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Young India Referendum Gives Decisive Verdict Against Modi Regime's Anti-Student Policies

On February 12, the results of the nation-wide 'Young India Referendum 2024' were released at the Press Club of India, Raisina Road. The 'Young India Referendum,' conducted by AISA was aimed to capture the opinions of students and youth to highlight their concerns on education and employment, was conducted in over 60 universities across the country, between February 7th and 9th, 2024. The students and youth have given their mandate! They have given a fitting rebuff to the Union Government, which in the last 10 years of being in power has utterly failed to ensure access to quality education and dignified employment. A 10 Point Chargesheet was released charging the government with causing massive fee hikes and unemployment, imposing anti-student CUET, FYUP, carrying out an assault on minorities and scientific temperament while compromising of social justice and social justice. An accompanying Student Youth Charter was also issued by various progressive students' organisations.

With the slogans of '10 years of Modi Govt, 10 questions of Young India' and 'Jhumla Nahi Jawaab Do, Das Saal ka Hisaab Do' the 'Young India Referendum' was conducted in Delhi University, University of Allahabad, Veer Kunwar Singh University (Ara), Patna University, BN Mandal University (Bihar), Lalit Narayan Mithila University (Bihar), Jamia Milia Islamia, Ambedkar University Delhi, SK University (Andhra Pradesh), Dr. Abdul Haq Urdu University (Andhra Pradesh), University of Hyderabad, Bengaluru University, Sri Krishnadevaraya University (Karnataka), Periyar University, Jadavpur University (Kolkata), Calcutta University, ICFAL University (Tripura), Hemchand Yadav University (Chhattisgarh), Azim Premji University, Manipal University, among many other affiliated colleges, hostels and student areas across the nation.

The referendum aimed to capture the opinions of students and youth in light of the 2024 general elections. The referendum

follows an all-India signature campaign where students and job-seekers posed ten questions to the Modi-led Central Government regarding its ten years in power.

Students responded enthusiastically to the Young India referendum and voted in favour of affordable education and dignified employment, where they voted on questions relating to yearly fee hike, provision of hostels and scholarships for students in need, and on the promise of the Central Government to generate 2 crore jobs every year. Nationally, about 1 lakh votes were polled in the referendum, where 88.33% students declared that they are not in favour of the yearly fee hike. About 86% students denied that the Central Government has been able to provide adequate hostels and scholarships for students in need, and that the Central Government has completely failed to deliver on its promise of generating 2 crore jobs every year, with 91% polling 'no'. In central universities like Delhi University, which garnered 13,048 votes, students polled 92%, 88% and 91% 'no' on the three questions, respectively. With 23,450 votes in Andhra Pradesh, students and youth have polled 'no' with 84%, 79% and 93% votes, respectively. In Uttar Pradesh's Benaras Hindu University, where students are facing the biggest onslaught on universities, the BJP-led Yogi Government and the Modi-led Central Government, 1711 number of students turned up at polling booths during the referendum and have spoken out against the Hindu majoritarian party. 91% students polled against fee hike, 79% said they haven't benefitted from the Central Government scholarships or hostels, and 87% said that the governments have failed to generate employment for youth.

The rejection of students and youth is resounding! The divisive policies of hate and communalism, coupled with corporate attack on education and employment, is being rejected in its entirety! The demand

for education and dignified employment has not been heard louder!

At the Press Conference, Dr. Laxman Yadav, teacher and activists addressed the gathering, saying, "our campuses are being turned into prisons. I am a former professor because the University didn't want democratic minded people inside the campus and this project is being made universal." Natasha Narwal, women and citizenship rights activist said, "education has an emancipatory purpose. Students must learn critical thinking and start to question social injustice. However, the current regime has actively sought to destroy this aspect of a public education." Apoorva, student activist of the movement in SAU also addressed the press, saying, "Young India's call for a democratic India begins with holding the government accountable. We need jobs and quality education, not communal polarisation."

The Press Conference was also addressed by leaders of various student-youth organisations and movements including Prashant Kamal, General Secretary of Yuva Halla Bol, Dinesh, General Secretary of AISF, Amit Singh from AISB, Niraj, General Secretary of RYA, Adarsh, Joint Secretary of SFI, Nilasis, President of AISA, Vijay, Chhatra Sabha Vice President, Ahmed, President of MSF, Anurag from CYSS and Saunkha from PSU. All resolved to include more and more organisations and movements to the cause of Young India!

The message is clear – the erosion of public-funded higher education institutes, attack on democratic spaces, assault on dissenting voices, inaccessibility of education, and lack of dignified employment – shall no longer be tolerated.

A 'Chalo Delhi - Young India Rally' with the slogan of '2024 Ka Agenda, Tay Karega Young India' has been called on February 28th, 2024 by Young India, a forum of progressive student organisations and people's movements. This is a clarion call to the students and youth of the country to congregate at Delhi to fight the BJP-RSS in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Young India will set the agenda of 2024 elections! Onwards to Young India Rally on 28th February! ■



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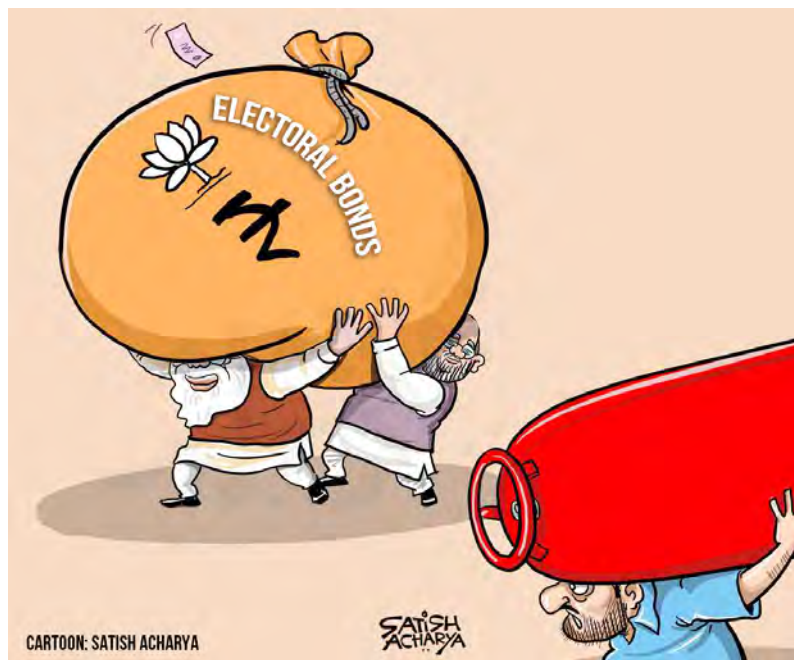
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In the Wake of the SC Verdict on Electoral Bond Scam



CARTOON: SATISH ACHARYA

A five-member constitution bench of the Supreme Court has finally struck down the Modi Government's Electoral Bond scheme as being unconstitutional. The scheme has indeed been one of the most brazen scams in recent years and it is great to see the Supreme Court finally taking the call and pronouncing a verdict that will go down as a heartening vindication of the rights of the people in a democracy, especially in the unequal battle against corporate power in today's India. While striking down the scheme the Supreme Court has also asked SBI to furnish all details about bonds encashed so far including the identity of donors and recipients to the ECI by 6 March so the latter can make this information public by 13 March.

Everything about the Electoral Bonds has been a brazen mockery of the constitution and democracy. It was passed fraudulently in parliament by presenting the scheme as a part of the 2017 Money Bill so it could escape scrutiny in the Rajya Sabha where the BJP did not have a majority. Even in the Supreme Court, the government invoked the doctrine of judicial restraint as is applicable to economic policy matters where the court usually does not interfere. Far from lessening the use of cash or black money in elections, the scheme has only exponentially increased the influence of money power in elections. And by granting anonymity to unlimited corporate funding the scheme thoroughly undermined the electorate's right to information and the consequent ability to make informed political choices.

The introduction of the Electoral Bond scheme had necessitated major

amendments to a whole set of legislations including the Companies Act, 2013, Income Tax Act, 1961 and the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Earlier, companies in existence for at least three years could contribute no more than 7.5% of the average profit earned in the past three years as political contribution and the details had to be shared with shareholders of the concerned company. Political parties were also required by law to furnish details about every donation above Rs. 20,000. The Electoral Bond scheme removed all these restrictions by paving the way for unlimited contribution by any company, including Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies, and exempting political parties from sharing details about contributions received by way of electoral bonds except mentioning the consolidated total amount.

On February 5, the Modi Government told the Lok Sabha that Electoral Bonds worth Rs 16,518 crore had been issued in 30 tranches since the launch of the scheme. Pending the submission of latest annual returns by political parties, the last figures available are till FY 2022-23, and according to these figures, the BJP had received Rs 6,555.12 crore out of a total of Rs 12,979 crore, almost six times the amount received by the Congress (Rs 1123.29 crore). The difference is bound to be even bigger once the latest figures are included. Next to the BJP and the Congress, parties ruling in various states like the TMC in West Bengal, BRS in Telangana, BJD in Odisha, DMK

in Tamil Nadu and YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh have received amounts in excess of Rs 350 crore.

Electoral Bonds are thus anonymous instruments of corporate funding for parties in power and the BJP running double engine governments in most states is by far the biggest beneficiary of this scheme. The bonds are issued in five different denominations ranging from 1,000 to 10 million. But according to the figure of bonds sold till July 2023, more than 94% of the total value of bonds sold was through the 10 million denomination and more than 5 percent through bonds of one million denomination. Clearly, those donating funds through electoral bonds are large corporate donors and not ordinary individuals. We should also understand that electoral bonds have not replaced other channels of corporate funding or black money transactions. Indeed, the use of cash in elections and black money in post-poll horse-trading to topple governments and cobble together majorities has only increased enormously in recent years.

The huge corporate contributions channelised through electoral bonds are clearly not acts of philanthropy or 'corporate social responsibility'. Once the detailed figures are published and identities of donors and recipients are revealed, we will be able to see a clear quid pro quo between these corporate contributions and reciprocal benefits extended to the corporates by the beneficiary

parties when in government, the Modi government and BJP-led state governments in particular. The cover of anonymity guarding the scheme is precisely meant to keep this quid pro quo, the growing bonhomie between corporate cronies and their political partners, shrouded in secrecy. The electoral bond scheme is essentially a euphemism for unregulated and unlimited corporate bribery which has already hugely distorted India's electoral process. It is the bridge between massive concentration of wealth in a few hands and increasing tilting of the electoral balance in favour of the most favoured party of India's big corporates.

