

Bangladesh's Marxist-Leninists — I

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DACCA in January 1982 — ten years after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent republic. But for the sporadic display of posters on walls announcing some meeting to observe death anniversaries of martyrs, a visitor to Dacca might be unaware of the massive liquidation of Leftist revolutionaries that had taken place in the country during the last one decade. Almost little, or nothing is known to the outside world about the Marxist-Leninists of Bangladesh. Judging by available published history, they seem to have played no decisive role at all in the tumultuous course of events that had shaken Bangladesh since its birth. Yet, how can one explain their heavy toll — much higher than the casualties suffered by the Right-wing Jammāt-e-Islami and Muslim League during Mujib's regime, or by the Awami League and Jatiya Samajtāntarik Dal (JSD) at the hands of Ziaur Rahman's army? According to Dacca's conservative daily *Ittefaq* which is preparing a sort of inventory of the victims of 'politics of murder' in Bangladesh, the Awami League has lost from 1972 till today about 4,500, the JSD about 6,000 and the Jamaat and the Muslim League (during 1971-72) about 8,000 followers. On the other hand, of the different Marxist-Leninist groups only two major factions — the Sarbahara Party and the Samyabadi Dal — alone had sacrificed about 10,000 lives till 1975. Thousands of their members and sympathisers are still behind bars. They are remembered only when, unable to stand the inhuman conditions in jails, they protest, are killed by the police and the news is somehow smuggled out. On October 29, 1980 in Khulna jail, about 215 miles south of Dacca, nearly 100 political and ordinary prisoners were killed — an incident which sparked off a spontaneous general strike in the country. Killing of political activists without any trial whatsoever has become a common practice in Bangladesh. On December 11, 1973, Erad Ali, Mantu Mashtar, Rashid and 41 more members of the Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist) were arrested by the police in Tanore of the Rajshahi district — 160 miles north-west of Dacca — and gunned down on the spot. On January 1, 1975, Siraj Sikdar, leader of the Sarbahara

Party, was arrested in Hali in Chittagong in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, taken to Dacca to be presented to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (since Sikdar's name was on the top of the list of wanted Communist revolutionaries), transferred the next day to the Rakkhi Bahini camp at Savar near Dacca, and the same night was shot dead near the Jehangirnagar University there. These dates are scalded in the memory of the Bangladeshi revolutionaries. Every year they observe martyrs' days on these dates — either through public meetings when possible, or in small secret gatherings in villages. In Dacca, some sympathisers have set up an organisation called 'Shaheed Biplabi O Deshapremik Smriti Samsad' (Association in Memory of Revolutionary Martyrs and Patriots) dedicated to the memory of all Leftist revolutionaries — irrespective of their political hue (ranging from Abu Taher of JSD to Siraj Sikdar of the Sarbahara Party) — who had given their lives in fighting the Awami League government as well as Ziaur Rahman's regime. On January 2 this year, the Samsad held a public meeting in Dacca to observe the death anniversary of Siraj Sikdar, which was attended by followers of different Marxist-Leninist groups and non-party progressive intellectuals.

LOOKING BACK

The different Marxist-Leninist groups in Bangladesh right now are "looking back" — taking stock of the results, if any, gained at the cost of the 25,000 martyrs. In the process they are reassessing the entire past of the Communist movement in Bangladesh, and before that in East Pakistan. The roots of the failure are embedded in the past, although one cannot at the same time dismiss the contribution of the ideological confusion stemming from the schism in the international Communist movement. The succession of splits in the Bangladesh Communist movement has as much to do with differences on strategy and tactics, (often inspired indirectly by Soviet and Chinese polemics) as with clash of personalities among the leaders.

