

Long Live the People's Resistance against Aggression of Globalization! Long Live the People's Occupation of Nandigram!

[As observed by Jiten Nandi, Shamik Sarkar, Md. Helaluddin, Subhpratin Roychowdhury, Anupam Das Adhikari and Amita Nandi *on behalf of* Manthan Samayiki, a bi-monthly Bengali little magazine from Kolkata, West Bengal.]

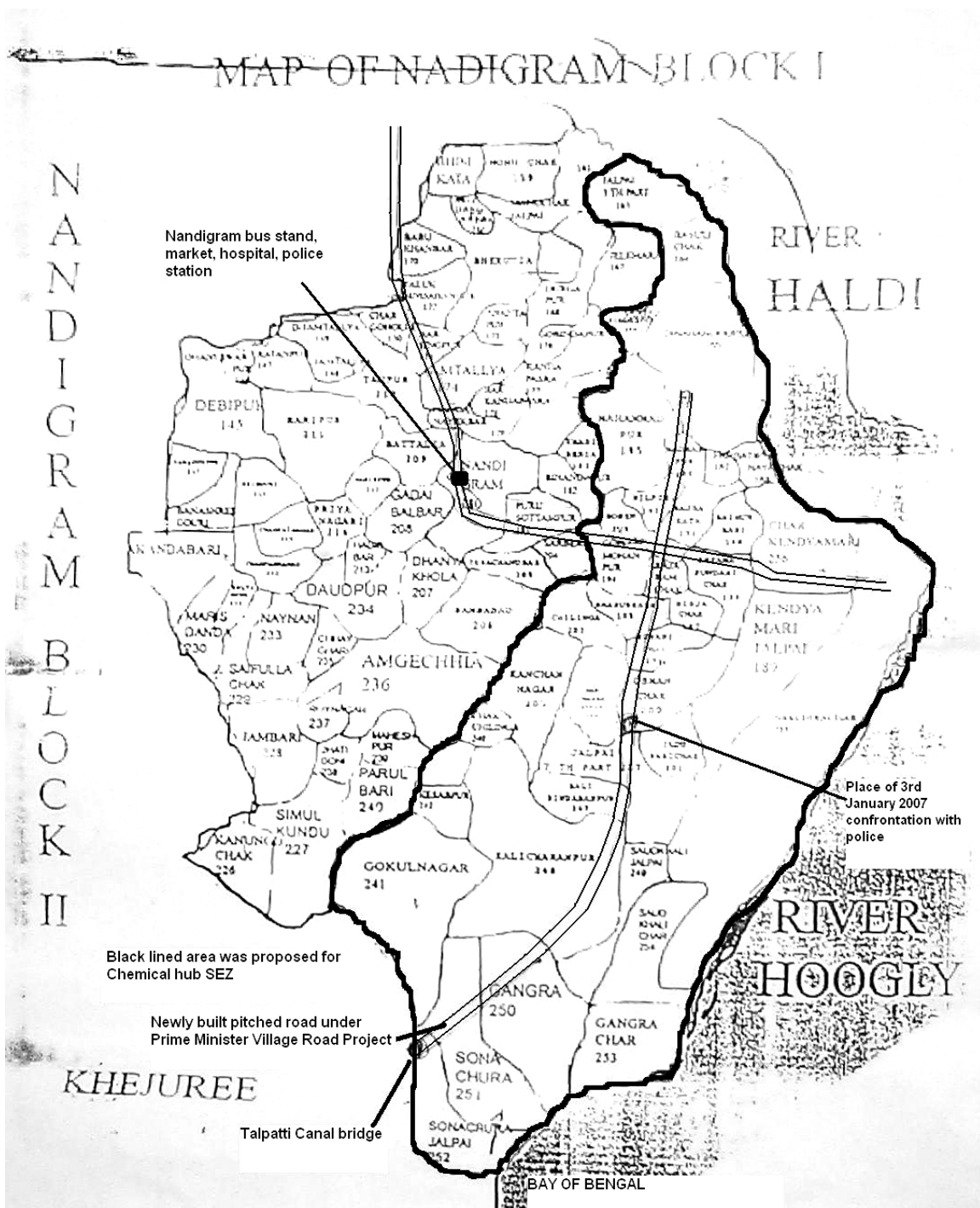
We, associated with a Bengali bi-monthly little magazine, 'Manthan Samayiki', went Nandigram three times during January to March. Being the residents of Metiabruz in Kolkata, we are neighbored by the people involved in garment industry, a community-based industry of muslim bengalees. Thousands of male villagers (about seventy-five thousand, according to Morsalin Molla, MLA, Mahestala, South 24 Parganas) from Nandigram block stay in Metiabruz and around temporarily for working in the community garment industry. We went Nandigram each time along with these people. We visited there on 18th January, 17-18 March and 27-29 March 2007. We travelled within Nandigram by bicycles and *van-rickshaw*.