It remains to be seen whether the SBI, the EC and the Modi government which today controls every institution of constitutional governance actually complies with the Supreme Court order. Regardless of the government's response, we the people of India must however draw strength from this belated judicial fillip to India's beleaguered democracy and intensify the battle to reclaim the republic. Using the electoral bond disclosures to expose the bond between corporate power and state power that underpins every brand of fascism is an important immediate task. Equally important is to fulfill the challenge of voting out the government which inflicted this unconstitutional scheme on the people and which has used these ill-gotten gains to win power and tighten its political stranglehold. ■

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Uttarakhand UCC

Encoding Hindutva into Law

MAITREYI KRISHNAN & CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

The passage of the UCC by the Uttarakhand Legislature by the brute majority of the BJP invited several comments by those startled by this development including one particular tweet that states "BJP leaders wake up every day and think about new regressive ideas on how to take this nation back to the Stone Age". Is this really true? Is the Uttarakhand UCC some knee-jerk hare-brained hasty law concocted overnight by the BJP? In answering this question there are two histories that need to be traversed. Firstly, the genesis of UCC and its mobilisation to reconfigure society into a bigoted misogynist Brahmanical majoritarian one. Secondly, the project of the Sangh Parivar and its forefathers to restrict the presence of Muslims and Christians in a land that they ordained as "Dev Bhoomi".

UCC has come to represent on the primary political demands of the RSS. Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), the precursor to the BJP, which was created by the RSS "not only to protect itself' but also "to stop un-Bharatiya and anti-Bharatiya politics", as per Malkani, introduced the agenda of the uniform civil code as a political demand. The promise was to end Muslim polygamy, repeal the Hindu marriage and succession laws and bring in a "uniform law for marriage, succession and adoption for all citizens.". The short-lived merger of the BJS with various other political parties to form the Janata Party in 1977 ended in 1980 with most BJS members walking out into the new political formation of the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The 1980s saw

the crystallisation of Hindutva's political demands – Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and the UCC. The thrust for UCC was the Rajiv Gandhi led Congress government's move to override the Supreme Court decision in Shah Bano case granting her alimony. Over the past three decades the RSS and its affiliates including the BJP have repeatedly bandied UCC has an important plank of its Hindutva project, articulating it, however, under the need to achieve objectives enshrined in article 44 of the Constitution.

“

The encoding of Hindutva into law is a return to the days when the social and legal sanction was given to slavery and apartheid.

The last few years has seen the mobilisation of Hindu supremacist forces to alter the secular identity of Uttarakhand to that of narrow Hindu majoritarian "Dev Bhoomi", which excludes the 13.5% Muslims and other religious minorities. To enable the realisation of "Dev Bhoomi", vicious campaigns to demonise Muslims in particular have been undertaken in the name of countering unsubstantiated and fictitious claims called "land jihad",

"love jihad", "mazar jihad" and more recently "vyapar jihad" alleging that Muslims are "capturing land, luring Hindu women, building shrines and taking over local businesses". Violent rallies and open calls for Muslims to be removed from the State are a regular feature and the police and BJP state government have ensured that this is done with impunity to these Hindu supremacist groups. The article "Driving Muslims out of "Devbhoomi" – The Sangh's quest for a Hindu holyland" by Tusha Mittal and Alishan Jafri appearing in "The Caravan" painstakingly details the communally divisive politics practiced for decades in Uttarakhand, which now "stands as an experiment of something larger—a micro model, a laboratory to create an exclusively Hindu land, a Hindu Rashtra in the truest sense".

It is in this background that there is no surprise that as the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) was tabled in the Uttarakhand Assembly, slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' were raised, revealing the hypocrisy behind its purported aim of bringing in a Code that transcends religion; rather the Uttarakhand UCC being another major step towards realisation of a theocratic Hindu majoritarian state.

Coming to a textual analysis of the Uttarakhand UCC, it must be said that though justified in the name of gender equality and uniformity, it is an attack on the women's' right of autonomy and bodily integrity on one hand, and diversity on the other. While it claims to unify family and personal laws, what it is in fact is a tool to curtail liberty and police intimate relationships.

Undemocratic Passing

In another demonstration of its disregard for any parliamentary democratic norms and processes, the BJP Government in Uttarakhand did not make public the Bill prior to its introduction, and the same was passed without any discussion. A committee that was constituted to prepare a draft proposal of the Uniform Civil Code had also not put out the draft prepared by them, and even during consultation had not called for objections to any proposed draft. A notification issued by them, without any proposal, called for comments.

CPI(ML) Liberation had in fact submitted its objections highlighting the impossibility of giving comments without a draft. The Objections submitted also highlighted that in regard to reform in personnel law, what was required was addressing inequality and discrimination, and not uniformity. The fears expressed therein have turned true, as the Code that was passed in the name of uniformity, not only reinforces discriminatory practices, but goes a step further encroaching on the liberty of people, and effectively policing all forms of intimate relationships.

Institutionalising patriarchy and policing in the name of gender equality

The UCC, remained without a concrete draft until the recent one introduced in Uttarakhand. Despite being advocated under the guise of gender equality, the Uttarakhand draft exposes its disregard for such principles, instead threatening fundamental liberties and granting the State authority to police personal relationships, in many ways criminalising the exercise of choice in intimate relationships.

Mandatory Registration of Marriages and “Live-in” relationships

The Code makes it mandatory for marriages and divorces to be registered, and provides for penal consequences for the non-registration of marriage, with failure to register the same inviting fine of up to Rs 25,000. The impact this would have on the plight of marginalised and vulnerable women is unimaginable.

The most talked about provisions of the Code is the mandatory registration of persons in “live-in” relationships within the state, regardless of their residency status. The Code mandates that any person in a live-in relationship or intending to enter into one, would have to submit a statement of the same before the Registrar, who would have the power to summon the persons concerned or any other person in the process of the enquiry. A statement is also required to be submitted to the Registrar upon termination of the live-in relationship. Upon such a submission, if either of the parties is below 21 years of age, the Registrar is also mandated to inform the parents/guardians of the party regarding the same. The failure to register a live-in relationship, invites penalty upto 3 months imprisonment or fine upto Rs. 10,000/- or both.

Compelling consenting adults to register their intimate relationship, empowering the Registrar to conduct an enquiry, and to call “the partners/ persons” or “any other person for verification” and “require the partners/ persons to supply additional information or evidence” penalising the failure to furnish such information is a shocking violation of the basic right to live with dignity and bodily autonomy.

It is claimed that this Code ensures to women in “live-in” relationships,

the right of maintenance, which is in any event already protected under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.

Allowing Public inspection of Registers

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, India witnessed 530 honour killings since 2015. These are only reported cases, with several unreported cases. The Supreme Court has noted the need to bring a law to address the same.

There have been several reports of members of the Sangh Parivar affiliate Hindutva supremacist organisations monitoring the Registrar of Marriages and notices under the Special Marriage Act, with the aim of identifying inter-faith marriages and potentially interfering with them. In fact, petitions have been filed seeking for the deletion of the requirement to furnish notice under the Special Marriage Act, due to the potential risk to the couples.

Instead of addressing either of these issues, the Code worsens the same.

As per the Code, the registers of live-in relationships, marriage, nullity and divorce are open for public inspection. The Registrar is also required to maintain a register of “live-in” relationships. This would only enable the policing and surveillance of inter-caste and inter-faith couples, whose lives are already precarious. These provisions institutionalise policing and surveillance of couples.

Retaining Restitution of Conjugal Rights

The Andhra Pradesh High Court in 1983, while striking down the provision for restitution of conjugal rights as unconstitutional, found that it constituted “the starkest form of Government invasion of personal identity and individual’s

zone of intimate decisions”. The Court found that “the decree for restitution of conjugal rights makes the unwilling victim’s body a soulless and a joyless vehicle for bringing into existence another human being” and that “pregnancy would be foisted on her by the state and against her will”.

The Code has retained this provision on the restitution of conjugal rights, which has been recognised as violating the right to live with dignity.

Equality Not Uniformity

The Report of the High Level Committee on the Status of Women in India (HLCWSW) which found that the Uniform Civil Code, was not necessary, noted:

“... The approach should be not

one of ensuring that there is one law for all, but rather, that all women, whether they choose to be governed by secular laws or their personal laws, enjoy equality which the Indian Constitution promises them. This requires addressing several aspects in the legal domain in specific ways rather than a diktat of ‘uniformity’, which is conceived of in fundamentalist/majoritarian ways.”

However, far from looking at discriminative practices and bringing about gender equality, the Code affirms such practices and brings about a direct assault on the deals of equality, liberty and fraternity. It is in fact the Codification of norms of brahmanical patriarchy, clamping down on choice, autonomy and bodily integrity.

Conclusion

The Uniform Civil Code of Uttarakhand, 2024 (“UCC”) passed by the Legislative Assembly of Uttarakhand will apply to all persons irrespective of their religion, but not really, since Adivasis are exempted. Its provisions relating to personal relationships endanger inter-caste, inter-religion and relationships of choice. Violent Hindu supremacist organisations on the loose in a predominantly upper caste dominated society, with their political agenda, are now further emboldened to enforce their reconfiguration of society by using the public nature of the information on personal relationships. The encoding of Hindutva into law is a return to the days when the social and legal sanction was given to slavery and apartheid. ■

Uttarakhand UCC is an Attack Against Women and Gender & Sexual Minorities - AIPWA

The All India Progressive Women’s Association in a statement has strongly condemned the attempts of the BJP Govt. in Uttarakhand to defeat pluralism through the Uniform Civil Code saying the UCC is a part of the larger cultural project of the BJP to dilute our pluralist society to establish its vision of a Brahmanical Hindutva society. The UCC will override personal laws in force in the State covering marriage, divorce, inheritance of property and live-in relationships.

While the law alters and targets aspects of Muslim personal law such as unequal inheritance, polygamy and halala, it fails to incorporate progressive aspects

such as payment of Mehr, marriage contracts or protections to women in inheritance of property.

When the 22nd Law Commission of India solicited views of the public on a UCC in a cryptic note without reasons, AIPWA acknowledged immediately that personal laws across religions contain discriminatory provisions needing reform, but that the UCC was not the answer. AIPWA noted that the root of inequality lies in discrimination and not in difference, and attempts to amend personal laws must address inequality in order to truly achieve gender equality. The UCC fails to address issues on custody, guardianship, transgender

persons, and rights of queer relationships. The UCC further fails to provide any protection against dishonour killings, and to inter-caste or inter-faith relationships.

