

Address to the 70th Anniversary Celebrations of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka by Madhav Kumar Nepal-Senior Leader of the CPN (UML) and the Former Prime Minister of Nepal, on July 3, 2013, Colombo

Comrade Chairperson,
Delegates and participants,
Distinguished Guests ,
Communist Party of Sri Lanka,
Colombo, Sri Lanka !

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) and my own please allow me to extend warm greetings to all of you and best wishes on this very happy occasion of 70th anniversary of Communist Party of Sri Lanka. I would also like to extend my thanks to the Comrade Chairman and General Secretary and the members of organizing committee for inviting me to address this very important event of CPSL. Nepal and Sri Lanka are two neighboring countries having a close ties since a long time. Both countries have been enjoying a very cordial, friendly relation and share common views and values on number of regional and international issues. Likewise, the party I represent here, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) and Communist Party Sri Lanka have also been enjoying fraternal relations since a long time. Leaders of your party have visited Nepal number of times and attended our National Congresses in the past. Likewise, the frequent visits made by both of our parties' leaders manifest the close and intimate relationship between our two parties in the region. We are always grateful for your support and solidarity to our struggle for democracy, justice and equality.

The theme 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Left Movement in South Asia' that you have chosen for this important occasion what I have found has been very relevant in the present context of our region, South Asia. The Left Movement in South Asia has a long history. The Left Parties have been very active here compare to many other regions and they are popular among the masses. Some of the left parties like in Nepal and India are the largest parties having wider support base and winning elections to form government both in national and provincial levels.

General Situation of the Region

Comrades,

While discussing about the South Asian Left movement, please allow me to briefly state about the general situation of the region. South Asian region is one of the most poorest regions of the world today. The region has some of the poorest people in the world plagued by illiteracy, ethnic discord and other oppressive social order. All countries are economically underdeveloped and political institutions and structures are not well

developed. Due to these and many other problems the countries in the region have been facing growing religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts, environment degradation, internal displacement, refugees crisis, forced migration, social crimes, terrorism etc. Over 65 thousand of people lost their lives in 25 years of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Similarly, 17 thousand people were lost their lives during the 10 years of Maoists armed conflict in Nepal. Each year more number of people missed their lives in religious and ethnic related conflicts in India and Pakistan than four wars between two states in the past century. The death related with poverty, hunger, malnutrition, HIV Aids, social crimes are at alarming level. Similarly, Bangladesh ranks one of the most disaster-prone countries of the world. Environmental disasters like tropical cyclones, storm surges, floods, tornadoes and droughts ravage the country almost every year, even several times a year. The increasing heat of the earth due to the green house gas has become another big challenge for both high Himalayan and low land countries in the region. There has already been experienced remarkable change in the climatic atmosphere in the region. However, the region is still one of the unresponsive regions in the globe in terms of these growing threats. Though during its formation, the SAARC had given focus on number of such issues and even infused some of these issues in its Charters and objectives however, in practice they haven't followed the clauses of the Charter.

Although most of the South Asian countries have been practicing democratic system, however the successive elected regimes have failed to address such large number of issues in the region. The democratically elected government which supposed to be the most accountable and responsive to the public but they failed time and again in our region. What we think, democracy must be based on equality, freedom, fraternity, social justice and socio-economic transformation, what envisaged by French Revolution in 18th century and other revolutions i.e. Socialist Revolution of Russia, New Democratic Revolutions of China and other Countries of the World. Democracy must also be economic, social and cultural. This would necessitate that democratic states give their citizens all democratic rights available under international law. National minorities and minority nationalities must be given equal rights and even special rights like affirmative action for them. This would only be possible if the development model is egalitarian, pro-poor and inclusive. The stress in development should be to provide the basis for rights and strengthen entitlements. Therefore, for a true democracy and egalitarian development there has to be a major role for the state to regulate foreign and domestic capital in the interest of more egalitarian distribution of the benefits of growth. For real democracy the state must be transparent and accountable, not only to political representatives but also to the common people.

