

LONG ODDS

Bloody Rajarhat—The Untold Story

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In the CPI(M) party today there is a fight between two major factions over the issue of why the Rajarhat model was not applied in Singur. If Singur is the model of Nirupam Sen and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, then Rajarhat is the brainchild of Jyoti Basu and Gautam Deb. Rajarhat New Town is touted as proof of the concept of peaceful development and the State Housing Minister has been going around saying that the government didn't have to face any opposition regarding land acquisition there. That it has been carried out without any bloodshed whatsoever.

Most people in Rajarhat used to be small farmers and agricultural labourers, and had been involved in agricultural activities for generations. They were not well versed in any other alternative livelihoods. Therefore it is only natural to expect bitter resistance on their part against the land acquisition carried out by the government, a fight that would get more and more desperate. But according to official dogma nothing of that sort happened in Rajarhat.

Rajarhat is one of the most fertile areas of West Bengal and perhaps India. Leaving aside some region used for habitation, most, if not all, of the land had been producing three to four crops a year. This land was irrigated by the Keshtopur, Bagjola and three other canals adjacent to them.

People farming this land used to get more than adequate water from these canals and did not require the aid of government irrigation canals. Nor did they have to bother overly about fertilizing their land and thus could produce their crops with relative ease. In these lands they used to grow Aman, Aush, different kinds of Ravi and Khariff crops. Besides these, various kinds of seasonal crops along with many types of vegetables, fruits and flowers too were grown by the farmers here. So profuse was their production that even after satisfying the demands of the local markets they could satisfy 20 to 25% of the demands of Kolkata and its suburbs. Apart from this, during the monsoon months the poor of this region used to get their supply of fish from the local bherries (fishing embankments) and the many canals that used to overflow their banks during the rains.

The farmers from this area also had a rather valuable contribution to meeting Kolkata's demand for milk, which they supplied from their herds of cows and buffaloes. These animals were nurtured on the green grass on the banks of the many canals and grassy fields adjacent to the bherries. Farmers raised their cows almost free of cost, feasting them on nature's bounties.

The majority of the population was Hindus and Muslims and a very small fraction belonged to the Christian faith. They had been peacefully coexisting for many decades, taking part in each other's religious and cultural festivities quite spontaneously. Communal unrests in different parts of India and West Bengal never had much of an effect in the communal amity between the people here.

Among the acquired sections of land in Rajarhat, Mahishgoth, Thakdhari and Mahishbathan under the present day Salt Lake have valuable contributions to history, especially during the pre-independence Salt Satyagraha movement, the Non-Cooperation movement and the Quit India movement. People from this area played an important role under the leadership of the local zamindar

Lakshmikanta Pramanik against the imperialist British. Many were thrown in British jails and many others lost their lives to police bullets. At the same time, in spite of gathering together with a few Jotdars and landlords against the British rule, the farmers and land labourers had always fought the exploitations, deceptions and tyranny of those vested interests.

In the post-independence era, even as the landlord system was being dismantled, the erstwhile landlords and other powerful interests used their powers to exploit the land reform laws to their benefit, coercing illiterate farmers and recording very large amounts of land in their favour. They also cornered the land pawned out by the illiterate poor farmers and dispossessed them of their rightful ownerships.

During the tenure of S S Roy as the chief minister of West Bengal the local landed gentry of Rajarhat prospered even more than they had during Dr B C Roy's era. With the support of the police and the administration at all levels they took over a large amount of land from the poor farmers.

In 1967, during the time when the CPM-led United Front came to power, small farmers, agricultural labourers and the workers in the fish embankments began organizing under the communist party flag in their struggle to protect their land and to demand better pay and related matters. Apart from a couple of embankments now belonging to the present day Bhangor of South 24 Parganas, the rest were all in the Mahishbathan region of the undivided Rajarhat. Prominent among these fish embankments were Boro Paresh, Choto Paresh, Bather Bherri, Diller Bherri, Sardar Bherri, Patrabaad 1,2,3, Nalban, Munshir Bherri, Chinta Singh, Narkeltolar Bherri, Mollahr Bherri, Bonghery, Doktor Bherri etc. Many people from Thakdhari, Mahishgoth, Mahish-bathan, Krishnapur, Nayapatti, Polenait, Khashmahal used to work there.

The embankment workers formed a bherri labourers' organization to direct their struggle against the owners. The most prominent leader among these pioneers of labour movement in this area was the influential leftist and CPI(M) leader Rajani Mandal. This struggle was further organized and given a more militant shape by another very popular leader from the same party, Dulal Chowdhury.