Following Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have mulled appointment of committees to initiate the formulation of UCC in those states. These attempts are a dog-whistle to attack secularism and impose uniformity in the name of equality. Thus, it is important to recognise the context in which the UCC has been passed, especially before the upcoming elections, and serves as a testing ground for the BJP to bring in a national-level UCC. AIPWA recognizes that the Uttarakhand UCC is nothing but a furtherance of the BJP’s communal and patriarchal agenda, without any actual concern for gender justice. ■

Modi Game Plan versus People's Agenda

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The last parliament session of Modi 2.0 ended on 10 February with the adoption of a self-congratulatory resolution by the regime for the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh had already adopted a similar resolution in the UP Assembly on 5 February congratulating both Modi and Yogi for the construction of temple. Yogi Adityanath is of course not content with just claiming credit for Ayodhya, with support from the judiciary his government is now focused on the next Sangh battlegrounds of Kashi and Mathura. Drawing an analogy with Mahabharata, Yogi said Krishna had demanded five villages for the Pandavas while he was demanding only three places! In the name of just three places, this is a loaded warning by the state to the people to accept Sangh-BJP claims about every disputed place of worship or risk a veritable Mahabharata-like war.

These resolutions and rhetorical salvos should of course be seen in conjunction with events and signals on the ground. Uttarakhand Assembly just passed a highly draconian and regressive piece of legislation in the name of uniform civil code. Amit Shah has announced the enforcement of the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act before the forthcoming elections. And in utter disregard of the rule of law and judicial restrictions and safeguards, Muslim houses and shops, mosques and madrasas continue to be targeted and demolished by bulldozers in state after BJP-ruled state and by the Home Ministry controlled Delhi Police, who are illegally destroying yet more centuries-old

heritage monuments. In Haldwani of Uttarakhand this demolition drive gave rise to an outburst of people's anger and now, using this mass outburst as an excuse, the government has unleashed an indiscriminate campaign of terror and repression. Tension also gripped Bareilly of Uttar Pradesh following police highhandedness in response to the 'jail bharo' call against the Varanasi Court order permitting puja in Gyanvapi mosque.

In Sandeshkhali of West Bengal, which is currently in the news over allegations of rampant sexual harassment of rural women by local leaders of TMC, the BJP is desperately trying to give it a communal colour by presenting it as a case of sexual exploitation of Hindu women by TMC-backed powerful Muslim men. In a very provocative address to the media, Union minister for women and child welfare Smriti Irani has even alleged a Hindu genocide in West Bengal. The indications are very clear: now that Modi's so-called 'guarantees' sound increasingly hollow, the BJP is desperate to push the country into another round of communal polarisation and violence as its most tested and trusted electoral strategy.

Relentless attack on the opposition constitutes another key component of the BJP's election strategy. The party's desperate design to grab power in Bihar and Jharkhand ahead of the 2024 elections has however not had full success. Even after the arrest of Hemant Soren, the JMM backed by the Congress, CPI(ML) and RJD has succeeded in sustaining its government with veteran JMM leader Champai Soren

as the new CM. In Bihar even with Nitish Kumar's widely condemned political somersault, the BJP has had a tough time proving majority on the floor of the Assembly. It took massive political machinations, administrative foul play and police intervention, in order to compel three RJD MLAs to switch over to the NDA camp and prop up the Nitish Kumar government.

Following its weaponisation of central agencies like ED, CBI and IT department, the Modi government has now even turned India's highest civilian honour Bharat Ratna into a tool of political transaction. The conferment of Bharat Ratna on Karpooori Thakur was used as a convenient screen for Nitish Kumar's somersault. Likewise, conferment of Bharat Ratna on former PM and towering farmers' leader Chaudhary Charan Singh has been used to seal the deal with Charan Singh's grandson and Rashtriya Lok Dal president Jayant Chaudhary. Advani and Narasimha Rao have also been chosen for the honour to satisfy traditional supporters of the BJP and the Congress. Agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan, best known among farmers for recommending a remunerative support price by adding a 50% margin over and above the investment expenditure, has also been awarded Bharat Ratna even as the government goes all out with obstacles and repression to stop farmers from coming to Delhi to raise their demands.

The main declared purpose of the parliament session was of course the interim budget with a full budget to follow after the Lok Sabha elections. The interim budget reinforced the

declining trend in social welfare and public service expenditure and the policy of robbing the poor to reward the rich. To divert the people's attention away from the current state of misery, the finance minister presented a so-called 'white paper' on the economic mismanagement of the UPA government which exited office way back in 2014! The idea is to distract the people either with the past or with the empty claim of making India a developed country by 2047 just when the people demand answers and accountability for the present crisis.

The people of India have had enough of these false claims and empty promises. Soaring prices, falling income and vanishing jobs are the burning issues that are subjecting the overwhelming majority of Indians to tremendous economic hardship. It is reassuring to see the people stick to their demands defying the deceitful propaganda blitzkrieg of the government, the ever-escalating hatemongering, and the political betrayal by sections of leaders and parties of the opposition. The joint call for industrial and rural strike on 16 February by farmers' organisations and trade unions, the growing mobilisation of young India for quality education and secure jobs, the continuing agitation by government employees for restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, the demand for caste census and effective, expanded reservation - let us strengthen these campaigns on the ground to set the people's agenda for the 2024 elections. ■

Modi Govt's Attack on the Rights of Women

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

As we approach International Women's Day, we look back at the manner in which the rights of women have been trampled on by the Modi Government over the last 10 years.

The BJP claims that it has worked towards women empowerment but the record shows otherwise. One of the Sangh Parivar's core beliefs is that women are not equal to men and are subservient to them. In the past 10 years of the Modi regime this has manifested itself in a variety of ways – how crimes against women are dealt with in courts of law, in the treatment of women workers, in the callous attitudes to women's education.

Increase in Crimes Against Women

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report, 2023 crimes against women have increased by 4% from 2021 to 2022. The report highlighted the fact that a large proportion of crimes against women under the Indian Penal Code involved 'Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives', 'Kidnapping and Abduction of Women' and 'Rape'.

According to the ADR's National Election Watch Report, 2023, the BJP has the highest number of sitting MPs or MLAs with cases of crime against women.

This casual attitude of the Government was most obvious during the Wrestler's protests against the sexual harassment of women wrestler's by Brij Bhushan during his tenure as the President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). Not only did the Government not take any action against him, but instead detained the wrestlers. When, in a rigged election, a close associate was blatantly elected as the new president of the WFI the government did not dissolve it but kept it under suspension. Earlier this month, Brij Bhushan's son was appointed President of the Uttar Pradesh Wrestling Federation of India.

When a 19 year old Dalit woman was gang raped and killed by four dominant caste members in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, the police and administration did all it could to scuttle the investigation. This ultimately led to the acquittal of the accused. From delaying in registering the FIR to forcibly burning the victim's body despite objections by her family, the administration showed its commitment to patriarchal casteist norms.

Similarly, when online apps named "Sulli Deals" and "Bulli Deals" featured Muslim women journalists and activists as being "auctioned", the police apathy and failure to act against the perpetrators resulted in the perpetrators being released on bail a few months later with no further action being taken against them.

The video of Kuki women being paraded naked in Manipur, as Manipur burnt, revealed the terrible violence meted out to the women in Manipur. Even while it pushed everyone to recognize the gross injustices taking place in Manipur, Modi and the Union Government remained silent and failed to take any action.

The Gujarat Government, in an illegal and cruel act, granted remission to the convicts in Bilkis Bano's case, and the Union Government, by its silence on the issue, gave its tacit approval to it. This remission was ultimately set aside by the

Supreme Court.

The BJP MLA who was part of the committee granting remission said of the convicts that they were “Brahmins with good sanskar” and therefore incapable of the crime. This Brahmanical patriarchy, a core aspect of the BJP and its regime, has led to increasing crimes against women.

Attack on Women Workers

The Modi Government has carried out an all-out attack on all workers but the attack on women workers is even more severe.

The Labour Codes pose a significant threat to women workers, exacerbating the discrimination they already face. The Codes attack the right to equal remuneration, by obliterating the mandate of equal pay for equal work, and allowing for discrimination against women workers. Furthermore, the Codes permit employers to assign women to night shifts, disregarding previous safeguards. They also diminish maternity benefits by reducing wages during this crucial period and easing employer obligations regarding the provision of childcare facilities. Such provisions in the labour codes not only undermine the rights of women workers but also perpetuates gender-based disparities in the workforce.

Over 94% of women workers, especially Dalit women, form part of the unorganised workforce, and a large portion of them work as “contract workers”. Subject to the triple oppression of caste, class and gender, they are already in an extremely vulnerable position. These workers are dealt a further blow by labour Codes that solidify informal working conditions and deny them their perpetuity permanence in job, equality in wage and social security.

More than 1 crore “scheme” workers who form the backbone of several Central Government schemes that include Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, National Health Mission workers, mid-day meal cooks among others, are not even recognised as workers and are made to work without minimum wages.

Attack on the Right of Education

Despite the BJP’s rhetoric of “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao,” the reality reveals a stark assault on girls’ right to education. The BJP government while in power in Karnataka stood in the way of ensuring education for girls, by bringing in new rules that prohibited girls to come to school with the Hijab. It was reported that more than 17,000 female students were forced to skip their board examination in 2022 due to this. In perhaps one of the first steps since India’s independence, rules were brought in which would prohibit girls from the right to education.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 would result in the closure of public-funded schools and colleges in small



towns and villages. The closure of schools and colleges is going to affect girls most as their mobility is severely restricted.

Despite the significant challenges faced by women under the Modi regime, there has been a remarkable resurgence of resistance. Women have played pivotal roles in various movements, showcasing their unwavering determination. The active participation of women farmers led to the successful repeal of the contentious farm laws, while their significant presence in protests against NRC-CAA thwarted government implementation efforts. The pursuit of justice for Bilkis Bano and the solidarity demonstrated during the wrestlers’ protests underscored the resolute spirit. Women workers, including ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and Pourakarmikas, have spearheaded massive struggles, demanded their rights and opposed the anti-labour codes. These reflect the indomitable strength and resilience of women in the fight against fascism.

The BJP ideology, drawing from Manusmriti, perpetuates the notion of women’s inequality, strives to confine them to a state of subjugation and erodes the principles of equality and liberty. This fascist agenda, rooted in the imposition of Manusmriti, seeks to enforce the subordination of women.