Nandigram is almost 160 km away from Kolkata. There are three blocks, Nandigram I, II, and III in the district of East Medinipore. Nandigram I block is mostly dominated by muslims and lower caste hindus. People survive by cultivation, fishing, and engaging themselves in garment industry. Haldia township and industrial belt, being just opposite to the Haldi river, promised them a huge opportunity of getting employment in modern industries. But in reality, most of the workers who got jobs there, were driven off once the construction works were finished. They realized that, in modern industries only highly educated elites could manage a respectful job. Village people are going to get nothing from there. Still now, some villagers go Haldia, for purely temporary contractual jobs with miserably low salary. We heard about the Jellingham Project at Nandigram Block 1, where about 400 acres of land had been acquired in 1977 for ship repairs. One hundred and forty two families lost their land. The Project stopped functioning after five years and the site today lies deserted.

Nandigram fought British colonial rule gloriously, almost occupied itself from British Raj in 1942. It took part in the *tebhaga movement* afterwards, under the leadership of legendary Communist Bhupal Panda. The indomitable spirit of the community (the *chashi-samaj*) Nandigram was carried positively by the leadership of Communist Party of India in tebhaga movement. Time and again, Nandigram village-folks dug trenches on roads to fight the aliens. In 1982, a movement under the leadership of Bhupal Panda originated in Nandigram with the demand for development (roads, sanitation, water supply, electrification, etc.). Police fired on the agitation and killed a student, Sudipta Tewari. Again, village-folks dug trenches in Nandigram to prevent police from entering into the villages.

Before 29th December 2006

A rumour was there in Nandigram for more than a year that some of the *mouzas* or villages and cultivation land might be acquired by the State Government for instituting an industrial zone, Special Economic Zone (SEZ). A land acquisition row was already there nearby for increasing the area of Kulpi port which would take lands from coastal area belonging to mostly fisherfolks and farmers. A committee, dubbed as *Krishak Uchched Birodhi O Jonoswartho Roksha Committee* (Committee Against Eviction Of Peasants And To Save People's Interest) was formed during August 2006 by Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) along with Indian National Congress for propaganda work against forced land acquisition. Another committee started to function in Nandigram and adjacent Khejuri block, called *Krisi Jami Raksha Committee (KJRC)* (Committee To Save Farmland). It is a state-wide initiative led by main parliamentary opposition party, called Trinamul Congress, formed in the pretext of land acquisition row in Singur of district Hooghly for a Tata Motor's manufacturing unit. Another initiative, called *Gana Unnoyon O Jana Odhikar Sangram Samity (GUJOSS)* (Association For The Struggle Of Mass Development And People's Right), comprised of Jamait I Ulema Hind and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Santosh Rana faction), established in Bhangar of district South 24 Parganas in the last quarter of 2006 to fight forcible eviction of peasants there for setting up of an industrial zone, started working in Nandigram during November 2006. Meanwhile, State Government occupied and fenced (*kanta-bera*) Singur land imposing section 144 of penal code of India despite protest and refusal to take compensation for land from a large section of villagers. And Ministers and ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders started talking publicly of setting up a huge chemical hub in Nandigram under the Selim group of Indonesia. GUJOSS started setting up some village committees comprising villagers cutting across the boundary of party affiliation after conducting a survey in some villages in Nandigram which showed that almost 99 percent villagers were ready to 'give their lives before leaving their motherland'.



