leave the choice to people and their experiences. We favour use of the Bengali script because Bengalis and tribals are moving ahead together. They are together everywhere from the market to the school, especially in the market where out of hundred traders ninety nine are Bengali. For less difficult communicability and exchange Bengali is needed and therefore we have opted for the latter. There is no question of imposing anything on anyone. Ultimately, daily experience will lead to that script which is needed.

Q: In the past, insurgency movement was quiet strong in Tripura but the latest data indicate that the movement has been on the decline. This means political steps have been taken to quell identity-based insurgency. Could you tell us what steps are being taken to curb insurgency? Moreover, can the other states of India, especially those in the north east, learn from the Tripura experience?

A: I shall limit myself to my experience. As to whether others can learn from our experience, will be decided by others. We do not want to teach in an arrogant manner. What we should remember right at the beginning is that these insurgents are armed and to contain them the security forces have to be strong. They have to be given operational freedom as well. They should work without interference from other quarters. In our state we have told the police and central paramilitary forces 'You are at liberty to take measures and steps against the extremists but please do not be trigger happy'. In other words, those insurgents who are caught should not be killed. Rather attempts should be made to bring them to the mainstream. The other request that was made was, do not harass and bother the common innocent people while fighting and capturing the extremists. In fact,



people's support is needed to curb the movement and the people should not be alienated. The common people want peace, friendly relations and healthy normal lives. Hence they should not be disturbed. These were the directives given to the paramilitary forces.

The extremists also raised ideological and political questions to which we gave ideological and political replies. Those who demanded an independent Tripura were told Tripura can get all the benefits if it remains within India. We spread this message on a campaign mode and, to be frank, we received considerable support from the tribals. We asked, 'Well, you are demanding an independent Tripura but what is your socio-political program? We are providing education and adequate health services. We are trying to improve the infrastructure. What more can you do?' We led and spread this political-ideological campaign and approached the families whose sons and daughters had opted for terrorism. We told them to appeal to their children to reject terrorism. The insurgents, of course, said, 'We are tribals. No one bothers about our language and culture. We don't have food, homes, hospitals, road, water, electricity, schools. If the deprivation is so strong and many sided why should we stay with you, we shall go separate.' To this accusation our reply has been, 'We are doing our utmost to improve your living conditions. So why have you declared war against us? We want you to return to the mainstream and cooperate with us.' Thereafter we created a special package for the tribals. All these efforts and arguments have won the day and insurgency is no longer a big problem for us.

We do believe in Left politics, we do not view 'identity' from the perspective you are implying. We intend to regard this problem as one of class outlook. This, however, does not mean that we are ignoring or undermining 'identity'. In fact, we think that if we ignore the class outlook we may cause confusion or even step back to a dangerous position.

Q: Could you elaborate on the functioning of the autonomous district councils in the state? How have these been able to promote good relations between the tribals and non-tribals?

A: We, the Left, organised movements even during the Congress regime to form these autonomous district councils (ADC). The Congress rejected our standpoint and claimed that formation of such councils will divide the state into two units. If that would have been the case, why do we have the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution? After all, the Leftists have not created the Sixth Schedule. This was created primarily to grant autonomous administrative powers to specific ethnic groups. This, in fact, strengthens democracy and helps to remove errors. We do not intervene or interfere in the functioning of these autonomous councils. They prepare their own budgets and the money is given to them to improve the living conditions. In other words, they present the budget to us and we give them the money to build roads, to ensure water supply and electricity, to build hospitals and schools. We also want that the district councils implement this program. We are working together holding hands, we don't regard the ADCs as something separate, nor they do regard us as aliens.

Q: Is it correct to state that the Christian missionaries and Congress supported insurgency?

A: Well, that has been our experience. I am keeping silent on the Christian missionaries, but our main opposition the Congress has INPT (Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura) as its partner. The political stand of this INPT is no way different from the insurgents. They maintain relations as well and people know about this.



Q: Could you elaborate on the industrialisation program and land acquisition policy of your government?

A: At one point of time in the past we did not think at all about setting up of industries. We asked ourselves, who will come here to invest? Poverty and malnutrition even starvation was the prevailing condition. The state had nothing--neither roads nor electricity nor irrigation--it had nothing, so why should industry come here? The picture has changed and the first pre-condition of the industry, communication, is being improved. Second, we are now a power-surplus state. Thirdly, even though the quantum is not great, an internal market has developed, the standard of living has risen and the people have some purchasing power. The fourth point is we have political as well as democratic stability. All these have contributed to the creation of a favourable atmosphere. We ourselves are setting up industrial zones and we are beginning to receive responses from possible, would-be investors. In sum, when compared to a decade ago opportunities for industrialisation have increased manifold in this state.

We have told private capital that if they want to set up of industries, they will have to utilise the land-bank of industrial zones. We shall offer all assistance to them. If, on the other hand, they feel that they need more land they have to search for it and acquire the land by themselves. They have to negotiate the price of land with the land owners; we on our part will enlighten them on the land status.

Q: We shall now come back to the position of the Leftists in India. The Left have lost in Kerala and West Bengal and is beset with problems. At the same time, the parliamentary elections are approaching, what should be the policy and the role of the Left now and in the near future?

A: There is no denying the fact that we have received a big jolt. We fared badly in the election of 2009. What is most significant is that we have lost at the state level in both West Bengal and Kerala. The defeat of the Left Front in West Bengal, which had ruled uninterruptedly for 34 years, was the greatest disaster. We were really not prepared for such an outcome in West Bengal. But this is only a bad patch or phase; this does not imply that Left politics has come to an end. We need to note one different point in this context. When we have a representative in either the parliament or assembly, he/she voices the interests of 90% of the people. But his counterpart in bourgeois parties speaks for only ten. We are trying to resolve burning problems by coming to the forefront; our opponents on the other hands are acquiring more votes. It is true that we have lost but we are also trying to regroup ourselves. In West Bengal the Trinamul conducted terror campaign on the eve of panchayat elections and returned with success. No matter what the outcome is, victory or defeat, the Left are fighting.