As we near International Women’s Day, we must unite to combat the continued assault on women across various spheres. Together, we stand against this fascist onslaught, challenging the forces of patriarchy, capitalist ideals, and the entrenched caste system, to build a society founded on equality and justice. ■

2024 Polls: People Rising against the BJP's Nefarious Designs

Ahead of the crucial 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the Modi regime has been desperate to destabilise every non-BJP government and gain the maximum possible direct control over every lever of governance and administration. Another major target has been to break the ranks of the growing unity of non-BJP parties under the banner of the INDIA bloc and wean away leaders and parties to the BJP/NDA fold. The game plan succeeded in Bihar with Nitish Kumar's return to the NDA but was checkmated in Jharkhand despite the arrest of Hemant Soren. And in the Union Territory of Chandigarh the BJP's act of stealing the mayor election by getting the presiding officer to perpetrate a brazen fraud in counting backfired miserably. The Supreme Court termed it a murder of democracy and it is not difficult to guess the higher-ups who must have designed and approved this murder plot.

The government has been known to have been using central agencies like the ED, CBI and Income Tax department as political weapons to coerce a section of opposition into submission and persecute the rest. The Modi government has now started weaponising the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour. Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur sealed the deal with Nitish Kumar, Bharat Ratna for Chaudhary Charan Singh became an excuse for the RLD to cross over for INDIA to NDA. Renowned agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan was also awarded Bharat Ratna even as farmers demanding implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendations continue to



face tear gas shells, barbed wires and concrete barricades leading to the death of young protester Shubh Karan Singh and loss of vision of several farmers.

Defying this terror campaign to suppress the people and break the unity of the opposition, the people's movement is asserting itself on every front and on every burning issue. The farmers' movement has once again started gathering momentum, young India is on the road for jobs, various segments of workers and employees have intensified struggles for wage increase and restoration of old pension scheme, and opposition parties have begun firming up seat-sharing arrangements. After his

latest political somersault Nitish Kumar has become the most discredited political figure in Bihar and popular anger against the BJP-JDU reunion will propel Bihar forward in the battle to defeat the Modi regime in the coming elections. The conviction of young CPI(ML) leader Manoj Manzil and 22 other peasant and agricultural labour activists of Bhojpur on fabricated charges in the Badgaon case and the consequent disqualification of Manoj Manzil who had won from Agiaon(SC) Assembly seat securing more than 60% of the polled vote will only reinforce the fighting spirit and resolve of the oppressed and deprived millions in Bihar. ■



FREE BADGAON23

**ASSERTIONS OF DALITS AND RURAL POOR WILL REMAIN STEADFAST
DESPITE THE CONSPIRACY BY BJP BACKED FEUDAL FORCES**

On February, 13, Manoj Manzil, CPIML central committee member and MLA from Agiaon constituency in Bihar, along with 22 other comrades were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in a politically motivated murder case. In the case, 90-year-old Comrade Ramanand Prasad was also sentenced to life imprisonment. The case was filed on the eve of the 2015 Assembly elections, and Comrade Manoj had to fight the polls from within jail. He still polled more than 30,000 votes and finished a close third.

The case against Manoj Manzil and other party comrades pertains to the murder of one JP Singh in Badgaon. They were implicated in the case as part of a conspiracy by the feudal forces in an attempt to suppress the burgeoning assertion of dalits and poor in the Bhojpur region. All the comrades, implicated in this fabricated case, have been at the forefront of Bhojpur's historic people's struggle against feudal and communal terror.

The case against Badgaon-23 is part of a long-standing modus operandi by feudal and right-wing forces of unleashing repression and massacres against the poor and dalits and later implicating those who challenge these regressive forces, in fabricated cases in connivance with the police and local administration.

CPIML has filed an appeal against this verdict in Patna High Court

Killers of Comrade Satish Yadav Continue to Roam Free

In 2015, a few days before the incident of JP Singh, popular CPIML leader Comrade Satish Yadav was killed by feudal-casteist forces. Comrade Satish, from Kamariya village of Agiaon had led several struggles in the area for people's livelihood, development, and against feudal crimes.

After the killing of Comrade Satish, the feudal-casteist forces feared massive people's assertion in the Bhojpur region, and in an attempt to suppress this upsurge, Badgaon-23 comrades were implicated in the false case. Despite this ploy to shut the voices of rights and dignity for people, Comrade Manoj, along with others, steadfastly carried forward the flame of resistance lit by Martyr comrade Satish. In 2020 assembly elections in Bihar, Comrade Manoj was given a thumping mandate by the people of Agiaon he won by a margin of more than 48,000 votes. This is despite the fact that the Nitish-BJP regime arrested Manoj just a few days before the election.

And now, as soon as Chief Minister Nitish Kumar somersaulting back to the feudal-communal BJP fold, Manoj and 22 others have been convicted in the case. The thought of the presence of an honest and young dalit MLA inside the Assembly always terrified the BJP.

CPIML General Secretary Comrade

Dipankar Bhattacharya said in a press conference on 14 February that BJP backed feudal forces have consistently been conspiring in the Bhojpur region against the rural poor's movement. They have killed hundreds of people in massacres and filed false cases against CPIML leaders. This is a travesty that none of the perpetrators of innumerable massacres, taken place during the 1990s, have been brought to justice. The same feudal forces succeeded in a conspiracy which eventually led to the conviction of party MLA and agrarian workers' leader Manoj Manzil in a false and motivated case. The people of Bihar will not tolerate such injustice and give a befitting reply to the communal fascists.

He further said that the conviction against Manoj follows the pattern of Modi government suppressing every voice of opposition, MPs are being suspended in bulk numbers from the parliament, an attempt was made to conspiratorially oust Rahul Gandhi from the parliament, and Chief Ministers like Jharkhand's Hemant Soren are being targeted. The jailing of Manoj Manzil should be seen in this backdrop where democracy, dignity and rights of dalits and poor are under attack.

Comrade Dipankar further added that in today's India we need more leaders like Comrade Manoj Manzil who has always been on the frontlines of people's struggles since his student

days. This judicial massacre of assertion of dalits and poor in Bhojpur will be resisted by the people.

The CPIML has called for a widespread mass contact campaign against the jailing of 23 comrades. Thousands came to the streets in Bhojpur against the shocking judgement. On 14 February, statewide protests were organised. CPIML is conducting a weeklong campaign visiting every village in Bhojpur from 19-25 February to expose the feudal-BJP conspiracy. A statewide mass contact programme has also been taken up from 21 to 27 February with the clarion call of 'Bihar Ki Janata Ladegi, Tanashahi Haregi' [People of Bihar will Fight, Dictatorship will be Defeated].

Below are the profiles of Bagaon 23 comrades:



1. **Manoj Manzil**, 40 years-old: Manoj hails from a dalit landless agrarian labour family. From his early student days, he dedicated himself to the struggles for equality of poor and oppressed castes. He became an activist during his college days and started organising people in villages of Bhojpur. He organised and led several historic struggles in the region, including the Sadak Par School movement for education and better schools and Bhojpur's 'Shaheen Bagh' Movement against CAA-NRC. Manoj Manzil is also the Bihar President of All India Agricultural Labour Association (AIARLA), the biggest organisation of rural

workers in Bihar with more than two million members. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the inhuman lockdown imposed by the Modi government, Manoj Manzil, along with the local party structure, worked tirelessly to provide relief and support to the affected families and workers. For several days and nights, he and other comrades camped inside the district hospital in Ara, actively arranging for treatment, medicines, oxygen and ambulances whenever and wherever required. Manoj was always just a phone call away for anyone who wanted help or support, whether it was a road accident or sickness. The dedicated and unwavering commitment for the rights of dalits and poor people were the reasons behind his immense popularity.



2. **Gabbar Chaudhary**: 40-year-old from Badgaon, he is a CPIML branch committee member and a brick kiln worker. He hails from Bind Caste. His wife Baby Devi, 35, works as a labourer. They have 5 children, most of them going to school.
3. **Nand Kumar Chaudhary**, 55 year old from Badgaon, is a brick kiln worker and CPIML Panchayat committee member. His brother is also convicted in this case. His wife Daulato Devi, 52, is an ex-ward member of village panchayat. He has 7 children. This landless family



has a house built under the Indira Awas Yojana. He also comes from the Bind caste.



4. **Rohit Chaudhary**, 46 years old: Lives in Mahavir Ganj in Arwal district. He left his village in Badgaon 30 years ago. He was not in Badgaon at the time of the JP Singh incident. A casual labourer, he hails from Bind caste.



5. **Triloki Ram**, 55 years old: He is CPIML supporter, who hails from Badgaon and earns his livelihood as a construction worker. His wife Tetri Devi, 56 also works as labourer. This landless family has a pucca house. His father Minik Ram, 80 and mother Pachratani Devi, 78 are suffering from chronic ailments. Four members of this family were also targeted by upper caste feudals in the past. He hails from Chamar caste.
6. **Bharat Ram**, 50 years old: He hails from Badgaon and is a law graduate but works as migrant



worker. He is a CPIML supporter. He has two sons. He is the brother of Triloki Ram, who was also made an accused in this case.



- 7. Cheena Ram**, 60 years old: He hails from Badgaon village and is a graduate. He is a block committee member of CPIML and in the past contested in elections for village mukhiya and for Sarpanch. He is a dedicated activist of CPIML for a long time and had been victimised and jailed earlier too for his activism. He could not continue his studies after graduation because of his family constraints, and was forced to work as a migrant worker to support his family. His wife Savitri, 55 is a casual worker, also a party member and once contested for Mukhiya election. His son's marriage is fixed in the coming month. The family is in a dire financial state. He hails from Chamar caste.



- 8. Ramadhar Chaudhary**, 65 years old: He is CPIML branch

committee member, who hails from Badgaon and works as an agrarian labourer. His wife Phulpati Devi, 60 also works as a labourer. He had contested in the Panchayat Samiti election. Hails from Bind caste.



- 9. Ravindra Chaudhary**, 43 years old: He hails from Badgaon and comes from a landless family. His wife and two sons are also daily wage labourers. Hails from Bind caste.



- 10. Prem Ram**, 52 years old: He is a member of the party's Panchayat committee and hails from Badgaon. His wife Vida Devi and three sons also work as casual labourers and are landless. He was targeted by feudals earlier as well and was jailed for resisting the oppression. The feudal forces are threatening to demolish his house. He hails from Chamar caste.



- 11. Shiv Bali Chaudhary**, 60 years old: He hails from Badgaon

village. He and his wife Prabhavati Devi, 52, and their three sons are agrarian workers. They are landless.



- 12. Tanman Chaudhary**, 59 years old: A member of the party's Panchayat committee member, he hails from Badgaon village. He, his wife and four sons are agrarian workers and live on government land in a house built under Awas Yojana. He hails from Bind caste.