It is necessary first to explain the political background against which the Marxist-Leninist movement emerged in

the then East Pakistan in the late 1960s. After the partition of India in 1947, the Communists in East Bengal agreed to operate as a separate party, the East Pakistan Communist Party, primarily because of geographical distance between the two parts of the newly formed Pakistan. At the secret congress of the Pakistan Communist Party in Calcutta in 1956, this decision of the East Bengali Communists to operate as a separate party was ratified. Among the 11-member Central Committee of the East Pakistan Communist Party elected at the Calcutta Congress were veteran Communist leaders like Moni Singh (who led the Tebhaga peasants' movement and the Hajang tribal uprising in north Bengal on the eve of partition) and Sukhendu Dastidar of Chittagong and Mohammad Toaha of Noakhali (who were later to play a prominent part in the building up of the Marxist-Leninist movement in the late 1960s). It is significant that at the Calcutta Congress, a delegate from Faridpur, Kumar Maitri, brought forth a proposal that the East Pakistan Communist Party should launch a Bangali national liberation movement. But except Deben Sikdar of Chittagong (who again was to be an important figure in the later Marxist-Leninist movement of Bangladesh) and a few other delegates, on one was in favour of such a separatist movement. The dispute over the strategy of whether to work within the Pakistani framework or to launch a separatist national liberation movement was to plague the East Bengali Communists for the next 15 years.

Meanwhile, because of the illegal status of the Communist Party in the then East Pakistan, the Bengali Communists decided to operate from within the national bourgeois party, the Awami League, instead of setting up an independent underground party. To quote Badruddin Umar, an observer of as well as a participant in the Communist movement of East Bengal, "This decision was unilateral. The Communists did not have any agreement with the Awami League on this, as the Chinese Communists had with the Kuomintang..." ("The Leftists of Bangladesh", *Sanskriti*, September 1981). When the Awami League split in July 1957 over the US-Pakistan military pact (which was signed by Suhrawardy as the Awami League Prime Minister of Pakistan at that time and backed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other pro-US elements within the League),

the Communists decided to join Maulana Bhasani who broke away from the Awami Party and formed the National Awami Party (NAP).

PULL OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The absence of an independent Communist organisation and the compulsions of working within bourgeois parties like the Awami League and later NAP, distorted the attitude and nature of functioning of the Communists. Unable to reach the rural peasantry and industrial workers with a distinct programme of their own, the Communists soon lost the base that they had in the countryside, particularly in the north of East Pakistan, where in the pre-partition years they led a militant peasant movement. Mainly coming from a petty-bourgeois and often feudal background, these Communists appeared to be more vulnerable to the politics of social-democracy and less receptive to the needs of the rural poor who formed 80 per cent of the East Pakistan population. As Badruddin Umar traces their degeneration: "While remaining in the NAP, the Communists turned into social-democrats and according to their approach, imported more and more social-democrats into their group to increase their strength. Thus, through a bourgeois process the communist party degenerated into a social-democratic party." Umar then draws a parallel to the fate of the CPI and the CPI(M) which through another path — the path of bourgeois parliamentary politics and elections — arrived at the same destination of social-democracy.

As indicated earlier, the East Bengali Communists began their journey with disgruntled ranks within their party. The question of a Bengali national liberation movement with the aim of seceding from Pakistan cropped up off and on. The Moni Singh-leadership accepted for good the existence of Pakistan as a nation and decided to operate within the framework of the Pakistan constitution. In this they were possibly influenced by the Indian Communists who by the mid-1950s had similarly accepted the Indian republic as a nation and refused to recognise the right of self-determination of ethnic minorities like the Nagas or Mizos. Moni Singh, Khoka Roy and others in the leadership held that the question of an independent East Bengal was a 'nationalist' issue and that if the Awami League or any other nationalist party led a movement on such an issue, only then the Communists could join it.

This was opposed by the minority led by Abul Bashar, Sukhendu Dastidar, Mohammad Toaha, Abdul Huq and others. The latter quoted Stalin and said that the bourgeois parties had forfeited the right to lead, and that only the Communists could take up the flag of national liberation that had been discarded by the bourgeoisie. Intense debates between the two groups dominated discussions of Communists in the NAP during 1964-65. This synchronised with the split in the international Communist movement between Moscow and Peking, Bashar, Dastidar, Toaha and their followers supported Beijing on international issues, and on the domestic front stuck to the view that East Bengal should be liberated from West Pakistan. Ironically, less than six years later Beijing was to come out in support of the territorial integrity of Pakistan in opposition to the liberation war waged by the Awami League and the pro-Moscow Communists of East Bengal — a stand which threw the pro-Beijing Communists in utter confusion and disarray. But more of that later.

