

OVER TO NAYACHAR

It's big. It's atrocious. but the myth of 'mega chemical hub' as touted by Bengal's ruling Marxists, otherwise the notorious apologists of twenty-first century capitalism persists. As global capital is tearing apart even formal democracy in this part of the globe, they are now doubly encouraged to hasten the process of demise of whatever remains of sustainable subsistence economy in the countryside. They are not ashamed of betraying their traditional constituency—peasants and workers. They cannot do anything else as they have long changed their class position. They know well if populism is in short supply as it is the case now, they could always have their vote through high-handedness.

Having failed to evict thousands of poor and marginal peasants from their lands and homes in Nandigram in the face of 'unexpected' resistance by the hapless villagers, the marxist advocates of neo-liberalism are planning to shift the much condemned chemical industrial estate or what, is enphemi-sitically called 'Chemical Hub' to Nayachar—a riverline island (*char*) not far away from Bay of Bengal and very close to Haldia river port. It is one more blunder in their bag of woes. Human factor apart, they do not even bother about science. Being the champions of 'scientific socialism' even of their kind, they are most unscientific in their attitudes towards society and nature. They continue to harbour the belief that 'environment movement' is a drawing room culture of the rich. So environmental degradation can be ignored even if it destroys livelihoods of thousands of people.

They talk of industry without taking into account pollution and mandatory safeguards that are needed to control industrial pollution nowadays. They do not know what is called green technology because they are 'red'.

Besides a petro-chemical complex and an oil refinery Haldia houses a heavy chemicals unit of Japanese multinational—Mitsubishi. And the people living in villages around the Japanese plant witness day in and day out what chemical pollution means. Once arable and fertile lands have become virtually barren, increasingly becoming unsuitable to support cultivation.

The river Hooghly is dying—it is already dead in the upper stream, thanks to Farakka Barrage. And even Haldia Port, not to speak of Calcutta Port is losing its relevance. Now the lover repairian economy of the Hooghly basin, involving thousands of artisans, fisherfolks, poor and marginal peasants, is in jeopardy, if the hub (i.e SEZ) project at Nayachar takes off, albeit even preliminary techno-economic survey goes against the location as the river island is not yet connected with power grid.

Surprisingly, this time the so-called junior partners of CPM-led left front did not raise their murmur against the Nayachar plan though they somehow

identified their rebellious role through their feeble voice of dissent in case of Nandigram. They are politically and organisationally so bankrupt that they have no option but to toe the CPM-line in the end. One reason they are not opposing the Nayachar site—despite too many geological and technical odds, is it won't have much impact on their vote politics.

The river island in dispute is just 60 years old. Geologically it is not yet a stable entity. Whether this recent alluvial soil can support heavy construction, not to speak of earthquake, tidal floods, tsunami etc. is open to question. Today it is Nayachar, tomorrow might be another riverline island to be sacrificed to woo multinationals, in the vanishing mangroves of Subderbans.

As for environmental issue, even the far left has no clear-cut policy. They just react to spontaneity while leaving this ever expanding political space to NGOs. As the West is in a hurry of shifting hazardous industrial units and exporting wastes, including nuclear wastes, to third world countries, India seems to be the most favoured destination, after Africa, at the moment. Not for nothing they highlight in so many colourful words India's economic miracle in the western media. Once they did it for 'Asian Tigers' till the bubble burst. And in India, West Bengal, otherwise most backward in terms of all indices, is being targeted by investors, foreign and domestic, because of surfeit of marxist hospitality and benevolence even if that means, simply wiping out of the poor. □□□