- 13. Ramanand Prasad**, 90 year old: He hails from Badgaon and is a CPIML member since the 1980s and was a Sarpanch until 2000 and then again in 2016-2021. He comes from a marginal farmer family with 7 bighas of land and had a pucca house located amidst feudal elements who had displaced him from his house and now lives on government land. He is extremely ill and unable to walk. His wife Suvachan Devi, 80, also suffering from old age ailments and bedridden. His one son died in the Covid-19 pandemic, and his two other sons are migrant workers. He hails from Kahar caste.

- 14. Manoj Chaudhary**, 45 years old: He hails from Badgaon. He is an agrarian worker who lives on a



homestead land. His wife Fula Devi, 40, also works as agrarian labour. He hails from Bind caste.



- 15. Baban Chaudhary**, 45 years old: An agrarian labourer from Badgaon has a pucca house on homestead land. Hails from Bind caste.



- 16. Pawan Chaudhary**, 40 Years old: His father works as a driver and share-cropper and his mother is an agrarian labourer, also owns 1 bigha of agricultural land and a house. He hails from Bind caste and is from Badgaon.



- 17. Prabhu Chaudhary**, 75 years old: He is CPIML member

since 1983 and is a member of panchayat committee and comes from Badgaon village. A landless labourer lives in a hut on government land. He had been jailed five times in the past for participating in people's struggles. He hails from Bind caste.



- 18. Rambali Chaudhary**, 56 years old: A CPIML sympathiser from Badgaon, works as an agrarian labourer and sharecropper. His wife Phoolmato Devi is a casual worker. He is the brother of Pawan Chaudhary, who was also convicted in this case. He comes from the Bind caste.



- 19. Sarvesh Chaudhary**, 35 years old: A CPIML member, he is a daily wage labourer and a sharecropper. He has a house under Indira Awas Yojana on homestead land. His two sons are school going. He hails from Bind caste.



- 20. Jai Kumar Yadav**, 47 years old: He is CPIML block committee

member from Khedi village in Bhojpur. He was elected as Mukhiya in the past.



- 21. Nandu Yadav**, 35 years old: He is a member of CPIML and hails from Khedi village. He is the brother of Jai Kumar Yadav, who is also convicted in this case.

- 22. Chandradhan Rai**, 65 years old: He has been associated with party for long time and hails from Kurmi Chak village. He is a block committee member and was elected for Panchayat Samiti in the past. He had been jailed many times for participating in peoples' struggles. He hails from Kurmi caste.

- 23. Guddu Chaudhary**: 25-year-old resident of Badgaon village in Bhojpur graduated from Jagjivan Ram College Ara in 2017. A supporter of CPIML, he works as a labourer and has two children. His parents are rural workers, who occasionally rent small agricultural land tracts for share-cropping. He was in Ara town at the time of the incident for which he has been convicted. He hails from Bind Caste. ■

- **Release Manoj Manzil and 22 others!**
- **Shame on the NDA government in Bihar!**
- **Stop persecuting Dalit- Bahujan leaders!**

Despite Nitish Kumar's Betrayal Bihar Will Play a Pivotal Role in the Battle to Save India from the Disastrous Modi Rule

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Nitish Kumar has switched sides yet again. An arrogant BJP which was claiming to have shut its doors for ever for Nitish Kumar has again embraced him as Chief Minister of NDA. Nitish Kumar, who had vowed to prefer death to again joining hands with the BJP, has reneged on his vow to return to the BJP's fold. Ahead of the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, the BJP was desperate to grab power back in Bihar and Nitish Kumar has offered himself to be used as a pawn for this BJP operation. The BJP hopes to have turned the tables on INDIA by weaning Nitish Kumar away from the opposition camp. But more than anything else, the BJP's desperation shows its weakness and sense of insecurity about facing the combined might of the opposition in Bihar. The memories of 2015 Assembly elections when the BJP tally had dropped to 53 seats in the face of a combined opposition must still be haunting the party.

Speculations are rife as to what prompted Nitish Kumar to switch sides yet again. In the terrain of pragmatic politics Nitish Kumar is known as a great survivor, even greater than the late Ram Vilas Paswan who had left the NDA camp after the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat and returned to the BJP's fold after a decade's association with the Congress-led UPA. Nitish Kumar remained a long-standing ally of the BJP till 2013 when the BJP started projecting Narendra Modi as its main national leader, went back to NDA in 2017 after winning the 2015 Assembly elections with RJD and Congress and running the government with Tejaswi Yadav as Deputy CM. In August 2022 Nitish Kumar once again parted ways

with the BJP only to return to the NDA camp now after seventeen months.

Ram Vilas Paswan is widely remembered with the epithet of "Mausam Vigyani" (weather scientist) and Nitish Kumar is now better known as "Paltu Ram" (somersault expert) or "Kursi Kumar" (throne clinger). But was Nitish Kumar feeling endangered as CM of the Mahagathbandhan government that he had to cross over to secure his position? Facts are clearly to the contrary. It was to counter the growing pressure from the BJP that he had left the NDA in the first place and if anything he will be facing even greater pressure now after returning to the NDA camp. It also does not make sense to attribute his desertion to his

not being made convener of the INDIA coalition. It is one thing to criticise the INDIA coalition or its constituents to improve the cohesion and conduct of the coalition and completely another to desert it and join hands with the prime adversary of the coalition.

A self-styled socialist leader who remains a steadfast ally of the BJP even after the Gujarat carnage and who rejoins the BJP camp in the Modi era twice before successive Lok Sabha elections should hardly leave us in any doubt about his basic political orientation. In spite of his dubious track record the Mahagathbandhan in Bihar and the INDIA coalition on the national level treated Nitish Kumar with due respect as Bihar CM and an important ally in the all-India context. Yet Nitish Kumar chose to ditch the INDIA coalition just before the crucial 2024 elections when the whole country was looking to Bihar for a broad unity among political forces in defence of democracy, federalism, social justice

CPIML Leader Attacked in Siwan by BJP backed Feudal Forces

Since the BJP grabbed power in Bihar, the feudal forces have unleashed a reign of terror over dalits and poor in the state. On 10 February, a dominant feudal criminal, Dhan Kumar Singh burnt down a stack of straw of Ramesh Ram because he refused to sell it at prices much less than market rates. This happened in Savan Vighra village of Daraunda block in Siwan district.

Dhankumar Singh then brutally assaulted Ramesh and his family members, including women members. Next day, CPIML leader Jaishankar Pandit and Ramayan Yadav went to meet Ramesh and inquired into the incident. During this, Dhankumar Singh reached the

spot and fired indiscriminately.

Comrade Jaishankar Pandit was shot in the leg. Sita Devi, sister of Ramesh Ram and her son Manu Kumar Ram were also injured in the firing. Manu was shot in the stomach. Ramesh Ram's wife, two daughters and mother were badly beaten up and harassed by the attackers. All the injured are admitted to PMCH in Patna and undergoing treatment.

CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya and Politburo member Dharendra Jha visited Comrade Jaishankar and other injured at PMCH on February 12 to take stock of the situation. The injured comrades were steadfast and said that the attack will not deter people's resistance to BJP backed feudal forces.

The CPIML has urged the state authorities to take action and ensure the arrest of all attackers immediately. ■



and communal harmony.

Nitish Kumar's desertion therefore can only be seen as an act of great betrayal to the cause of democracy and social justice. What made this betrayal most unscrupulous was the occasion chosen for executing this somersault - the birth centenary of Jannayak Karpoori Thakur and the 74th anniversary of the Indian Republic. Nitish Kumar presents himself as the self-styled successor of Karpoori Thakur, but the two trajectories could not be more contrasting. In his time Karpoori Thakur had to face the most virulent opposition of Bihar's feudal-communal camp, the RSS and Jan Sangh in particular for his pioneering role in implementing OBC reservation which also included backward castes within the Muslim community. His two stints as Bihar CM were extremely short-lived and he spent most of his political life as an opposition leader and staunchly advocated communist-socialist unity in post-Emergency Bihar, especially with the rise of the revolutionary movement of the rural poor under the leadership of the CPI(ML).

As far as the BJP's game plan is concerned, it is well known that the party is desperate to have direct political control in all major states.

Non-BJP governments are a complete anathema to the Modi regime. After toppling the Maha Vikas Aghadi government of Maharashtra and stripping the Delhi government of all its powers, its eyes have clearly been on the eastern region states of West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand. Without losing a moment after recapturing power in Patna the Modi regime has intensified the ED assault on Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and Tejaswi Yadav and Hemant Soren in Jharkhand.

The other major factor behind the BJP-orchestrated coup in Bihar is the Sangh brigade's fear of Bihar inspiring a countrywide popular assertion for democracy and social and economic justice. The caste census and socio-economic survey in Bihar aroused countrywide interest and became a pivotal template for the demand for an all-India caste census and increased reservation. Within Bihar the focus had also turned to the massive scale of poverty, the urgency of adoption of poverty-alleviation measures and provision of government jobs and a secure future for Bihar's youth. The sizable scale of recruitment of teachers raised the hope of rapid filling up of vacancies in different departments. The BJP was desperate to abort this

agenda and divert people's attention away from this agenda of people's rights and welfare to the Sangh's agenda of hate-filled communal polarisation.

We must remember that while the NDA had managed to sweep the polls in 2019, within a few months the opposition succeeded in mounting an effective challenge in the Assembly elections. The entry of the CPI(ML) in Bihar's grand alliance broadened and strengthened the social unity and political assertion of Bihar's oppressed and deprived millions and the NDA could retain power with only a very narrow majority. The return of Nitish Kumar has only exposed the weakness of the BJP behind its aggressive rhetoric and is bound to increase tension within the NDA camp while the Mahagathbandhan can now march ahead with greater cohesion, determination and energy. The hope and dynamism generated in the wake of the 2020 Assembly elections and the recent caste count, socio-economic survey and recruitment of teachers must be harnessed and the mass anger against the BJP's coup and Nitish Kumar's betrayal must be channelised towards a stronger assertion of the INDIA coalition in Bihar in the coming elections. ■

Protest against Gangrape and Murder of Dalit Woman in Navgachhia

On the morning of 16 February 2024, a poor mahadalit woman proceeded to deliver milk in the Brahmin Tola, as per her daily routine. Upon her husband's return from work in the afternoon, he discovered that she had not returned. He, along with other relatives, searched for her at the Karelal Thakur house in Brahmin Tola, where the deceased had gone to deliver milk. However, the house owner scolded them and shoed them away. The 39 years old victim was from Gangotri caste, an extremely backward community. Her husband runs an e-rickshaw. They have 4 daughters and 2 sons.