Finally, the East Pakistan Communists split in 1967, with the pro-Beijing section holding a national congress at Sylhet, adopting Mao Zedong's policy of 'agrarian revolution', 'encirclement of cities by villages' and 'seizure of state power through armed revolution'. There were debates at the Sylhet Congress over the question whether East Pakistan could be described as a colony of West Pakistan — a thesis proposed by Deban Sikdar and Abdul Bashar. Ultimately, the Congress adopted a resolution deciding to launch a struggle to break away from Pakistan and form an independent 'People's Democratic Republic of East Bengal'. The new party was however named East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist) — later to be renamed Marxist-Leninist — with the late Sukhendu Dastidar as the Secretary of a three-member secretariat.

RELATIONS WITH WEST PAKISTAN

The new party's ambivalence towards a theoretical analysis of East Bengal's relations with West Pakistan sowed discord among the members. In 1969, Deben Sikdar Abul Bashar (both of whom raised the slogan of East Bengal being a colony of West Pakistan), Alauddin, Matin, Nurul Huq, Mahbubullah and others formed a separate party — Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L) or East Bengal Communist Party (M-L). They could mobilise the students around an 11-point programme with stress on mass

struggles for an independent East Bengal. Incidentally, it was this 11-point programme which was later taken up by other Leftist parties and groups which led the mass movement leading to Ayub Khan's downfall. In July 1969, the newly formed Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L) held its first congress at Jainagar in Pabna district, about 100 miles away from Dacca, and elected A Matin as its secretary.

Meanwhile, in 1968 an independent Marxist-Leninist strain had emerged in Chittagong. A 24-year old engineer, Siraj Sikdar who was working in Teknaf in Chittagong, formed a trade union organisation called the East Bengal Workers' Movement in January that year with some enterprising young Communists. Sikdar later moved to Dacca and established the Mao Zedong Research Centre at Malibagh there. Towards the end of 1969, Sikdar came out with a thesis where he described East Bengal as a 'colony of Pakistan' and stressed the need for armed struggle to break away from Pakistan to establish an "independent, democratic, peaceful, non-aligned republic of East Bengal". He formed armed guerilla bands whose activities were initially concentrated in Dacca, where bomb attacks were made on the Pakistan Council Centre, the US Information Centre and other prominent establishments. Around the middle of 1970, Sikdar began to spread out to the villages, where he adopted the tactics of "annihilation of national enemies", meaning landlords and other feudal interests. In January 1971, a massive annihilation campaign by his guerillas in the Fatikhchhari tea estate of Chittagong helped him to create a base among the workers in the estate. On March 2 that year — on the eve of the Pakistan army crackdown, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was negotiating with Yahya Khan as to the possible form of government to rule East Pakistan — Sikdar on behalf of his East Bengal Workers' Movement addressed an open letter to Sheikh Mujibur. He asked the Sheikh to form a national liberation front consisting of all patriotic parties and groups to free East Bengal from Pakistani rule through a protracted people's war. At the end of his letter Sikdar commented: "Without such a programme, any liberation war would be a counter-revolutionary war led by US imperialism and conducted by Soviet social-imperialist and Indian expansionist plotters, and its ultimate result will be the emergence of a colony of Soviet social imperialists and Indian expansionists headed by the US imperialists, and its government

will be a puppet in their hands."

All these various groups of Maoists — the East Pakistan Communist Party (M-L), or EPCP (M-L), the Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L) and Sikdar's East Bengal Workers' Movement — played a leading role in the mass movements that rocked East Pakistan in 1968-69. The first two groups could build up trade unions among a large section of workers and 'kisan samitis' in the countryside and were able to turn the Maulana Bhasani-led NAP into an effective mass organisation embracing workers, peasants and middle class students and professionals. On January 20, 1969, Asaduzzaman, a student leader of the EPCP (M-L), was shot dead by the police while he was leading an anti-government procession in Dacca. This was followed by a massive protest movement all over East Pakistan, in the face of which Ayub Khan had to step down and hand over power to General Yahya Khan on March 25 that year.

MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE

One could ask why with a popular base created in the course of the 1968-69 struggles, the Maoist Communists of East Pakistan failed to lead the next stages of the movement for an independent East Bengal. After Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's release from jail (he was taken to military custody in January 1968 on a charge of conspiracy to make East Bengal an independent state, known as the Agartala conspiracy case) in February 1969, it was his six-point programme (which incidentally never included the demand for an independent East Bengal, but confined itself to the demand for provincial autonomy within (Pakistan), rather than the 11-point programme, which became the starting point for the next turn in the mass movement of Bangladesh. In fact, some groups of Bengali Marxist-Leninists found themselves completely outside the mainstream of the 1971 liberation war, and drifted from utter isolation to absolute inaction. How could Sheikh Mujibur's Awami League 'usurp' (as some Maoists now accuse the Sheikh) the leadership of the movement from the Leftists and the Marxist-Leninists who were the first to give the call for an independent East Bengal?

The Bangladesh Marxist-Leninists are divided in their evaluation of the reasons. Mohammad Toaha of the then EPCP(M-L) (which has now been renamed Samyabadi Dal M-L) describing the collapse of the Ayub regime in

the face of the 1969 mass upsurge says: "In this situation, the EPCP-ML leadership was reduced to a state of hopeless perplexity. The party leadership could not think of seizing state power through revolutionary force and fill up the vacuum created by the collapse of the old state machinery. It did not make the necessary preparations." As for the second possible reason for the failure of the Marxist-Leninists, Toaha says: "Although the EPCP-ML could earn the confidence of the large masses of peasantry and workers during the historic days of the 1969 mass upsurge, it failed to reflect in its programme and actions the desires and aims of the national and petty bourgeoisie who were interested in industrialisation in particular and the development of the national economy of Bangladesh. On the contrary, Sheikh Mujib through his so-called six point programme could easily win over the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie of the country. In Mujib's six point programme there was promise of gains for them; there was no fear of loss (of their existing privileges)." ("Today's Bangladesh in the Perspective of 1969" by Mohammad Toaha, *Swadesh*, January 1981.)

Badruddin Umar blames the 'terrorist' tradition in the Communist movement in the sub-continent. "The pro-Beijing Communists right from 1970 followed a terroristic line in the shape of 'annihilation of class enemies' under the influence of India's Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) led by Charu Mazumdar. As a result of this and under the influence of the Chinese party, the strategy that they adopted during the 1971 war shattered their organisational position." ("The Leftists of Bangladesh". *Sanskriti*, September, 1981).

In fact, the EPCP(M-L) from its birth suffered from some ambivalence as regards the main contradiction in East Bengal society. It held feudalism as the main enemy, although at the same time it aimed at the establishment of a "Peoples' Democratic Republic of East Bengal" (thus suggesting secession from Pakistan at some future date). Its stress on 'agrarian revolution' led it to concentrate on attacking 'class enemies' in the villages, and ignore the rising contradiction between West Pakistan and the broad masses of East Bengal. Although the Deben Sikdar-Abul Bashar group which broke away from it and formed the Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L), sought to grasp this rising contradiction and succeeded in 1969 in giving it the shape of a mass move-

ment in co-operation with other Left groups, the Marxist-Leninists in general all through the 1969-71 period remained torn between the compulsion of organising anti-feudal struggles in the countryside and the 'national' obligation of fighting West Pakistan. This to a large extent crippled their striking force.

THE 1971 WAR

Among the Marxist-Leninist groups in Bangladesh today, there is a growing tendency to come up with a conspiracy theory that lays the blame squarely on 'Soviet social-imperialism' and 'Indian expansionism' in collaboration with the Awami League and the pro-Moscow East Bengali Communists for having frustrated the efforts of the Maoists to lead the liberation movement. Often this tendency gets the better of patient efforts to analyse the real causes of the isolation of the Maoists. While the pro-Moscow elements did definitely make a *volte face* by jumping on the bandwagon of Bengali self-determination in 1969 after having criticised such secessionist aspirations as CIA-inspired in the past, and while Indira Gandhi's government out of its own self-interest certainly encouraged through direct interference the secessionist movement led by Sheikh Mujibur, the East Bengali Maoists cannot shirk their own responsibility, as pointed out by Toaha and Umar.

