

NEWS WRAP

AGD

CPI(M) party workers had massacred eleven landless labourers at Nanur in Birbhum district (West Bengal) in 2000. The Marxist party had kept total Bengal under party control, through a vanguard of motor cycle riding armed cadres. These armed political activists are now shifting allegiance to the next emerging political force, the Trinamool Congress. Former CPI(M) MLA, Ananda Das was killed in broad daylight by a group of armed people in Nanur which has become a new battlefield, in the ongoing turf war between the ruling CPI(M), and its principal political rival, the Trinamool Congress. The attack was a sequel to one on a local TC leader, Phulu Sheikh, who was shot by a group of armed men, allegedly belonging to the CPI(M), some days earlier. The ruling CPI(M) is steadily losing its grip over rural society in East Midnapore, West Midnapore, Birbhum and Murshidabad, after successive electoral reverses. As the TC establishes its authority in rural Bengal, a pattern emerges in the series of violence and political killings occurring in rural South Bengal.

Nanur in Birbhum and Mangalkot in Burdwan, two contiguous blocks divided only by a river, has fast turned into battlefields. The terrorised local CPI(M) supporters and activists of the left front partner, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) have begun fleeing the area, and have taken shelter in nearby Kirnahar and Bolpur towns. The local branch of the forty member Indian Medical Association have decided that medical practitioners in Kirnahar will stop visiting any patient's houses after 8 pm. The elected panchayet representatives, belonging to the left front in Nanur, are unable to visit their respective offices and villages, owing to lack of security. Teachers, local traders and contractors are forced to pay extortion money, for permitting to proceed to their place of work. Extortion is rampant and armed units of the Trinamool Congress are accepting money. There are several villages where arms and ammunition depots have been built up.

Between 1977 to 1987, that is the first decade of Left Front's land reforms, the share croppers were given cash grants and rural banks released agricultural credit. Cash strapped West Bengal state government failed to sustain the financial support to share croppers, and the banks found such programmes unsustainable. The deprived sharecroppers renewed fresh understanding with the landlords. The landlords poured money into the land owned by them, in return obtained two-thirds share of the crop. Around 15% of the landless peasants, who have earlier received land under 'Operation Barga' land distribution, began losing land to the relatively well off farmers, owing to absence of support from banks and the state government. Steadily the landed gentry left the villages for district towns. The landowning class and the newly empowered poor peasant opted for the Forward Bloc or Revolutionary Socialist Party, other than CPI(M). The aim of capturing the land of the landowner no longer relevant, the political parties are now obsessed with the panchayat system.

TRANS-BALKAN PIPELINE

The proposed 285 km pipeline, between Burgas on the southern Black Sea coast and Alexandroupolis on the northern Aegean coast was intended to help reduce tanker traffic

on the crowded Bosphorous waterway. Long-standing opposition by environmentalist groups and the BP spill off the east coast of USA, highlighted the coast's vulnerability to accidents. This resulted in the pipeline a three-way partnership between Bulgaria-Russia-Greece, not to get started. Now after an environmental impact study for the project, and following BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Bulgaria "is no longer interested" in a project to build an oil pipeline from the Black Sea to the Aegean. Earlier there was a dogged reluctance of the Russian state-owned oil companies, to specify the amount of oil, that would be transported through the pipeline. Bulgaria is seeking substantive cuts in natural gas prices, charged by Russia, Bulgaria's sole supplier. On the basis of a negative environmental assessment, Bulgaria is likely to avoid paying a penalty under the terms of the Trans-Balkan partnership, for pulling out.

CHINA-TAIWAN TRADE DEAL

Taiwan's biggest trading partner is China, in spite of China considering Taiwan as one of its provinces. On 29 June 2010, China and the self-ruled island Taiwan, signed a major trade deal. The fresh Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) lowers tariffs on hundreds of products, and demolishes barriers to service sectors like banking. Thousands of pro-independence Taiwanese demonstrated against the trade agreement. The ECFA trade deal will help Taiwan economically and politically, though it does not guarantee any lasting peace nor "reunification" of Taiwan with mainland China.

ECFA opens up the Chinese market further. Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) between China and the ten-member Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) recently came into effect, excluding Taiwan. Regional competitors have been entangling the China economy, where Taiwan continues as the world's 17th biggest exporter. The Agreement preserves Taiwan's peculiar status of de facto independence. Taiwan's Kuomintang has reached agreements allowing scheduled flights across the strait, and Chinese tourists to visit Taiwan. Taiwan's GDP is expected to grow by more than 6% in 2010, after shrinking by nearly 2% in 2009. The recovery has been powered by merchandise exports from Taiwan to China, which account for almost 30% of Taiwan's total. Several large Taiwanese companies have big mainland China operations. Institutions, conducting corporate affairs and investment banking, in China, have little financial incentives to enter Taiwan's market, which are already saturated. □□□