The woman's family filed a missing complaint with the Rangra police station, but the officials took no action and told the relatives to go to the temple and worship for her return.

The husband raised the possibility that Karelal Thakur might have done something to his wife during the police visit to the residence on February 17. But instead of searching for the missing women, the police told the family they would be sued if she didn't come back.

Family members found the woman's dead body after a relentless search on the morning of 18 February in a naked state at Kailu Nishad's cattle-shed. She was gang-raped before being murdered. Some of the victim's personal belongings including the milk can were recovered from Karelal Thakur's house. All the accused come from the Brahmin community, one of whom is a Panchayat Samiti member. The names are – Karelal Thakur, Saurabh Thakur, Raja Thakur, Suman Thakur and Jimmy alias Pradeep Thakur.

Immediately after the body was found, a large number of people protested against the lack of action by police in the case. As per the reports, the police fired 12 rounds of bullets on the protesting people.

On February 19, a fact-finding team comprising Bindeshwari Mandal, CPIML District Secretary of Bhagalpur, Navgachhia Block Secretary Ramdev Singh, RYA activist Gaurishankar Rai, AIPWA District Secretary Renu Devi, Kanchan Devi and Meena Devi visited the spot and met the family members of the victim. They also spoke to villagers about the incident.

CPIML demanded that all the criminals should be immediately arrested and action should be taken against erring and negligent police officials. The district administration must also provide compensation to the victim's family members. On February 20, a protest march was taken out by CPIML in Bhagalpur against this incident and police-feudal nexus. ■

CPIML Memorandum to the Election Commission

A CPIML delegation led by polit bureau member and Bihar State Secretary Kunal submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission in Patna on February 20 with suggestions to ensure voting rights of poor and dalits in those constituencies of Bihar where feudal casteist forces are known to prevent oppressed communities from exercising their voting rights.

Comrade Kunal said that according to ECI's own report, there are many booths where voting percentage used to be below the national average. In districts like Ara, Jahanabad, Pataliputra, Karakat and Siwan this trend is more prominent because of still prevailing feudal domination over dalits, poor, oppressed, minorities and women voters. These are the regions where the poor have made sacrifices to preserve their right to vote in the past, too.

The CPIML has demanded from the ECI to make polling booths inside the tolas and localities of dalits and poor in the coming Lok Sabha elections. In the absence of any government building inside dalit localities, ECI must arrange for mobile booths so that they can exercise their voting right without fear. All dalit and poor voters must be given polling booths at their tolas.

The party delegation also apprised ECI of the deletion of names from the voters' lists. Many names from dalit, MBC and backward communities are missing after the revision of electoral rolls. This is quite astonishing that the name of CPIML politburo member and ex-MLA Rajaram Singh has been deleted from the voter list without citing any reason. The party has demanded to include all deleted names in the electoral rolls without delay.

The CPIML reiterated the party's stand that elections should be conducted with paper ballots and EVMs be removed. EVMs are increasingly coming under doubts and the ECI has failed to clear those suspicions. If EVMs are used in the forthcoming elections, then 100 percent VVPAT counting must be allowed to ensure the credibility and impartiality of the entire election process. CPIML has also demanded to decrease the expenditure limit for candidates and parties both, this is much needed to counter the increasing domination of muscle and money power on the country's electoral democracy. ■

Steadfast Farmers' Movement against an Arrogant Regime

Today, anyone who travels from Punjab to Delhi via the state of Haryana will witness the arrogance of power. From iron spikes and concertina wires to large concrete barriers and hundreds of police-paramilitary personnel armed with every weapon in their arsenal are stationed along the entire stretch just to stop the Delhi march of unarmed farmers, who are demanding fulfillment of Modi government's promises made to SKM. For the first time in the country's history, armed drones are being used to drop tear gas shells on protesting farmers.

And if you wish to tweet or post these structures of arrogance and repression on social media, you can't! The internet has been suspended in several districts of Haryana and Punjab which, since February 12. Even if you are able to post, it is likely that you will join the group of 177 (and increasing) social media accounts that have been blocked by the Indian government.

In fact, these farmers are asking the Union government to fulfil its own promise made in 2021. During the historic farmers' movement in 2020-21 led by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and other farmers organizations, the Modi government had promised to meet their four key demands. The government, in an agreement with the farmers, had promised to address the demands of legal guarantee for MSP; withdrawal of the draft Electricity Amendments Bill, withdrawal of criminal cases against farmers and compensation for the families of farmers who died during the year-long protest.

However, since then, the farmers have only experienced betrayal. Against this, in tandem with the working



class have decided to embark on countrywide resistance actions.

February 16 Strike

Against the Modi regime's lies, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha along with the Central trade unions called for a countrywide rural and sectoral strike on 16 February. The Bandh was enforced in all states, including in urban and rural areas. In Delhi, the strikes were observed in all industrial clusters and a central protest program was organised at Jantar Mantar, near the Parliament Street.

In Punjab and Haryana, the strike action received widespread public support, with large parts of the states witnessing complete shutdown.

In Bihar AIKM, AIARLA and AICCTU along with other organisations organised protest marches and sit-ins in several district and block headquarters.

In Odisha, the rural bandh observed across the state. All India Kisan Mahasabha, AICCTU, and AIARLA participated in Puri, Rayagada, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Koraput, Khurda, Nygarh, Balangir, Sonapur and Sundargarh. In Andhra Pradesh,

hundreds of workers from various unions and sectors participated in the massive rally in Vijayawada. Workers in Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu organised a Rasta Roko with AICCTU banner.

The scheme workers, government employees and railway workers across the country joined the strike and expressed their unwavering solidarity with the farmers' movements.

Delhi Chalo Call

Another group of farmers and farm labourers, under the banner of SKM (non-political), gave a separate call of Delhi Chalo (March to Delhi) on 13 February. This was stopped at the Punjab-Haryana border and met with severe repression by Haryana police and paramilitary forces deployed by the centre. These farmers are camping at Shambhu and Khanauli borders just outside Haryana, braving a continuous barrage of tear gas shells, rubber bullets, water cannons and even pellet guns.

On February 21, a 24-year-old youth, Shubharan Singh, was killed in the police action at Khanauli border. Three farmers have lost their vision

in due to pellet firing by the forces, and two elderly farmers died during the protest.

The Haryana police and paramilitary have even attacked and damaged vehicles of those farmers and leaders who visited the protest site to express solidarity. Hundreds of farmers and youth have been injured until now, but farmers are determined to march to Delhi in the struggle for their demands.

On February 23, CPIML and AIKM organised meeting to pay tributes to Shubharan Singh and other martyred farmers at Bihar's Daudnagar. Condemning the Modi regime's repression on farmers, the people who joined the condolence meeting resolved to oust the anti-people regime in the up-coming Lok Sabha elections.

Modi Regime's Dillydallying

Amid the renewed push by farmers demanding the fulfilment of the promises, the Union Government proposed a five-year guarantee of purchase of farm produce for selected five crops, besides wheat and paddy. The farmers have unanimously rejected this proposal as a ploy for pushing 'contract farming' under the disguise of facilitating crop diversification. This offer to the farmers demanding minimum support price (MSP) for all crops and to all farmers, exposes BJP government's dishonesty as well as insensitivity towards the plight of the country's farming and rural people. Farmers' morale remains in high spirit despite brutal tactics used against them and are enthusiastically coming forward to join the protest to teach Modi a lesson and to force the government to implement a legal guarantee on MSP on agricultural produce, loan waiver and other demands.

The SKM condemned the brutal repression on farmers and 'dictatorial

mindset of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi' and gave the call to organise peaceful demonstrations, public meetings, torchlight processions in the Constituencies of MP's of BJP and other ruling NDA parties. The SKM firmly rejected the proposal of a five-year contract with farmers to procure 5 crops, namely Maize, Cotton, Arhar/Tur, Masoor and Urad and reiterated the demand of MSP with C2+50% formula as recommended by the National Farmers Commission in 2006. SKM's other major demands are loan waiver, no privatisation of electricity, a comprehensive crop insurance scheme under the public sector, Rs.10000 monthly pension to farmers above 60 years of age, dismissal from ministership and prosecution of Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni, the main conspirator of Lakhimpur Kheri massacre of farmers. The 13-month-long farmers' movement of in 2020-21 had forced the Narendra Modi government to withdraw anti-farmer farm laws and the Electricity Amendment Act that was introduced by the regime to pave way for complete corporatisation of Indian agriculture. While withdrawing these Acts, the government had also agreed to address the other demands of the movement and constituted a committee for the implementation of the legal guarantee for procurement of 23 crops at MSP rates. Instead of addressing the matter with seriousness, the committee established by the government remained merely an eyewash, with no tangible progress or discussion regarding the demand for legal guarantees for MSP. Other agreed upon demands have had the same fate. With the current phase of farmers' struggle the government has, besides unprecedented state violence, once again unleashed an intense vile propaganda with BJP troll machinery spreading lies and many ruling party leaders and self-

styled experts trying to build a false narrative through godi media about MSP being impractical and even harmful for farmers' welfare. On the contrary, a guaranteed legal MSP policy regime is very much possible, which in turn helps strengthen the rural economy and country's food security [as explained in the box].

There is no doubt that the BJP government intends to protect cronyism and corporate control over the agriculture sector. Despite, the withdrawal of three farm laws under the pressure from the farmers' movement of 2021, the BJP regime continues to employ backdoor tactics in favour of the entry of corporations in the agricultural sector. This is the reason behind the government lacking political will power for bargaining in WTO for MSP and other subsidies. Farmers are fighting for inclusion of 94 percent of farmers who are out of the MSP regime.

The Central trade unions and farmers organisations have resolved to continue and intensify the agitations in the coming days. The unions noted that the repression and violence have become defining characteristics of the ruling party having lost the confidence of people as well as realizing that they have lost the ground as because they know that they failed to deliver results in every promise they made to various sections of Indian masses. The toiling masses will thwart the diversionary and divisive designs of the BJP-RSS and guarantee the ouster of the disastrous Modi Gov in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

What is happening today with the farmers in India clearly reflects this intent of the government that is completely leaning in favour of the corporates.

The farmers are not begging, they're asking for their due. ■

Why Does the Modi Government Not Want a Legally Guaranteed MSP for Farmers?

Will MSP be too burdensome for the state exchequer? The clear answer is No.