In 1977 when the Left Front came to power the CPIM-supported farmers association was set up in the No. 2 Mahishbathan area and the struggle against the landowners intensified under the able leadership of its first secretary Sudhir Pramanik. Meanwhile among the poor and working class people in those areas the CPIM had a positive influence leading to strengthening of the organization. While before 1978 there was only a single party member in Thakdhari in that year an woman along with eight others obtained the party membership there.

The Krishak Samiti, Bherri Mazdoor Sangha and the poor under the leadership of the CPIM ratcheted up their fight against the landholders of the region and retrieved the occupied surplus land from them and had it distributed among the poor landless. Of these, 550 bighas were taken from the Mollahr bherri and the land divided among the 500 landless people. This was followed by similar actions in Chinta Singh and Patrabaad bherries where each of the landless families got from one and half to two bighas of land.

The most prominent role in this struggle was played by Dulal Chowdhury who by then had been elevated from being a party member of the Rajarhat local committee to a member of local committee itself. Dulal Chowdhury

earned the love and respect of the local people as he was always by the side of the struggling masses and in spite of not being a local was regarded as one of their own by the populace of Rajarhat. However a section of the CPIM leadership allegedly in league with vested interests didn't appreciate the struggle of the poor masses against the landholders and landlords of Rajarhat. They set upon subverting the popular movements under various pretexts. To this end, in spite of Dulal Chowdhury leading the struggle of peasants and the bherri labourers, two other members of the local committee, were reportedly entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the bherries. They were allegedly bought out by the bherri owners and subsequently expelled from the area by the common people when they tried to stop the workers' fight against the owners.

1988 TO 1995

After Dulal Chowdhury's departure from the party towards the end of the 88-89 most of the bherries came under the direct control of the CPI(M) and the gangs of goons supported by the party. They enticed the bherri labourers with the vision of joint ownership and got them on board to oust the bherri owners.

These bherries are : Diller bherri land area : 150 Bigha (approx.), Narkeldangar bherri : 600 Bigha, Mollahr bherri with a present land area of 200 Bigha approx. and the labourers' "khol" area of the Munshir bherri amounting to about 200 Bighas.

The bherri workers each paid a sum of Rs 3000 with the expectation of buying an ownership stake in them. Since getting the ownership even as they doubled their efforts towards pisciculture the fact remains that they are being deceived by the CPI(M) party and its supported gangs year in year out. They do not get any share of the profits made in those bherries. While the net income from those bherries are to the tune of a few crores of rupees, almost all of it is creamed off reportedly by the party's district and state committee members and affiliated gangs.

The workers lived in mortal fear of this very powerful nexus and dared not raise their voices against this injustice. Those who had dared to protest were either beaten up and driven away or simply murdered. In this way in all these bherries the workers were rendered powerless and the control was transferred to the vested interests. Around this time, in 1989, Samar Dey (Babu), a CPI(M) Rajarhat No. 1 local committee member and extortionist who terrorized the Keshtopur market area was lynched by over a thousand people, men and women in broad daylight.

LANDGRAB AND TERROR

To set up the Rajarhat township the WB State government used the British colonial Land Acquisition Act (1894) to acquire the 21 Mouzas of land. The Land and Land Revenue Ministry issued in 1995 a notice and by the order of the governor the undersecretary West Bengal government all the land and waterbodies of those 21 Mouzas were acquired. Later on a few more Mouzas were acquired e.g. Kalikapur, Patharghata, Muhammadpur, Natun pukur, Chabna and Hudarait. 7000 hectares of land from 21 Mouzas came under acquisition and the process was started in 1999 under the 12/2 section of 1 of the Act. The total number of affected families added upto nearly 2,50,000.

According to the documents of the land revenue department the number of recorded landowners was over 30,000 while 5,000 were recorded Bargadars. The number of unrecorded Bargadars was double of that. Long before the government notification and land acquisition process had started the land mafia started buying up the land from the poor farmers.

LAND AGENTS AND THE CPIM

Around 1984-'85 the state's biggest land agent Kamal Gandhi and his relatives and friends from his business community started buying up bigha after bigha of lands paying a higher price than the then market price for the land. For instance they were paying upto 30,000 to 40,000 for farmland which was then priced at 15,000 to 20,000. In this way Kamal Gandhi and his associates became direct or indirect owners of a large section of land in Rajarhaat.