29th December 2006 to 3rd January 2007

A public meeting was held on behalf of ruling CPI(M) in Nandigram market on 29th December 2006 where MP from Tamluk and East Medinipore district leader Lakshman Seth urged farmers to pave the way of development and industrialization in Nandigram

by giving up their lands, both farmland and residential land, against compensation. He also urged people to take the opposition at gunpoint, alleged the villagers. He gave a list of the names of the villages (*mouzas*) those would be taken for the proposed chemical hub, on behalf of Haldia Development Authority of which he is the chairperson. Later



Torched police van (on 3rd January) carrying a poster, *we will not leave motherland for industry*

that document was found in District Land Reforms Office. Male-folk returned to their villages hearing the news. A large number of male-folks, predominantly muslims, who worked in Metiabruz or elsewhere came to their villages for Idujjoha on 1st January 2007. They also became agitated hearing the news that their birth-place (*matribhumi*) is going to be forcibly occupied by the government. On 3rd January 2007 a Governmental car entered into Nandigram and went to Kalicharanpur gram panchayet office. People gathered and fearing forcible land acquisition drive, rushed towards that

panchayet office. Panchayet *Prodhan* Samiran Bibi and her husband CPI(M) leader Rejjak told them that a UNICEF team had arrived here for a government project for *Nirmal Gram Prokolpo* or Fresh Village Project. People marched back, but in their way to Garchakraberia, they found some four police vans with armed police force arrived there in Osmanhawk. The procession asked the police why they came. Police replied with lathicharge and gunfire which left 4 persons wounded. People got furious and chased the police van. One police van had been torched in Garchakraberia Bhuta More. All the police personnel left rapidly. Traditionally the peasant community of Nandigram is hostile to police administration. In 1902, villagers burnt a *Daroga*, called Raimohan in Gumgarh village of Nandigram who was backing a *mahajon* (money lender) called Gopal, and attacked Nandigram police station. Several villagers were hanged later for that offence by the British rulers. This memory is still alive among villagers through folklores and songs. One such song goes like "*Ki khela khelili Gopal Nandigramer bajare/ Khelar tape Gumgarh kanpe/ Raimon daroga pure more/ kharer gadar bhutore.* (Gopal, what a trick you played in Nandigram market./ The trick trembled Gumgarh./ leading Raimohan *daroga* to be burnt in a heap of paddy-grass). Till the day, i.e. 3rd January the agitation was mostly dominated by male-folk of the villages. After this incident women-folk from both communities, Hindu and Muslim came out of their homes. Within an hour (in the afternoon) all the village populace started digging the roads in their villages for preventing police to enter into the villages. Within 12 hours, people dug more than hundred places, cut small concrete bridges, blocked the roads with tree-trunks, huge trees, boulders and bricks all through the villages proposed for acquisition for the chemical hub SEZ. People occupied their own villages. It was a huge show of people's power and uprising. Sumit Sinha, a member of CPI(ML) (Santosh Rana faction) was present there at that time. He described the event like one when 'people's knowledge and initiative surpass leaders' episteme and craft'. He said that he was reluctant to believe the incidence in North Bengal when over 100 km rail-track was

eliminated within a night by people during *Khadya Andolan* in 1950s. Now, seeing this mass initiative he started believing the actuality of that incidence.

Upto 7th January 2007

From 4th January 2007 people urged for unification of three above-stated committees. On 5th January 2007 a meeting was held in *Etimkhana* (muslim orphan house) in Tarachand Bar beside Nandigram market involving all block or district level leaders of political parties who were involved in those three committees. A unified committee, called *Bhumi Uchchedh Protirodh Committee (BUPC)* (Committee for Resistance to Eviction from Homeland) was established from the meeting and resolution was taken that nobody would hoist their own political flags within Nandigram excluding the case when a