It is being propagated that the government has to spend an extra sum of at least 10-16 lakh crores each year to procure MSP crops at declared prices. This is a misleading argument that hides the fact that food grains procured are to be sold in the market at a certain price; hence it is only the difference between the cost of procurement at MSP and the prevailing market prices of the particular farm produce in question. The market analysis wing of CRISIL has recently calculated this difference between MSP prices and current mandi [agriculture market] prices for 16 crops for the year 2023 to be around Rs. 21,000 crores only. In another estimate made in 2016 for 23 crops, this amount was around 47,000 crores.

Now compare denial of minimum support price and enacting a law to guarantee the same with the government's gleeful submission to the National Company Law Tribunal's (NCLT) decision in December 2023 to waive off a whopping Rs. 46795.1 crores from Anil Ambani's long pending debt to various public sector banks and other financial institutions. This was only made possible because the Modi government had passed a law, 'Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code' in 2016. Ever since this law was brought in, several lakh crores of public sector banks' money, which mostly is common citizens' hard-earned earnings, has been wiped off by corporates through NCLT 'settlements,' which are now commonly known as haircuts. Until 2019, Rs. 2,40,932.58 crores were waived in settlements for nearly 250 companies that includes Patanjali owned Ruchi Soya and Jindal owned

Bhushan Steel. So far NCLT has settled or given resolution plans in nearly 2500 cases where total haircuts amount to substantial money in lakhs of crores. The Modi government has actually given a legal guarantee to corporates of running away with public money, but does not want to give farmers a minimum price, even though MSP for all will require just a little fraction of the huge amount the government has waived for the corporates.

Therefore, it is a blatant lie that providing legal guarantee for MSP will completely drain the government exchequer. Besides, banks have also written off lakhs of crores of rupees marked as NPAs during the past ten years, while farmers' indebtedness has increased in the same period. Today, every farmer is burdened with an average debt amount of Rs. 1 lakh over her/his head and is in dire need of minimum price support for her/his farm produce. The idea of MSP is as old as India's quest for remunerative agriculture and food sovereignty. The LK Jha committee had recommended a policy of minimum support price for farmers in 1960 which was implemented first time in 1966 for the wheat crop. The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) each year revises MSP for 23 crops, but there is no law to guarantee its implementation and more than 85% of the agricultural produce goes at rates much lower than MSP to private buyers and middlemen who have a monopoly over the market in mandis. The government procures 20-25% of food grains mainly wheat and paddy at MSP rates for public distribution system, NFSA and buffer stock to be sold in open market during lean season to balance the market prices. This procurement is primarily meant to provide subsidised food grains for the poor under the food security act,

but it also controls prices in the open market to some extent.

A legally MSP regime will not only make agriculture a remunerative profession where more than half of the country's population earns a livelihood, but also give the rural economy a boost. This can help ease grave unemployment in villages, and stop the forced migration in search for work and sustenance. Today, millions are forced to leave their villages and work under semi-slave conditions in other states and urban areas. The MSP regime will also enhance food sovereignty.

Developed countries give their farmers huge subsidies, but they do not want agriculture subsidies in the developing world. A farmer in the US receives an average subsidy that approximately equals 40 lakh Indian rupees, and a farmer in India gets an average amount around Rs. 25000 as subsidy annually. In all developed countries, farming is highly subsidised, but they want the removal of subsidies in countries like India. The WTO provides a legal framework for this unequal treatment, which mandates for the maximum subsidy at 10 percent of the total value of production of that crop. And, the value of production is calculated at 1986 prices instead of current market prices, which is completely unjustified. MSP for all crops will also pave the way for much-needed crop diversification, as farmers won't have to depend on wheat and paddy in hope of a government procurement.

The current Prime Minister Modi in a statement in 2014, just before his party rose to power, had said "why should our farmers not get the right price? Farmers are not begging, they worked hard for it & should get good prices."

So, what changed now? Clearly, the Modi's government's dillydallying regarding MSP guarantee has nothing to do with the budgetary restrictions or fiscal concerns, it is about the intent. ■

Who Wants the Subsidy Dead?

▲ SAI

Today, the tractor, a vital tool for the farmer, has become an anti-national vehicle. Police in Haryana and Delhi are making every effort to stop farmers on tractors from entering Delhi. These very tractors and farmers' toil are responsible for our daily food, vegetables, and fruits. However, when the time came for listening to the grievances of farmers, the Modi regime greeted them with violence and repression.

Farmers' demand is to make Modi government fulfil its assurance of making Minimum Support Price (MSP) a legal right. Following farmers protests, the three farm laws which Modi government introduced in 2020 and later revoked, one of the promises that was made was to legalise MSP. Farmers argue, the way every product in market has a maximum retail price (MRP), why cannot crop produced by farmers have an MSP? Currently, the Government of India announces MSPs for 23 crops and declaration of MSP does not mean, government is going to procure for surety.

Then why can't Modi government ensure MSP for all crops and legalise the same for ensuring private players? The answer lies in the Agreement on Agriculture and the World Trade Organisation.

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) introduced in World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995 prohibits subsidies and duties on the pretext that they distort the market. AoA-WTO came with the process of globalization that introduced measures of Liberalisation and Privatisation across the world. The idea behind the subsidy reduction was to open the markets of all nations to products produced in other countries.

When the negotiations started for



Figure 1: In WTO, subsidies in general are identified by "boxes."

the AoA, India, like other developing countries, despite knowing the consequences of acceding to the trade regime, willingly went ahead and made farmers suffer the consequences of it. India's position during this negotiation broadly spoke about protecting the farmers and alleviating the poverty. But, however, the developed countries started off with a greater buffer level. Not only were they economically well-placed, but also they were politically strong.

There was reluctance from developed countries to make any concessions regarding their agriculture sector because it was one of the highly protected markets. This is an irony as it is the same countries who preach about protective measures to be dismantled in developing countries.

Now, it is in this context that we have to understand the reduction of state support in Agriculture.

In the early 90s, the developed countries had the financial wherewithal to sustain reduction of state support in one kind of subsidy, to replace them with another kind of subsidy [non-distorting as per WTO]. For example, in the case of de-coupled direct income support for farmers and other measures that became part of the green box (no restriction in subsidy limit; see Figure 1) meant that developed countries could comfortably withdraw

themselves from trade distorting market mechanisms in the domestic market like minimum support price, universal subsidies. In comparison to the developing countries, they had less number of farmers and people depending on the farming sector.

Understanding this becomes essential in how our agriculture economy suffered the most when the government withdrew from most of the state-support it provided – fertilizer, pesticide, infrastructure for irrigation, procuring from farmers, providing minimum support price, and so on. This situation meant that the vulnerable farmers in India were competing with large-scale farms from developed country.

Realising the cost that India has paid for getting integrated into the WTO, and the rising farmer suicides, India along with other developed countries in late 2000s, were arguing for greater ability for food security programmes. The National Food Security Act, 2013 in India was a product of this realization.

However, this meant India had to breach the 10% de-minimis [minimal amounts of domestic support that are allowed even though they distort trade] subsidy regime for public procurement. This resulted in India and other developing countries negotiating for a permanent "peace clause" in WTO for food security programmes. This means any WTO

member cannot challenge or claim damages if countries like India breach its subsidy limit for public food procurement for the food security programme.

In 2013, coming under the pressure of developing countries, the developed countries agreed to a temporary “peace clause”. However, the final text remained ambiguous. This meant that many developed countries who were not happy with India’s subsidy regime and food security programme started raising questions in the WTO, leading to a situation where the peace clause became ineffective.

India and other developing countries are negotiating to get a permanent peace clause notified. On the other hand, the developed countries are doing everything in their capacity to stall the process and deny developing countries the policy to protect their farmers and people.

Having lost the state support, facing increased input prices and falling market prices for products, the farmers are facing severe losses and indebtedness.

The clause of trade distorting and non-distorting subsidies in AoA is the product of global attempt by multinational corporations to capture the agricultural sector in Third World countries in the name of globalisation. Today, the majority of farmers in the developing world and also, from the developed countries are under constant threat due to the push by neoliberal forces to turn the tillers into corporate slaves. This, corporatization of agriculture, is the very basis for the ongoing destruction of state support for farming, which has resulted in a lack of food security and livelihood for millions of people across the globe. ■

Modi Government’s White Paper on Indian Economy

▲ PRASENJIT BOSE

The “White Paper on the Indian Economy” presented by the Union Finance Minister in parliament on February 8, has alleged that the previous UPA government had left behind a “deeply damaged economy” marred by “governance, economic and fiscal crises” in 2014. The paper claims that the Modi government has “turned around” and “rebuilt” the economy from its foundations in the past ten years. The 55 pages document, however, mentions the word “inflation” thirty four times, while the words “jobs” and “employment” are mentioned only twice and “unemployment” never at all; which exposes the skewness of its analysis.

Public Finances

The true picture of public finances and macroeconomic performance under the UPA and NDA regimes emerges quite plainly from the official data provided by the union budget documents, ministry of statistics and the central bank. Public finance data for the four governments in the past twenty years does not reflect any discernible trend towards gradual deterioration of fiscal indicators in the first ten years and continuous improvement in the last ten.

Rather, average annual total expenditure, along with that of revenue and capital expenditure (capex), shows a decline as a percent of GDP under the NDA-I government from the levels attained under the UPA regime. It was with the fiscal expansion of the post-pandemic period, that the NDA-II government’s total spending rose significantly.

The NDA-I government had reduced expenditures relative to GDP on most major heads compared to the UPA regime, including capex, subsidies, defence, education and rural development. NDA-II increased the outlays on those heads significantly vis-a-vis NDA-I. However, the expenditure record of the NDA-II government vis-a-vis the UPA era remains mixed; outlays on capex, food subsidy, agriculture, urban and rural development improved, while outlays on education, defence and subsidies on fuel and fertiliser fell, as per cent of GDP. Health expenditure as a share of GDP witnessed no change at all between UPA and NDA rule, despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the revenue front, gross tax revenues in GDP showed minor improvement during the NDA rule compared to UPA’s, but non-tax revenues deteriorated. Overall there was a decline in Centre’s revenue receipts as a share of GDP, partly due to the increase in the State’s share in central taxes following the implementation of the fourteenth Finance Commission recommendations.

NDA’s revenue mobilisation strategy revolved around increasing indirect tax collections on one hand, through GST rollout and levying high excise duties on petroleum-products, and expanding the income tax base on the other. Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) data show that the number of individual income taxpayers with positive tax payment increased from 1.25 crore in 2012-13 (assessment year) to 2.08 crore in 2021-22 (assessment year). The average tax paid per individual income tax payer more than doubled from Rs. 91200 to Rs. 2.03 lakh in 2021-22. This raised income tax revenues from the UPA years’ annual average of around 2% of GDP to 2.3% under NDA-I and 2.9% during NDA-II.