A substantial portion of this land likewise came allegedly under the ownership of the former CPI(M) member of the upper house of the parliament Sarala Maheswari, a relative of Kamal Gandhi. Owing to the fact that Kamal Gandhi was rather close to the CPI(M) leadership and the party around 1984 he could easily get access to the various plans relating to the Rajarahaat township and related documents. Accordingly he could proceed with a definite plan of land procurement and in this process he was aided and abetted by the state CPI(M) leadership, the related district, zonal and local committees and the leaders, the CPI(M) supported anti-social elements and the Police.

The thugs paid by Kamal Gandhi began coercing the people of Thakdhari and Mahishgoth who were unwilling to sell their land and a few murders too were committed around this time. Kamal Gandhi with the help of CPI(M) and its thugs used to isolate and encircle the unwilling farmers and blockade and threaten them, forcing them to finally come to a settlement by selling off their land to him.

In 1993 Panchayat elections, two years before the issue of notification for land acquisition in Rajarhat, CPI(M) nominated the notorious antisocial from the No. 2 Thakdhari in Mahishbathan, Ruidas Mandal alias Ruhis a.k.a Lewis as its candidate from booth number 139. Lewis, who used to get political shelter from the Congress, was well known for the reign of terror he had unleashed by carrying out acts of murder, robbery and various other criminal activities. In the event of his winning the Panchayat elections it would have been most convenient to use his clout to acquire the land more easily –hence the nomination. Accordingly the CPI(M) Rajarhat leadership went all out to secure a victory for Lewis and in the process made a farce of the electoral process, ensuring his victory by a single vote through a recount even after he had lost the ballot by 2 votes in the first count.

The installation of Lewis as a Panchayat member was a dark day in the lives of common people of the area. The CPI(M) party leadership went on a landgrabbing spree with the active collusion of the local Police and administration. Poor people fearful for their lives were forced to sign off their land at gunpoint, which was either taken over by the local party functionaries or transferred to men close to the party. Names of many bona-fide Bargadars were struck off the documents and names of those close to the leadership were substituted instead. In this particular activity they had the active support of the local Panchayat as well as the Land and Land Revenues Department.

Owing to this open flouting of the law of the land by the CPI(M) and its antisocial brigade the whole area was under the grip of fear and terror. One by one antisocials from the adjoining areas joined in the landgrab. The antisocials from the infamous Shibakaali temple area of Keshtopur followed suit by looting land brandishing firearms. At the same time hired antisocials from Howrah, Asansol, North and South 24 Parganas were being mustered to threaten the common man forcing them to sign off the power-of-attorney to the local thug or the CPI(M) party functionary.

Those who were unwilling to give up their land in spite of the terror visited upon them were subject to unmentionable strongarm tactics. Many left hearth and home because of beatings and harassment. Those who reported to the Police were murdered. Those who left their home had their houses wrecked and their land dug up so that they would not be able to live even if they came back. Sometimes even family feuds were exploited to grab land and sometimes the party members and supporters were spared of their deprivations.

To stifle the voices of protest right at the very beginning certain CPI(M) activists who were all along in the forefront of the common people's struggle against vested interests were subject to well orchestrated attacks and a few of them were even murdered so that the rest were forced to leave the area. So much so, that finally CPI(M)'s local Thakdhari section was decimated save for one member, Karim Bux Mollah. Along with this the various civic organizations were also folded up. This was not restricted to this particular area alone, and in fact all over the Rajarhat region a well planned campaign was carried out to uproot and expel all the principled and honest party members from all the party branches and civic organizations. In the process these organizations and even the local clubs came under the control of antisocial forces.

The few courageous men who dared to stand up to this dirty campaign were brutally murdered, most of them in secrecy but a few in broad daylight, out in the open. As the day of land acquisition approached the terror and intimidation worsened rapidly and in this manner before and after the land acquisition over 50 farmers were murdered in the Mahishgoth and Thakdhari region alone. Slowly but surely CPI(M) thugs thus took control of Rajarhat by means of a sustained campaign of terror and violence.

RAJARHAT KRISHI ROKSHA COMMITTEE

The land acquisition process officially started in Rajarhat in the months of April-May of 1999. The landowners and the Bargadars were sent notices to that effect. In the beginning of this process all the farmers of Mahishgoth and Thakdhari declined to accept the notice. Primarily because the compensation package decided upon for each Katha was Rs 5000 to 6000 as compared to the officially government registered price from Rs 40000 to 50000. More importantly for the major section of people here, farming was their assured source of income for the upkeep of their family and they knew no other way of earning their livelihood.