South Asia and left movement

Immediate after the Russian revolution in 1917, the Marxist ideology came to be accepted by some revolutionaries in South Asia. As early as in 1920, the Indian Marxist participated in the second Comintern Congress in 1920 and the Communist Party of India was established in 1925. The establishment of Communist Party of India provided impetus to other Marxists in the region and began to expand the Marxist ideology and

formation of the Communist Parties in other countries . In Sri Lanka , the Communist Party of Sri Lanka was established in 1943 and in Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal was established in 1949. In each country , the Communist Parties after their formation played important role for mobilizing the masses against the repressive regimes. The CP of each countries formed broader alliance of masses. They began to organize workers, peasants, women, teachers, students and other oppressed classes of people. In the initial days, each of the parties in the region were able to mobilize large number of people under these organizations.

Dear Comrades,

While we appraise the past and evaluate the present, it becomes crystal clear to us that the left and Communist movement in South Asia has gone through many ups and downs and now requires more objective analysis and future projection. Since the beginning of the Communist movement –that was started with the establishment of communist parties in the South Asian countries 97 years ago, the communist and left parties of South Asia have learnt many valuable lessons. This century-long history of the left movement has provided us ample experiences both regarding different aspects of theory and forms of struggles. The communist and left movement of Sri Lanka itself has very rich experiences that can benefit to make further progress. As we know, the Communist movement was started against feudalism, comprador-bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism when the South Asia was facing various sheds of autocratic regimes and British colonial rule. Though the country like Nepal remained independent from the British imperial regime, most of the territory of South Asia was under the British rule in those days. Communist parties in all South Asian countries resolutely fought against British colonialism and its subservient domestic rulers. Banner of independence, equality and justice was raised high by the communist parties thus to fulfill aspirations of working and exploited masses of this sub-continent. In return, the communist parties enjoyed wide support from the people in the first two decades of the left movement. The high tide of the international communist movement, including the new democratic revolution in China, had greatly encouraged the left and communist movement in South Asia. However, the great polemical debate between then the CPSU of Soviet Union and CPC of China had negative impact on the South Asian left-communist movement too. Communist parties were divided and they bogged down in the vicious cycle of debate about strategies and tactics of the communist-left movement in South Asia. The divide and debate became so sharp inside the communist movement when some pleaded the way of armed struggle and others pursue the path of election and parliamentary competitive politics. Similarly, the issue of the National Democracy propagated by then Soviet Union and Mao's theory of New Democracy further polarized the communist movement of South Asia in those days. Nevertheless, this kind of debate gradually waned down and virtually ended when the Soviet Union collapsed and China itself followed the path of socialist market economy combined with the approach of peace and stability in the world. It has provided a valuable lesson for us that the notion of implementation of Marxism according to the objective reality of a given society is entirely correct. All of us have to learn lessons from these events and chalk out our own course of action best suited to our objective conditions.

Challenges of the Movement

Distinguished Comrades,

Despite this, South Asia still stands out as having experienced the longest, largest mass-based nationalist movement, and one that involved extensive participation of various strata of the people. People's involvement in the democratic and nationalist movement set an example in other parts of Asia. The people's movement in the region was remarkably active in mobilizing various sections of masses during a period of repressive, authoritarian rule. The ability of people's movements contributed for the increment of common people's representation and addressed the issues of inequality as well as fulfillment of many demands and assumed the existence of a democratic framework that includes an independent judiciary, an accountable state and a representative parliament.

The left and communist movement in South Asia has gone through various zigzags in the past and it is still facing many challenges. We have to remember that most of the South Asian communist parties had suffered either internal divisions or sharp ideological differences in the past. Some of them had suffered serious setback too. Still the left and communist movement in our region has been facing several ideological as well as practical challenges and problems. If we concisely mention them, we can bracket them as follows:

- **Extremism and opportunism**- Left extremism and opportunism of both the left and right character has been one of the serious challenges that have often created serious set-backs to the left-communist movement of South Asia. In the name of armed struggle and fight against class enemies, extreme ideas like 'class annihilation' was adopted and complete boycott of peaceful political movement and competition was discarded. This kind of thinking and behavior is still persistent among some communist groups in the South Asian communist movement. Though it is losing currency in recent years. Similarly, right deviationist opportunism has also obstructed the success of the left parties in several instances due to capitulation to the bourgeoisie class , abandonment of class struggle and alienation from the toiling masses to forge ahead towards the goal of socialism.
- **Decline of ideology and rise of parochialism** - Along with the globalization and dissolution of socialist system in the Soviet Union, the South Asian left and communist movement has also confronted with the considerable decline of ideology and rise of parochial thinking based on ethnicity, caste, religion and regionalism. It has not only posed ideological problems within the communist parties but also has created problems in the society at large for a congenial environment to the development of the left and communist movement. You have seen and experienced the grave consequences of emergence of ethnic violence and destruction in your own country- Sri Lanka.
- **Changing global power balance**- After the demise of the Soviet Union, cold war situation was changed. It has changed the pattern of relations among the power countries. Even the relations between the US and China, between India and the US and several other countries has been changed. It has serious impact on the ideological base of these countries. Most of the countries' policies are dictated by their national interests and other national imperatives rather than classical political ideology. It has virtually influenced the pace of development and course of action of the left movement in

general and communist movement of South Asian in particular.

• **Changing pattern of economy, people's livelihood and migration-** People's way of life, trade and commerce between the countries and trans-border movement of people in search of jobs and opportunities have been altered in an extraordinary way. There is no proletariat class only working in industries in our countries as dominant force in labor sector, but there is huge number of other kinds of working masses which greatly influences our societies. Scientific innovations and development of technology, means of transport and communication also have greater impact on the left movement. It has seriously influenced the communist movement creating serious challenges before us.

• **Lack of coordination and cooperation among the left parties internationally-** There was a time when the international left and communist movement was strongly influenced by internationalism. Almost all communist parties had a kind of close bond of fraternal relationship and there was an environment of mutual assistance. It has been changed since last few decades. At present, even the left and communist parties are also more prone to looking inward rather than outward.

Opportunities before the Left and Communist Movement

Comrade Chairperson,

I am not talking about the negative aspects only rather elaborating about some major challenges faced by left and communist movement of South Asia. We have to realize about the challenges and problems confronted to us to devise appropriate policies and programs. There are ample opportunities too. Despite the setback of the international communist movement due to the demise of the Soviet Union and East European socialist countries, the efficacy and relevance of Marxism and socialism is still persistent. Especially in South Asia, a large portion of population still supports the left and communist movement despite splits and divisions in the movement. Though we understand that the communist and left movement is in a defensive mode, there is a bright prospect of resurgence.

Poverty, inequality, injustice, unemployment and marginalization of many working people have been creating dissatisfaction and disgust against capitalist and feudal system. Peasants, workers, urban poor, middle class intellectuals and service sector working people still admire and look with hope and expectation towards Marxism and socialism and Communist Parties. A great number of masses are supportive to the left parties. As a result, communist and left parties of the countries of South Asia have been successful even running the state affairs time to time. They have been able to make their considerable presence in governments and people's elected bodies. In a vast country like in India, left parties have been playing their important role both in provincial and national politics.

Dear Participants,

May I say a few words about my own country Nepal's communist movement while talking about the communist and left movement in South Asia? The communist movement of Nepal has not only sustained during the past 65 years despite many odds and difficulties, it has been the most popular and powerful politics of the country in our times. Though the Communist Party of Nepal also has faced both left extremism and rightist opportunism in its life, it has been a major political force to be reckoned with and

has been in the Central stage of Nepali National Politics. Though the Nepali communist movement has experienced left extremism and its violence, splits and serious differences, dissolutions, it has also seen reorganizations and positive developments and remarkable achievements.

Our party, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), had adopted the theory and program of People's Multi-party Democracy while the Soviet Union was crumbling down. Due to our close attachment with the masses, our own past experiences as well as experiences of various socialist countries, our party realizes that we need a new orientation while implementing Marxism in our context. Therefore, the Fifth Congress of our party held in 1993 made some important decisions under the leadership of late General Secretary Madan Bhandari. The very Party Congress has adopted a program which is based on People's Multi-Party Democracy. This decision is also based on our long experience in fighting against domestic and international reactionary forces to safeguard and develop our understanding of Marxism in the changed context. We believe that only a people's multi-party democracy based on rule of law can alert us to check the mistakes and sustain the popularity of the party among the masses.