What was the role of the various Marxist-Leninist groups during the 1971 war? The EPCP(M-L) immediately after the March 25 military crackdown that year, in accordance with their old programme of liberating East Bengal from Pakistan, formed guerilla squads to fight the Pakistani occupation forces. But on April 13, 1971 *Pakistan Times* carried a message sent by Zhou Enlai to Yahya Khan which said: "In our opinion the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength". Zhou also referred to "a handful of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan". His statement stood in direct contradiction of the main strategy adopted by all the pro-Beijing groups of East Bengal since their birth — the strategy of waging a national liberation struggle against West Pakistan with the ultimate aim of setting up an independent East Bengal. The publication of Zhou's message — which for the first time set out in categorical terms China's views on relations between East and West Pakis-

tan — had its immediate impact on the EPCP(M-L). It split into two. One group led by Ajoy Bhattacharya and Abdul Huq (both members of the party's central committee) broke away from the majority and in the Jessore-Kusthia sector started a war of resistance against both the Pakistani army and the Bengali freedom fighters (who were receiving training in India at that time and were being sent to East Bengal for commando actions against the Pak army). This group however soon degenerated into the role of collaborators with the Pak army concentrating their attacks only on the freedom fighters. They raised the slogan of maintaining the "territorial integrity" of Pakistan and building up of a "new democratic Pakistan". The major section of the EPCP(M-L) represented by Toaha in Noakhali, Khondakar Ali Abbas in Dacca, Yakub Ali in Mymensingh however followed a policy of national resistance war against the Pakistani army all through 1971. Their guerillas managed to set up 'liberated zones' in several parts of the country and they fought the Pakistani army in Dacca, Mymensingh, Tangail, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Pabna, Fardipur, Khulna, Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla. But towards the end of the civil war, with the entry of the Indian army, most of these liberated zones were wiped out and the guerillas killed.

As for the Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L), one group led by Deben Sikdar and Bashar escaped to India at the beginning of the civil war, got in touch with the CPI(M) in West Bengal, and later joined the 'Bangladesh National Liberation Co-ordination Committee', an organisation of different East Bengali Left groups formed under Maulana Bhasani's auspices and backed by the CPI(M). The followers of the Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L) who stayed back in the war-torn East Bengal flocked under the leadership of Alauddin and Matin and fought the Pak army. Tipu Biswas's guerillas in Pabna and Obidur Rahman's guerillas in the Atrai area of Rajshahi set up liberated zones during 1971. The Matin group during this time held the view that the principal contradiction in East Bengal was between the broad masses of the country on the one hand and monopoly capitalism of West Pakistan on the other.

In the meantime, Siraj Sikdar of the East Bengal Workers' Movement moved to Barisal after the March 25 crackdown, and got in touch with some ex-servicemen and local young men to organise resistance against the Pak army.

He first formed the 'East Bengal Armed Patriotic Force' and later in the Pearabagan area of Barisal on June 3, 1971 founded the East Bengal Sarbahara (or proletariat) Party. The party's guerillas fought in Barisal, Patuakhali, Dacca, Faridpur, Tangail and Pabna. When from August 1971, the India-trained Awami League freedom fighters started moving into East Bengal, the Sarbahara Party sought to co-operate with them to fight the Pak army. But the Awami Leaguers, unwilling to brook the existence of any rival group, particularly the Marxist-Leninists, set about in a calculated manner to eliminate the Sarbahara guerillas. By December 1971, faced with the combined and superior military might of the Awami League freedom fighters and the Indian army, the Sarbahara guerillas had been forced to give up one by one the zones that they had earlier established.

CONFRONTATION WITH AWAMI LEAGUE

In fact, all these Marxist-Leninist groups who remained in East Bengal and succeeded to some extent in liberating parts of the countryside had to bear the brunt of the offensive of the Awami Leaguers towards the end of 1971, when the India-trained freedom fighters of Mujib's party sought to clear these areas of Marxist-Leninist influence and establish their own control. In this, they were fully backed by the Indian army — at first indirectly through training and supply of arms, and after December 16 by direct intervention. On September 25, 1971 in the Naporapahar village of Chittagong, the Awami Leaguers invited 15 guerillas of the EPCP(M-L), ostensibly for talks on unity, and then gunned them down when they were asleep. According to a Sarbahara Party report: "All through 1971, the Party suffered more losses from attacks by Awami fascists than in the anti-Pak army war. Of the 200 party guerillas killed in 1971, almost all were killed by the Awami League. Many among our activists and guerillas were also arrested by the League. The latter was engaged in such vile pursuits in the name of a 'liberation war' (*Sphulinga*, May 1981). In another part of the same report, we are told: "At the beginning of 1971 in Pabna, Tangail, Chittagong, Mymensingh; Savar and other places, it was possible at our initiative to build up understanding and joint activities with the Awami League and other patriotic forces. But the contemptible attitude of the Awami Leaguers who returned from India frustrated the unity efforts." It would be worthwhile to investigate into the