Farmers unwilling to accept the notice was subjected to tremendous intimidation and brutality. CPI(M) goons were going around Rajarhat forcing people to accept the notice at gunpoint and this resulted in the farmers unifying to form Rajarhat Krishi Roksha Committee (Save Rajarhat Farmers Committee) to resist.

This organization was not under the control of any political party even though at times some of the members approached the Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Bannerjee asking her about her apparent indifference to this struggle of the common people. They were then given to understand that she could take up their cause only if the organization agreed to identify itself with her party, something the farmers could not accept, with the result that they had to continue their fight without any political backing whatsoever.

However it became quite apparent later on the reason why it was not possible for the TMC to extend support to the farmers' organization. Many in the TMC leadership went on to be involved in the landgrab exercise and became complicit in the whole process. Around this time another organization came up in the Thakdhari and Mahishgoth region which was constituted of the people rendered jobless by the land acquisition process and they had a membership of over two hundred and fifty.

The CPI(M) was taken aback by the stiff resistance offered by these two organizations and the antisocial elements under its political shelter retreated for the time being. Meanwhile a large section of common people had been reacting adversely to the blatant strongarm tactics of CPI(M) and in a Rajarhat zonal committee meeting a decision was taken to oppose any further land acquisition in the Thakdhari and Mahishgoth area.

However there is no reason to conclude that the leadership all of a sudden became aware of the grave injustice done to the farmers. Rather it was a well calculated ploy to take some time out to muster their strengths and to take stock. So sometime after that once again the CPIM reaffirmed their wholehearted support for the land acquisition process. They then tried to lure the farmers through various tempting offers like promises to offer plots of land at cheap prices in the township along with priority for ownership of shops in the township.

Also various lies were peddled regarding possible employment in various jobs related to the Megacity projects. However all these enticements failed to divert the farmers from their path of agitation. So much so that the urban development minister and CPI(M) state secretariat member Gautam Deb and the Rajarhat MLA Rabin Mandal failed to sway the farmers even after holding more than one public meeting in Rajarhat.

The CPI(M) then resumed its dirty tricks and the district party leadership incited those refugees from East Pakistan who had settled in 1964 over a large area in colonies adjoining the Bagjola canal . The leadership deliberately precipitated a clash with the farmers over the occupation of some farm land in the Sulunguri Mouza and the ensuing violence led to twenty one people losing their lives, most of them being farmers and land labourers. This is known as the infamous Sulunguri episode. One Nani Kar, a CPI(M) North 24 Parga-nas party member, was incriminated in various lawsuits and had to spend sometime behind bars. To this day the furious farmers and labourers have not forgiven the CPI(M) for its treachery and to a large section of this people CPI(M) has become an object of hate.

Meanwhile to realize their plans the CPI(M) started forming Neighbourhood Committee and the Rajarhat MLA Rabin Mandal was selected as its chairman. To speed up the land acquisition process the CPI(M) initiated more and more dirty tactics. The leaders of the two farmers' organizations contacted by messengers or police were asked to meet Rabin Mandal or Gautam Deb in

person. In those meetings the then OC of the Rajarhat police station too used to be present as were the top antisocials of the region. The leaders were cajoled and coerced repeatedly by the CPI(M) to change their stands without any success.

Having come a cropper in their attempts to force the farmers' organizations to toe their line the CPI(M) leadership subsequently changed their methods. They started to approach the youth of the adjoining areas and began explaining to them the various merits of land acquisition and the positive impact all the new development would have on the social and economic level of Rajarhaat.

Supporting the land acquisition Gautam Deb went so far as to claim at a conference of party workers and youth rally that "along with the economic and social development of this region the neighbouring areas too would be benefited. In view of the high number of the unemployed youth we are duty bound to improve their lot. The immense economic prospects opened up by the township would enable the youth to join in this endeavour and they would be able to earn at least Rs 5000 to 6000 on a monthly basis and that too on a long term basis. However the whole process has been slowed down due to the unwillingness of the farmers to give the required land."

In this manner the CPI(M) tried to play the middle class youth of the adjoining areas against the farmers.

In the meantime when the cheque distribution for the compensation package began the majority of the farming community refused to accept them. However the CPI(M) went on spreading the propaganda that huge numbers of people had been accepting the cheques. In fact, the cheque distribution process was fraught with lack of transparency. Many persons who never had a single square inch of land in those areas but were close to CPI(M) party used their party connection and the willing connivance of a section of government officials to siphon off several lakhs of rupees overnight. In this way many fake owners and well-to-do Bargadars profited solely because of being in the good books of CPI(M).

