

**India's Marxist veteran looks back with pride.**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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CALCUTTA, India, June 15 (Reuters) - The leader of the world's oldest democratically elected communist government looked back on his 20 years in power and said he was proud of his achievements in a "capitalist-feudalist" society.

Jyoti Basu, the 82-year-old chief minister of India's West Bengal state, told Reuters in an interview late on Saturday he did not think communist regimes elsewhere in the world had anything to learn from his success.

"I really don't appreciate this comparison," said Basu. "As far as we Marxists (in India) are concerned we are working in states and not as sovereign nations...and compromising with feudalism.

"In this capitalist-feudalist system, we have to take part in elections. If we get governments we have to run them in a way that other, bourgeois parties have not done."

Basu's Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), heads a coalition of nine left-wing parties called the Left Front that has won every election in West Bengal since 1977. The communists have planned low-key celebrations for June 20, the anniversary of their ascent to power.

Basu, who began life as a London-educated barrister and then embraced communism to become a trade-union leader back in India, said land reforms were the bedrock of support in West Bengal.

"We have great achievements here during the past 20 years. To summarise, we have brought in land reforms," he said.

"Land distribution, protecting the rights of the peasants and agricultural labourers...70 percent of the people are connected with agriculture in West Bengal. And now in the rate of agricultural production we are first in India," he said.

The communists had also built up local government bodies, or "panchayats", at the village level, Basu said.

"We have involved the people in our policies, programmes. We spend 50 percent of our budget through these local bodies."

Asked if a radical 1994 investment policy he adopted meant he had embraced capitalism, Basu said: "Not at all, even foreigners understand this now, that if you build up a base with land reform, improve the conditions of 70 percent of the people, that lays the basis for the industries.

"Otherwise, you have industries but they become sick. Who is going to buy your goods unless purchasing power is increased?"

Basu said West Bengal had approved investments totalling 400 billion rupees (\$11.2 billion) over the past three years, with a quarter of that sum already "in implementation".

"But we are weak in infrastructure. In the past we did not have a need for infrastructure," he said. "But now we are in a frightful hurry as far as building up infrastructure is concerned. We are even borrowing money from the World Bank.

"What I am saying is, we have to make up for the lost years. It is a difficult problem. There is no magic."

Basu admitted that the CPI(M), despite its record in West Bengal, had not been a great success nationally.

"That is a question we ask ourselves in every party congress or conference -- why we are unable to advance in other states," he said. "Politically we do not have that status in other states because we have not expanded our base. We are trying to do that. Even then the CPI(M) is running three states in India."

The CPI(M) also heads governments in Tripura and Kerala states. India has 26 states.



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Looking back at his half-century in politics, a career that began just before India won independence from British colonial rule in 1947, Basu said:

"In some spheres, of course, compared to the colonial period some good things have been done, like building up basic industries. But the drawback is that all this has happened for 10 or 15 percent of India's people, not for the remainder."

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