nature of training — both political and military — that the Indian army imparted to the East Bengali 'freedom fighters' during 1971. It appears that the Indian government cannot escape the partial responsibility of the massive onslaught on Marxist-Leninists in post-liberation Bangladesh, the basis of which was apparently laid in the course of the 1971 civil war.

It has to be pointed out at the same time that the roots of the inevitable confrontation between the Awami League and the Marxist-Leninists lay in the mutually opposing class interests of the two forces. The Awami League basically represented the interests of the feudal landed elements in the countryside and the aspiring petty industrialists. The EPCP(M-L) — the parent body of the East Bengal Maoists which later split into numerous groups — on the other hand, as pointed out earlier, stressed at the initial stage the conflict between the masses and feudalism as the principal contradiction, leading to actions against the landed interests thus antagonising the Awami League.

With the removal of the direct presence of West Pakistan from East Bengal after the December 1971 war, the contradiction came out in the open. But as in the past, it was again blurred by the introduction of a new element — the influence and control of the Indian government over the newly formed Awami League government of Bangladesh. In the minds of the Bangladeshi Marxist-Leninists, the contradiction between the people on the one hand and 'Indian expansionism backed by Soviet social-imperialists' on the other, often tended to overshadow the domestic class-conflict. Soon after the establishment of Bangladesh, EPCP(M-L) in its new thesis said: "Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionism pledging themselves in a sinister military pact, has imposed a puppet government [in Bangladesh] after having launched an attack on Pakistan and occupied East Pakistan. As a result, East Pakistan has become a protected state of Indian expansionists... Occupied East Pakistan has become a special kind of colony..." It took two years for the major section of the EPCP(M-L) (led by Mohammed Toaha) to recognise the reality of Bangladesh. While one section continued to follow the pro-Pakistan policy laid down in the course of the 1971 war by Ajoy Bhattacharya and Abdul Huq, Toaha's followers changed the name of the party into 'Bangladesh Samyabadi (Communist) Dal' at the second national congress in

1973. But a new split soon developed over certain strategic and tactical questions. Toaha and his supporters in the Samyabadi Dal felt that the time was not yet ripe for organising armed struggle and that the present stage was one of launching mass movements leading to massive upheavals only after which the party could think of taking up arms. This was opposed by Nagen Sarkar (an old Communist since the 1930s) and his followers who maintained that in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal Bangladesh, seizure of power through a protracted armed struggle, mainly by peasants, could be the only correct objective. Over the last few years, Toaha has moved further to a line of increasing collaboration with a section of the ruling class. In his strategy, Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionism preponderate over considerations of the intensifying class struggles within Bangladesh. When on August 15, 1975, Sheikh Mujib was assassinated in a coup, which in all probability could have been a CIA-backed attempt, Toaha welcomed it as "a step towards independence and sovereignty" and later gave a call for the formation of a 'patriotic national government' in alliance with Ziaur Rahman. Who are these 'patriotic forces' which could form such a government? An inkling can be had from an article by one of the party ideologues: "Landlords and rich peasants in the countryside, and the national bourgeoisie in the industrial areas represent the national bourgeoisie and the entire richer classes in Bangladesh. In the present context their conflict with imperialism, and the conflict between nationalised capital and private sector are the main contradictions. In both these areas [of contradiction] imperialism is both directly and indirectly involved... The interests of a section of landlords, rich peasants and middle peasants are also involved [in these conflicts]. If the Communists ally themselves with these sections they will win, provided the latter agree to oppose imperialism..." ("A Few Words on the Main Contradictions in Our Society" by Alauddin Ahmed, *Swadesh*, January 1981.)