When you cast your eyes on the multitude of problems affecting our lives, you come to realise that there is no other alternative than the Left. Shooting prices of commodities, decline of the rupee, inflation, suicide of farmers, rising unemployment, closing down of factories, a situation of economic depression, deep-seated corruption--this is the state in which we are living. This is the direct result of following the neo-economic liberal policy. We are demanding a change. It has to be mentioned that BJP is also clamouring for a change but their aspiration is skin deep. They are not fighting for a far-reaching, structural transformation. Vajpayee was replaced by Manmohan Singh but that did not bring any change. We are asking for different policies, for an alternative policy set up. We are asking for Left-democratic-secular politics which will also oppose the advance of the imperialists. We are fighting for the worker, the daily labourer, peasants, tribals, OBCs, minorities and those who are under the poverty line. We would like to reformulate the country's policies bearing their interests in view. We might need some time to come to this stage but we have no doubt in labelling this as the



right approach. Indeed, genuine Left politics is the only alternative in the present context. The Congress and BJP are riding on the same boat; as a result the actual alternative is proposed by us. I would rather not comment on the possible outcome of 2014 elections. It is difficult to predict especially in the current situation.

Q: One question is being raised repeatedly, what are the Left doing to block Narendra Modi?

A: We are not concerned about the individual Narendra Modi. Rather, we are working against his politics and policies. To be candid, there is no difference between the Congress and BJP as far as economic policies is concerned. For example, take the case of the Food Security Bill. Our standpoint was: please do not make any distinction between the APL and BPL. At the last moment we modified our stand and said, 'eliminate the tax payers.' They constitute 2-3% of the population. At present, after the implementation of the bill 33% of the poor section would be left out. The question is what about their security? Second, we wanted the quantum to be raised from 25 kg to 35 kg for every person. This was not accepted which means 10kg of rice or wheat or daal would have to be bought from the market. Thus we are leaving the poor at the hands of the market. The government is also saying that they will issue food cards if they cannot distribute actual rice and wheat. The government is saying that they would give rice and wheat at the price of INR 3 per kg when the market is charging INR 30. Tell me, how can food security be ensured in this situation? We, in fact, fought for 200 amendments which were not accepted. The Congress and BJP held hands together and guaranteed the smooth passage of the bill. The two parties again cooperated on the issues of Pension Bill and Land Bill. Our demand was very simple and emphatic--the ownership of the land should be given to the actual cultivators. If this was allowed along with the granting of some more actual benefits, the unemployment problem would not have remained the same, it would have come down considerably. The economy of the country would have gone to another height. Hence my remark would be, 'For us Modi, Rahul, Manmohan represent both sides of the single coin. In order to save the country we need to change the coin.'

Q: There is a lot of discussion on the possible nature of twenty first century socialism. What is your point of view on this? Do we need to go out of the sphere of Soviet experience and concentrate on other experiences?

A: We cannot divide socialism on the basis of centuries. Socialism does not belong to either twenty or twenty first centuries. It is based on some fundamental and essential elements. The main question is who will control the means of production. We Communists are saying that the state should be the controlling authority whereas the capitalists would favour market. Russia has now embraced capitalism. Communism in that country broke down because of several reasons and in most countries, which have walked out of Soviet Union, capitalism has been established. Nonetheless, Russia has taken a few radical correct steps on different issues. For example, we applaud Russia's intervention in the Syrian crisis.

The discussion on twenty first century socialism has emanated from the Latin American experiences. Several countries in Latin America believe in Leftist politics but their approaches are different. The Bolivarian approach, for instance, is different from the praxis implemented in other countries. At one point of time these countries--Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia--were under the thumb rule of the United States. That phase has passed and the USA is not at all happy with the recent development. I would definitely welcome the advance of socialism in these countries and, if needed, we can learn from their experiences. I would not label them fully socialist at this juncture. Nonetheless, they have adopted measures which have brought a new politico-economic environment which comes



close to socialism. We must remember in this context that socialism has adopted different forms. The Soviet experience was unique; the Chinese experience is different from the Soviet; again Vietnam has a model of its own which is different from Cuba. In other words, the nature and type of socialism has varied from one country to another. The Indian path to socialism will also be necessarily distinctive. We have to evaluate our experiences and practices, learn from other models and try to build up an Indian form of socialism.

Q: How do you regard the look east policy of Indian government?

A: Quite some years have passed since the pronouncement of this policy. It is still relevant and can turn into positive gain if the emphasis is given on infrastructure development in the northeast states. By this I imply the establishment of connectivity—road, rail, air, telecommunication—which could change the face of the northeast. In several meetings and discussions I have stressed this point of view in front of the central government. A big step forward can be taken in this regard if we build up a constructive and stable relationship with Bangladesh. According to pacts which should be signed between the two countries, India should provide water to Bangladesh and facilitate the exchange of *chitmahal*. Bangladesh should be an integral part of this connective map which will emerge in reality once the look east policy concentrates on adequate production and supply of power, forging rail links, building roads and sponsoring telecommunication. Once these are done private capital will come automatically to Tripura and other northeast states. There is no point in going to leaders of private capital asking for investment if these preconditions are not met. Even large public sector units can be set up when this crucial connectivity is affected.



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