Barricades with tree-trunks and boulders

political party was organizing a meeting or march on its own. On 6th January noon, a huge public meeting was held in Bhuta More, Garchakraberia announcing the formation of BUPC. Meanwhile, the agitation led by KJRC in Khejuri was brutally suppressed by State administration and CPI(M) cadres there and all the agitating villagers were made silent or 'proponent of industrialization' at gunpoint. Nandigram and Khejuri are separated by a 50ft wide canal called Talpatti Khal. A bridge separates two newly made (2004-2005, under *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Jojona* or Prime Minister Village Road Project) *pakka* roads or pitched roads, Nandigram's one connects Talpatti Khal to Basulichawk (16.2 kms.) and Khejuri's one connects Talpatti Khal to Rasulpur. Historically, Nandigram was attacked time and again by Portuguese armada (*Harmad* in colloquial tongue) or Pirates and British invaders through Khejuri. Nandigram people used to resist them. Nandigram was again attacked on the onset of 7th January 2007, from Khejuri, with bombs and bullets. It was a foggy morning. Thousands of people from the adjacent villages (Bhangabera, Sonachura, Gangra, Adhikaripara, Gokulnagar, Tekhali etc) started thronging at Talpatti Khal bridge, to resist the invaders, the 'army of industrialization', the '*harmad bahini*', the '*cadres* of Lakshman Seth', carrying sticks, *Da* (bamboo cutting knife), *Banti* (knife used for domestic vegetables cutting). Three persons died of bullets during resistance, namely, Bharat Mandal, Sekh Selim and Biswajit Maiti (12 year old). A landlord of Bhangabera, Shankar Samanta (His two storied fort-like residence, gardens and ponds constitute at least 20 acres of land, leaving aside the farmland he owned. Almost all of the other houses in Bhangabera are made of mud. This family was traditionally with Indian National Congress, also his father Sudhansu Samanta, but turned into CPI(M) two decades ago) was allegedly showing the invaders the key persons of the resistance for killing them, villagers alleged to us. People chased him, captured and burnt alive. His mansion was ransacked and torched also. Invaders stopped shooting after the sunset. Thousands of people decided to dig the *pakka* road to cut the link between

Talpatti Bridge and Nandigram. The 16.2 km long pitched road was ornamented with several ditches, trenches, tree-trunks, boulders, bricks. The war began.

7th January to 14th March 2007

As the war situation unfolded, formation of village committees, the organization from below, virtually stopped. Instead political leaders of BUPC started leading the whole resistance. People already started night-vigil to resist the invaders. When they found any



A trench on Prime Minister Village Road Project road, with a black flag of BUPC

intrusion in night, they started chanting *Shankha* from households and making call of alert (*ajan*) from mosques. Hearing this everybody used to come out of their households and marched towards the Talpatti Khal, which was started to be termed as border, colloquially. In a war like situation, people couldn't resist

the sophisticatedly armed police and cadre force without weapons. And so weapons including guns started to come in the hands of villagers through some heavyweight political leaders of parliamentary opposition.

Villagers reorganized the barricades and trenches on roads in a manner so that one could move by walking, bicycle or even *Ricksaw*, but no car or speedy motorbikes could move in or out. The ferry service connecting Nandigram and Haldia through Haldi River was cut out by ruling CPI(M) cadres temporarily, Haldia town being a stronghold of them. The supply of cash crop and labour from Nandigram to Haldia was halted. Haldia market faced a huge price rise. Fearing unrest in Haldia, ferry service resumed after seven days. But labourers from Nandigram were systematically manhandled in Haldia by CPI(M) cadres. Especially Muslims were targeted. It is very special. CPI(M) is known internationally as the strongest critique of Gujarat communal riot and Hindu fundamentalism. Cadres belonging to that party in Haldia, started provoking muslim sentiment by targeting them specifically. The Nandigram-Metiabruz buses were systematically searched by CPI(M) cadres in Nandakumar, some 40 km away from Nandigram, and people belonging to those villages proposed for chemical hub SEZ



were got down from buses and were advised to go by walking as 'they were opposing industrialization, they should not be allowed to go by buses'. These things were done by CPI(M) cadres after a state level leader of CPI(M), Benoy Konar called for 'making the villagers' lives a hell encircling them from three directions' before media. The three directions were Nandakumar, Khejuri and Haldia. Meanwhile Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya said before media that the proposed chemical hub would not be set up at Nandigram, *if villagers didn't want it there*. He also announced to tear apart the Haldia Development Authority's notice, before media. But Lakshman Seth, the Tamluk MP and Haldia's strongman, urged for setting up the SEZ in Nandigram. Nirupam Sen, state industry minister, also said in that way. No official notification was issued any further.