On the basis of this program and principle we followed the path of peaceful competitive politics relying on the power of people. Our main motto is to defend Marxism and the Communist Party from dogmatism and capitulation. Consequently, our party- the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), formed the government winning the mid-term election in 1994. Our government brought pro-people programs and policies resolutely and thus became the most popular government of Nepal.

Since the formation of communist government, our party continuously is making strides both in the government and parliament and local bodies despite the Maoist extremism and other splinter groups' obstacles. At present, the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) is one of the major political parties of the country and a large portion of people is in the side of the left and communist movement in Nepal. In the dissolved Constituent Assembly, the communist and left parties have about 61 percent strength of total members and had got 55% of vote cast. On this basis, I can say that the popularity and strength of our party and other left parties will achieve substantial progress in the coming election of the Constituent Assembly- the second CA election, on coming November 19.

In a relatively small country like in Nepal, the communist party has run the government time to time and it has achieved dominant position both in parliament and recently dissolved Constituent Assembly. We should not forget that the historic achievements that we have been able to accomplish in the peaceful struggles launched by the communist and non-communist parties in the country, the Comprehensive Peace Accord, promulgation of the Interim Constitution, successful conclusion of the Constituent Assembly elections, declaration of the Republic by ending of the 240 years old Monarchical system and many more other important decisions for the institutionalization and strengthening of the democratic system have become possible.

The Communist movement has a very close link with the popular movement in Nepal. Communist Party has always been the part of struggle of the common people. They have attached themselves with the masses. The Communist Party of Nepal (UML) have

always believes that the party and its members must connect themselves with the masses and must act to win accordance with the needs and wishes of the majority of the people. Our party has always been with the people, we have always been trying to understand common people's problems and raise those issues in local as well as in national level.

Thus the past and present of the communist and left movement of Nepal also gives a glimpse of the communist and left movement of South Asia.

All these facts shows shows that there is a great prospect for the development of communist and left movement in South Asia.

Also in the international arena, some of the socialist countries have successfully defended and developed socialism improving the life of people drastically even after an arduous struggle. They have brought spectacular changes in societies achieving prosperity, equality and justice in their respective countries.

We have to understand and adopt appropriate theories, strategies and tactics according to the tune of time. As we understand that Marxism itself is not a dogma rather a dynamic scientific philosophy. If we adopt suitable path of communist and left movement adhering the basic principles of Marxism and socialism we can win the support of vast masses. It requires both internal unity in the communist parties and international solidarity among the communist-left parties in this globalized world. Communist and left parties should be skillful to seize the opportunities for the sake of people and society. In this way, we can expand the communist and left movement safeguarding our past achievements.

Comrade Chairperson,

We are facing many challenges but many opportunities are also before us in the contemporary world. No readymade model of revolution and social transformation is existent both in the right and left politics in the world. Creativity and objectivity is even more relevant and important for the communists and leftist progressive parties. We have not only take into consideration the scientific, technological innovations and developments but also unprecedented trans-border movement of people, goods and services in our time. We should also properly gauge the time difference from the declaration of the Communist Manifesto in 1948 and this century. Both the time and development of humankind have created challenges and opportunities before us.

Marxism- the communist-left movement has enough potential and power to bring about changes in South Asian societies by effectively organizing the masses skillfully and selflessly. Lack of understanding about the dynamics of changes and situation might cause setbacks and failures. All of us have to be cautious about it.

I believe that this kind of celebration will contribute to the further consolidation and development of communist-left movement in Sri Lanka making contributions to the South Asian left-communist movement too. I wish a grand success of this Celebration.

I would like to thank Comrade General Secretary and all leaders and members of the Communist Party of Sri Lanka for warm hospitality accorded to me here in Colombo.

Thank you.