In 2000 a case was filed on behalf of the Rajarhat Krishijomi Raksha Committee challenging the land acquisition process and a farmers' organization approached the court regarding the whole compensation process. The CPI(M) thugs who previously went around door to door forcing the acceptance of the land acquisition notice now took those notices back by threatening the farmers.

In Thakdhari, Mahishgoth and adjacent areas wherever the CPI(M) workers were close to the farmers and lent them support in their struggle against the land acquisition the party took care to identify and banish those party members from the area. In a political space bereft of a meaningful opposition but full of terror and repression the CPI(M) took away the right of people to hear and be heard. It went so far as to forbid strictly any attempts to contact the party leadership regarding matters related to the land acquisition. Anybody violating this ban was punished severely and even party members and leaders were not spared.

The land acquisition process was initiated in Thakdhari and Mahish-goth area. While a section of farmers took the compensation package at Rs 5000 to 6000 per Katha instead of risking the wrath of CPI(M) and ending up as paupers, the majority of the farmers raised their voices against losing their

birthrights and assured source of livelihoods. The result was that the farmers were completely crushed by the steamroller of terror let loose by the CPI(M).

The CPI(M) supported antisocial elements of the Shivakali area terrorized the people of the Chandiberia Mouza close to Thakdhari and Mahishogth and started occupying the land. Once the takeover was completed they started selling off the land. They forcibly took over a lot of land belonging to the Ryotdars and the registered Bargadars of the area. Finally when the farmland belonging to the former vice chairman of the Mahishbathan No.1 Gram Panchayat (which at present constitutes a part of the Rajarhat Gopalpur municipality) and CPI(M) No. 1 Rajarhat local committee member Bibek Nashkar along with the land inherited by the secretary of the Chandiberia branch of the CPI(M) Sreekanta Mandal were taken over by the CPI(M) goons, people panicked and gave their assent to land acquisition.

In those regions new standards of terror and mayhem were set by gangs of 250 to 300 CPI(M) thugs in red bandanas (they were initially employed to provide security to the section of young men and women arriving in droves from the city and its suburbs to romp in the waters of the then newly set up Aquatica at Thakdhari) and a huge police presence too was called up by the government and the CPI(M) so that they didn't face much of a problem in bringing the other Mouzas in line. Ordinary people were too intimidated by the red terror to dare to protest. The few sporadic instances of opposition that took place in Ghuni, Jatragachi and Sulunguri were ruthlessly suppressed.

Those youths at the forefront of these protests were set upon jointly by the CPI(M) thugs and the government police, and what followed was reminiscent of the treatment meted out to the Naxals in the seventies. The youths were bound up feet and hands and then beaten up, burnt with cigarettes and bidis and had police batons inserted up their rectums. They were turned raving mad and let out in the open in public spaces so as to serve as a warning to the populace at large.

The CPI(M) betrayed the people from the Hatiwara Mouza, as it agreed as a token of its solidarity with the people's movement against the land acquisition by agreeing to exempt a small part of the land. CPI(M) promised to allow acquisition of only that area which was outside of the boundary determined previously. However after a few days the party district and zonal committee let it be known that it was beyond their capacity to do anything about it. After that strict orders were issued by the party to its members and functionaries not to show any interest in this regard. People who disobeyed were dealt with severely, Rakhal Mandal a member of the Mahishgoth branch of the party was expelled as his elder brother had filed a case against the land acquisition process in the High court.

All this while the land acquisition process steadily went on gathering momentum riding roughshod over all the agitation and protests of the farmers and the local people. One after the other the Mouzas were taken over and as usual along with the police force the thugs brigade of the CPI(M) too were employed to this end. In many places when the farmers and the local residents resisted the land acquisition they clashed with the police and the CPI(M) goons. Women joined in the protests, lying down on their beloved land in desperate attempts to hold on to it. Of course the police and the goons didn't take too kindly to this and they laid into them with merciless brutality. To

silence the voices of protest people in villages were targeted and the CPI(M) goons and the police connived to kill many a villager.

Many of those killed had their bodies hung up from trees and were passed off as suicides by the police while the bodies of many others were transported away and dumped in trucks that were moving in and out of the township daily, some were simply buried in the ground. They were shown as missing in police records. Even by the most conservative of estimates at least over fifty people thus fell victims to state and social fascism. This process of rampant murder and torture continued till all the voices of dissent were silenced for good.