The everyday life of village-folks hampered in a big way. Cultivation, schools and food supply and external communications were hampered. People overcame those, just by solidarity within community. People even ate raw *khesari*



A trench by Talpatti bridge

leaves and cereals during these two and a half months. Help came in the form of rices and cereals from adjacent villages. Village life, in a contrast to the city dwellings, can live on its own resources, crops from fields, fishes from ponds, *quok* doctors etc. People survived by the virtue of their own resources, despite the barricades and trenches they organized to occupy their own villages. No festivals or ceremonies had been held in those villages during this period, be it marriage ceremony, or *tajia* of Muharram. A handful of strong CPI(M) followers from those villages left voluntarily fearing atrocities, or been driven away in some cases. The total number wouldn't cross 120, the villagers urged. All the rest of CPI(M) followers took up the call of resistance to save their home land and livelihood. Some of them led the resistance also. The martyr, Bharat Mandal was one of them. These villages were dominated by CPI-CPI(M) followers traditionally. All the villages became united showing huge communal amity. BUPC remained the only organization left there.

On the eve of 14th March 2007

After a state wide, two-month long campaign for industrialization, CPI(M) organized a big mass meeting in Kolkata on 11th March under the banner of Krishak Sabha, the party's peasant wing. The home secretary of the State Government, Prasad Ranjan Roy ordered the administration to RE-OCCUPY the Nandigram villages on 14th March 2007. BUPC organized a mass deputation at Nandigram police station on 13th March. The mass deputation was thronged by women-folks in thousands. After a meeting in state assembly between East Midnapore district leader of Trinamul Congress, MLA Subhendu Adhikari and Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Subhendu assured the BUPC leadership that police would come on 14th March to repair the trenched and barricaded roads only.

Police would use tear gas or fire blank from guns at most, BUPC leadership perceived. They urged the villagers to organize a peaceful demonstration of at least 10 thousand by the side of the Talpatti bridge and send back all their weapons. In a way, one can say that BUPC leadership disarmed the village-folks on 12th and 13th March, who were indulged in a war with the invaders for saving their homeland and saving themselves from eviction. Villagers followed BUPC leaders' advices.

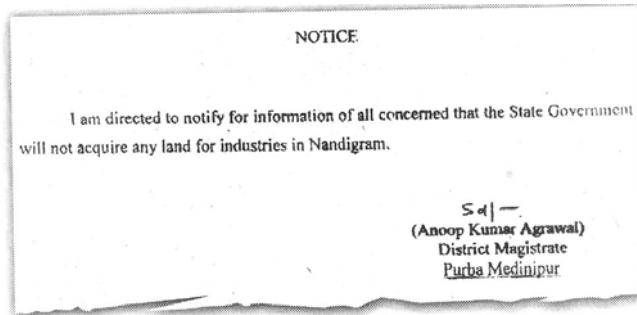
On 14th March 2007

The villages by the Talpatti canal were mostly populated by hindu community. And the heart of the resistance was Garchakraberia, a muslim dominated village, which is 10 km away from the Talpatti Khal. The *shankhadhwani* by hindu women-folk started as early as at 3 am on 14th March. Children and women gathered beside the Talpatti bridge at 3 am and started *puja* of *Gouranga* idol and *Singhabahini*, the community believes that the goddess save their land and lives. Muslim women and children came a little late, at 4 am and started reading from Koran Sharif. Thousands of villagers, mostly children and women were present there by the dawn. No prominent leaders of BUPC were available at the spot, but local village level leaders were there.