Although Nagen Sarkar's group decided to stay away from elections (Toaha had agreed to participate in them) and continue armed struggle, barring a few isolated armed actions, it has not been able to make any mark on the political scene. Confusion over identifying the main contradiction and Nagen Sarkar's death last year have

thrown the group into disarray.

Among the other Marxist-Leninist groups which still continued armed actions after the formation of Bangladesh, the Alauddin-Matin led Purba Bangla Communist Party (M-L) described the Awami League government as "dependent on India and Soviet Union" and felt that the main contradiction was "internal" necessitating the politics of "civil war". They organised a massive, peasant force in Atrai of Rajshahi district (where during the 1971 war they could create a liberated zone) and adopted Charu Mazumdar's thesis of 'annihilation campaign' against landlords and other feudal interests. In an encounter with Sheikh Mujib's Rakkhi Bahini (a paramilitary Organisation trained by Indian government) the party's leadership consisting of Ohidur Rahman, Tipu Biswas, Alauddin and Matin were arrested. This dealt a severe blow to the organisation, from which it has not yet been able to recover. Ohidur, Alauddin, Matin and the rest came out from jail in 1977, but decided to concentrate on mass organisation and 'legal' work in the form of a new party, Bangladesh Communist League (M-L).

A change has come over the pro-Pakistani Abdul Huq group of the ECP(M-L). In 1978 they accepted the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation and formed the Revolutionary Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) with the policy of anti-feudal armed struggle as its main basis, rejecting the thesis that the main contradiction is between Indian expansionism and the people of Bangladesh — a thesis subscribed to by most of the Marxist-Leninist groups. Huq's group is still active in several parts of Bangladesh.

The other major armed group of Marxist-Leninists are the followers of Siraj Sikdar organised in the Purba Bangla Sarbahara Party. After liberation, they held their first national congress between January 12 and 16, 1972. In April 1973 they formed a mass front called the National Liberation Front of East Bengal aimed at overthrowing the "puppet government" of Mujibur Rahman which they described as "subservient" to Soviet social-imperialism and Indian expansionists. The armed struggle launched by the Party took the form of attacks on Sheikh Mujib's Rakkhi Bahini, and Awami League landlords and hoodlums, creation of guerilla bases in the countryside, raids on banks to collect money, and organisation of general strikes in cities. December 16 — the day when the

Indian army entered Bangladesh and the Awami League was installed in power — every year was observed as 'national enslavement day' (meaning the Awami League government's subservience to India) through general strikes. In 1973 such strikes were total in Barisal and Madaripur towns and partially successful in Dacca and Tangail. An important asset to the party was Lt Col Ziauddin who joined them in the spring of 1974. Ziauddin had a heroic past. Along with Abu Taher (who was to lead the November 7, 1975 army mutiny following Sheikh Mujibur's assassination, and was to bring Ziaur Rahman to power, only to be executed later by Ziaur) and Manzur (who in May 1981 was to lead another army coup resulting in Ziaur's assassination). Ziauddin had escaped from Pakistan in April 1971 and joined the freedom fighters in East Bengal. After liberation he became the commander of the Dacca Brigade, but developed differences with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's policies and protested against his failure to stem the tide of corruption, and particularly against the 'secret treaty' with India. In late 1972 he was dismissed from the army. During the next two years he toured the countryside, read Marxist classics, and in 1974 went underground to join Sikdar's Sarbahara Party.

Although the Sarbahara Party could build up an effective force of guerilla bands, the conspiratorial character of its activities bred suspicion among members leading to "executions" of innocent comrades (suspected of being police spies or having links with rival groups) and a series of splits. After Sikdar's death in January 1975 (described earlier in this article) the crisis deepened with massive police offensive against the party's bases in Faridpur almost reducing the organisation to shambles. In 1981, however, the party could reorganise itself to some extent as evident from a sensational raid on the Burirhat police station in Faridpur in September that year. The party today is split into two major groups — one led by Anwar Kabir active in Faridpur, the other headed by Ziauddin commanding some areas of influence in Chittagong, particularly in the hill tracts. Both the groups appear to agree on the main strategy of an agrarian revolution through peasants' armed struggles. The latest reports suggest that efforts are on to bring about unity between the two factions.

(To be concluded)