Even after being subject to such horrific brutality the agitating farmers still continued their struggle to save their land. When the CPI(M) goons got contracts to fill up the low lying areas of Rajarhat and tried to dig up earth from the land belonging to the Mollahr bheri and its adjoining area the farmers who were cultivating those lands under patta protested. They unified under Kamal Patra, a farmer leader who left the CPI(M) and resisted the goons. In a December evening Kamal Patra was brutally murdered and he was hung up from a tree like others before him, while his brother and his son have been missing since then. As usual the police passed it off as a suicide.

The loss of someone as popular as Kamal Patra finally broke the back of the farmers' movement. They could not protest against this terrible injustice ever again. Many of them left the area one by one, while a handful did return most of them can not be traced any more.

TRINAMUL CONGRESS

The sad fact is that nobody stood by these helpless people. Bourgeois political parties had already turned their back towards them. If the news media and the intelligentsia who are so vocal against the land grabs in Singur-Nandigram of the Left Front government enamoured with SEZ and its inhuman repression and mass murder of common people had shown even a fraction of that solidarity for the people of Rajarhat perhaps so many people would not have lost their lives.

While the Congress never showed any interest, the way TMC betrayed the farmers is unpardonable. When the Rajarhat farmers' organization filed a case in the Kolkata high court the then TMC leadership contacted the two organizations and argued that since they had already filed a case along similar lines having both the cases run at the same time might weaken them both. Further they argued that since unlike the TMC the farmers' organizations were lacking in financial strength perhaps it would be better for all concerned if the farmers' organizations withdrew their case. The farmers were swayed by the plausibility of the argument and in good faith withdrew their case. Soon after, the TMC too withdrew their case against the government leaving the farmers high and dry.

TMC did this in a calculated manner as they wanted to gain out of all this. By helping the CPI(M) in this manner they were assured of CPI(M) support in the region and allied with Congress and CPI(M) in their anti-people activities. The TMC leaders and activists collaborated with the CPI(M) workers as trade partners and became engaged in supplying, construction business, contracting work related to building, promotership of multistoried buildings in the municipal areas and land agentship in the Rajarhat township and neighbouring Gopalpur.

All over Rajarhat the land use laws as well as the municipal laws are being flouted with impunity as ponds, other waterbodies and marshland are being rapidly filled up and multistoried buildings are being erected at a breakneck pace. Many a local leader of the CPI(M) are investing money directly or otherwise in such businesses run by the TMC and Congress workers and leaders. Crores of rupees are being siphoned off by cocking a snook at the municipal laws by pocketing the various subsidies provided for housebuilding and by illegally extracting money from the public in the name of building roads. Valuable trees planted by the Panchayat are being cut off and the life of common people are being ruined in many other such destructive ways.

In all these activities the political parties in opposition have joined hands with the CPI(M) in a free for all loot of public property. It's a sad state of affairs indeed where Rajarhat has been turned into a meeting ground where opportunists of all political persuasions are equally welcome!

It must be pointed out that worried about the dangers of having the natural drainage system of Kolkata and its adjoining areas irrevocably damaged and the ecological balance being destroyed by the steady acquisition of all the arable land and waterbodies of Rajarhat the environmentalists of the state filed a case with the green bench of Kolkata high court. On 16th June 1999 to commemorate "save the wetland day" the farmers' organizations along with the environmentalists assembled in front of the Mastar'da memorial organization in Keshtopur and held day-long rallies and street meetings at many places of Rajarhat where the acquisition process was in effect and criticized the land acquisition process of the government.

In one such rally on behalf of the local farmers' organization the farmer leader Gaur Mandal spoke critically of the government and the local CPIM leadership and this was broadcast on the television. As a result in his absence armed CPI(M) goons turned up at his Mahishgoth residence and left after firing bullets indiscriminately and hurling bombs. This led to the death of his aged father by cardiac arrest.

The solidarity displayed by the environmentalists was the only instance, albeit temporary, where an organization supported the Rajarhat farmers' agitation. For some unknown reason however the movement by the environmentalists died down for good.

It should be pointed out that in this region CPI(M) had no effective political opposition from any quarters. In spite of making a show of fighting the CPI(M) during the elections the Congress, TMC, BJP and their party workers were never too bothered to attempt the removal of the CPI(M) from power. In fact it appears that they have been helping the CPI(M) as if they had an unwritten understanding with them. □□□

[Source:<http://sanhati.com/excerpted/945/>]