Police started the operation on 10 am. They fired tear gas and within some minutes began firing. Armed CPI(M) cadres came along with the police. The cadres wore police uniform for camouflage. State reoccupied Sonachura, Bhangabera, Adhikaripara, Tekhali (3 km from the Talpatti bridge) with police, special combat force, sophisticated weapons, and CPI(M) cadres. Within one hour wounded persons started to come to ill-prepared Nandigram Hospital. By the evening, 60 people came with injuries, mostly with bullet injuries in upper parts of the body. So the firing was intended to KILL the protestors, not to disperse them. 14 deaths have been reported immediately by government. Party flag entered into those villages of Nandigram after two and a half months. The victory of state over the villagers was celebrated there, and the rest part of the East Medinipore district by hoisting innumerable brand-new hammer-and-sickle marked red flags. Meanwhile, a district wide 12 hour strike was issued at the afternoon of 14th March by CPI(M) trade union wing CITU, to prevent the miscreants from hampering the process of reinstallation of administration in Nandigram, according to 'The Hindu', a media source. Everywhere in the district, CPI(M) cadres took the streets with flags, blocked roads, and prevented the parliamentary opposition leaders, the Governor and the media from entering into Nandigram. The ambulances carrying seriously wounded to Tamluk hospitals were also attacked. Reports of huge death and disappearance of body, rape started coming from Nandigram. Sonachura, Bhangabera, Adhikaripara, Tekhali were completely under the control of police and armed CPI(M) cadres by the night of 14th of March.

After 14th March 2007

Under the direction of Kolkata High Court, CBI team arrived at Nandigram on 15th March. Police and cadres in Sonachura village organized the villagers there at gunpoint for leading a procession for re-occupation of Garchakraberia on 16th March. But their



attempt failed, as almost 50 thousand villagers from other villages, led by BUPC, came to sonachura on 16th March morning. Cadres escaped the villages. Police forces presented their begged for lives. Red flags had been replaced with a handful of black ones of BUPC, and predominantly with tri-coloured Trinamul Congress flags.

After the red ones, entered the tri-coloured party flags. After severe protests in and outside of West Bengal and condemnation of state sponsored mass killing of unarmed villagers, facing opposition from ruling coalition partners of decades, Left Front Government decided to withdraw the police force from Nandigram systematically, issued a notice on behalf of East Medinipore district magistrate stating that no land acquisition would be held in Nandigram. It was the second official notice related to Nandigram SEZ. First one was issued on behalf of Haldia Development Authority at the end of December 2006 providing the list of mouzas to be acquired in Nandigram, as stated above.

The struggle of Nandigram is still continuing. Now the land grab fear is over. But the anguish and grief of losing a number of their comrades remains. Villagers are asking for the punishment of the murderers and rapists. We asked the female-folk about what kind of help they needed. They urged us to join the struggles 'like them'. The CPI(M) party cadres are still bursting bombs at night, from the side of Khejuri. BUPC asked most of the 'driven out' or 'left out' of the villages for their CPI(M) affiliation to come back, but urged for the arrests of a few of them who were involved in the violent attack and massacre on 14th March.

The residents of 38 villages, mostly a peasant population, predominantly poor and marginal, in Nandigram fought a severely uneven fight for last 3 months. It was a genuine people's resistance against globalization in its present aggressive form. Global capital is installing SEZs, neo-colonies in India. Almost 200 SEZs are already working in our country. Gujarat, Haryana, Orissa, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand etc are prominent states in SEZ maps of India. All state governments, be it Congress led or BJP led or else, are asking for SEZ and advocating it for industrialization and development. The SEZ Act was planned during BJP led NDA government, and implemented in 2005 by Congress led UPA government. It was passed by parliament without even any debate. The country-wide people's resistance sent the act under review and sanction of fresh SEZs was stopped, in January, immediately after the people's uprising and occupation in

Nandigram. Village-folks are resisting the land grab and forced eviction almost everywhere, at Kalinganagar-Jagatsinghapur in Orissa, at Raigarh in Maharashtra, in Jharkhand, in Uttarpradesh etc. Nandigram was one among them. And it emerged VICTORIOUS. Chemical hub SEZ in Nandigram died before its birth. It's a successful local resistance, a people's resistance against globalization with a broader and immediate implication.