In sharp contrast, however, corporate tax collections fell as a share of GDP, from

the UPA era average of 3.5% of GDP to 3.3% under NDA-I and further to 2.8% under NDA-II. Aggregate income tax collections are projected to surpass corporate tax collections by over Rs. 1.13 lakh crore in 2024-25.

CBDT data show the number of companies paying positive taxes rising from 3.45 lakh in 2012-13 (assessment year) to 4.57 lakh in 2021-22 (assessment year). Yet, data from the "Statement on Revenue Impact of Tax Incentives under the Central Tax System", annexed with the Receipt Budgets, show that the effective corporate tax rate, which inclusive of the dividend distribution tax had risen from 24.2% in 2012-13 to 30.4% in 2018-19, had fallen sharply to 22.2% in 2020-21.

The withdrawal of the dividend distribution tax and sharp reduction in the corporate tax rate through the new tax regime introduced in 2019-20, have led to massive revenue losses under the NDA-II government, whose estimates the government has suppressed till date. Such a revenue mobilisation strategy, while transferring income from the poor (through enhanced indirect taxes) and middle classes (through income taxes) to the profit-making corporate sector, besides exacerbating income inequality, has also failed to generate adequate revenues at a time when public expenditure was being enhanced under NDA-II, following the onset of the pandemic and recession.

As a result, the revenue deficit has eventually bloated to an average of 4.3% of GDP under NDA-II and the fiscal deficit averaging at 6.6%, raising the central government's debt from 52% of GDP at the end of UPA rule and around 50% under NDA-I to the current level of 58%. Annual interest expenditure has also risen from the low of 3.0% earlier to 3.6% of GDP in the current period. That is why there were major cutbacks on capex, subsidies and welfare expenditure in

the interim budget.

It is also noteworthy, that despite the enhanced level of resources transferred to the States in the past ten years, combined debt of the State Governments have grown faster than that of the centre under NDA rule than the UPA era. This underlines the inadequacy of current level of fiscal transfers to the States, given their expanding expenditure commitments.

Economic Performance

Official data on the real economy under the NDA regime has been criticised from several quarters for overestimating its own macroeconomic performance and undervaluing that of the UPA regime. Even then, the simple truth which is evident from the official data is that on average, real GDP growth was at least one percentage point higher during the UPA decade than that of the NDA.

Not only did the deep slump following the pandemic and lockdown cause major disruption during NDA-II, but slowdown in the economy was already evident under NDA-I after the successive policy shocks of demonetisation and GST rollout. The UPA era had witnessed the global financial crisis and consequent worldwide recession during 2007-09, which was also a major external shock. The government's white paper has omitted any mention of that global crisis or the 2016 demonetisation episode.

Gross value added (GVA) growth in basic prices reflects the same trend as real GDP, with the average growth rate first rising during UPA I, then falling during UPA II, rising again in the NDA I period and then falling sharply during NDA II. Most importantly, the ten years of NDA rule could not provide any break with the sectoral pattern of growth witnessed during the UPA era. Agricultural growth remained way below the overall GVA growth rate, with its share in overall GVA

falling continuously. With the share of manufacturing and industrial sectors remaining largely the same under UPA and NDA periods, the services sector's share in GVA increased from below 48% in 2008-09 to over 54% in GDP. The Make in India initiative launched by the NDA, to transform India into a "global manufacturing hub", could not succeed in altering the services-led growth trajectory.

Real investment and export growth was significantly higher during the UPA decade than the NDA's, which explains the cause of higher real GDP growth during the former regime, despite being interrupted by a global recession. Private investment (GFCF) as a share of nominal GDP during the UPA decade remained significantly higher than in the later period. In contrast, growth during NDA-I was private consumption led. During NDA-II's tenure, even real private consumption growth fell significantly, making economic growth largely dependent on the fiscal stimulus. This is clearly borne out by the rising fiscal deficit and debt-GDP ratio under NDA-II.

UPA's growth record, although higher than NDA's in magnitude, had three major problem areas, which the Finance Ministry's "White Paper" has highlighted. What is missing though is an honest appraisal of how far the NDA regime has been able to address and resolve them.

The most problematic aspect of the UPA era's growth process was the high inflation that accompanied it, particularly the double digit food inflation. The new series of CPI data reflect a sharp decline in the overall consumer inflation rate by the end of NDA-I's tenure to 3.4%, but a resumption of the inflationary trend under NDA-II, averaging around 6% annually. As was the case with the UPA regime, NDA too has relied upon the Reserve Bank of India to try and control inflation by raising its policy

interest rate and managing liquidity. Despite the repo rate being hiked from 4% in mid-2020 to 6.5% in February last year, where it has been held till date, the headline inflation rate has stubbornly ranged between 5-7% in the past two years, with average food inflation crossing 7% in 2023-24. This demonstrates, as it did during the UPA era, that RBI's repo rate adjustments have very little influence on food price movements in India.

The NDA regime has done little to address the major supply side factors driving food inflation, beyond imposing ad hoc export bans. Cash transfer schemes like PM-Kisan or distribution of free foodgrains to the poorer households can provide much needed income support and relief, but neither can they improve agricultural productivity nor modernise storage and marketing of food items like vegetables, pulses and cereals, whose prices are driving food inflation today. The only method conceived by the NDA to address these issues was to facilitate a wholesale takeover of India's food and agricultural economy by enacting three farm laws in September 2020, which had to be eventually rescinded following a year-long protest by North Indian farmers. Since then, the NDA-II government has remained as clueless as the UPA-II was, in dealing with food inflation and agriculture.

The second problem with UPA's growth story was that while exports grew rapidly, imports grew even faster, partly due to rising global crude prices, which worsened the current account balance and increased external vulnerability. During the NDA regime, both export and import growth declined, which impacted economic growth adversely but improved the external trade balance. Further, during the NDA decade, net FDI inflows increased as a share of GDP but remittance inflows, which remained significantly higher than net FDI inflows, declined compared

to the UPA decade. The end-result has been mixed.

The fall in India's foreign exchange reserves during NDA-I could be reversed during NDA-II, but the rupee has continued to depreciate vis-a-vis the dollar. The rupee-dollar exchange rate, which fell from Rs 43 to Rs 60 per dollar during UPA rule, has fallen even further to Rs 83 during NDA's tenure. In the context of the post-pandemic surge in global inflation last year, rupee depreciation has only imported the inflationary trend into the domestic economy.

The third problem with UPA's higher growth and private investment phase emerged through rising big ticket corporate defaults, initially concealed through debt restructuring, which ultimately left a huge pile of legacy non-performing assets (NPAs) in the banking system. The Modi government is claiming credit for restoring the health of the public sector banks (PSBs) by reducing the GNPA stock significantly. The fact remains that while cumulative NPA reduction under the NDA rule through all recovery channels, including the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code was around Rs. 10.8 lakh crore (till March 2023), NPA write-offs have amounted to over Rs. 14.8 lakh crore in the same period.

The PSBs, which accounted for over Rs. 10.65 lakh crore of these NPA write offs had to absorb substantial losses because of NPA provisioning, making net losses between 2017-18 and 2019-20. Simultaneously, since 2017-18 massive doses of capital was infused into the PSBs and financial institutions like EXIM Bank, IDBI and IIFCL, in order to bail them out. As disclosed in the Receipt Budgets, the centre's total debt burden on account of these recapitalisation bonds have increased to Rs. 2.90 lakh crore by 2023-24, and their annual interest expense of over Rs. 19000 crore is being met through central government's revenue

expenditure since 2019-20. Thus, massive NPA write-offs by the PSBs have been subsidised through the public exchequer.

Income and Employment

In the ultimate analysis, the efficacy of union budgets and macroeconomic performance needs to be judged in terms of their impact on the lives of ordinary people. The Finance Minister claimed in the budget speech that under NDA rule "People are living better and earning better, with even greater aspirations for the future. Average real income of the people has increased by fifty per cent." How true is this claim?

Official data show that real per capita income in India, estimated by inflation adjusted Net National Income (NNI), registered a growth of 50.3% during the ten years of UPA rule. During NDA's ten year rule, real per capita income grew by 43.6% only, reflecting a slowdown in inflation adjusted income growth across India.

The NDA government often cites the annual Periodic Labour Force Survey findings to claim a reduction in the unemployment rate between 2017-18 and 2022-23. However, comparable estimates from the NSS 68th round on Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, show that unemployment rates, estimated by both current weekly status and adjusted usual status, grew very sharply between 2011-12 to 2017-18.

Moreover, while the unemployment rates declined between 2017-18 and 2022-23, the open unemployment rates of 2022-2023 were still higher, not only vis-a-vis the NSS 68th round of 2011-12, but compared to all the eight previous NSS rounds conducted since 1972-73. The open unemployment rates have never been so high in India in the last fifty years. Unemployment was particularly high among the urban youth aged

15 to 29 years and among those with educational level of secondary and above.

Even as agriculture's share in gross value added has declined to 14.4% in 2023-24, there has been an increase in the share of workers engaged in agriculture between 2017-18 and 2022-23. The share of workers engaged in informal non-agricultural enterprises has also increased progressively since 2011-12. These trends in employment status from the PLFS data point towards growing informalisation of the labour force, contrary to the official claims of increased formalisation.

The Finance Minister had claimed in the budget speech that the government's "Skill India Mission" has trained 1.4 crore youth and 54 lakh youth have been upskilled and reskilled. However, the dashboard in the official site of the PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana shows that out of 1.10 crore certified candidates, only 24.51 lakh, i.e. around 22% who have been "Reported Placed". Such excess supply of skilled workers in the economy and growing informalisation is working as a dampener on wage and earnings growth.

PLFS data further show that average earnings of casual labour in non-public work to be Rs. 8547 in 2022-23, that of self-employed workers Rs. 13347 and that of regular wage/salaried workers Rs. 20039. While casual labourers' average earnings have grown by around 49% in five years since 2017-18, and regular wage/salaried workers by 19%, average earnings of self-employed workers rose by 8.5% only in 5 years. With annual retail inflation rate averaging 6% during NDA-II's tenure, less than 2% annual growth in average earnings for the self-employed clearly indicates a decline in their real earnings. 57% of India's labour force engaged in self-employment, are certainly not "living better and earning better", as the Finance Minister would want us to believe. ■

Budget 2024: Tall claims based on Half-Truths and Manipulations

CPI(ML) Statement | 1 February 2024

The Interim Budget 2024 is a propaganda piece boasting performance of BJP Govt of last ten years in an election year by selective use of data, relying on half-truths and distortions. The budget revised estimates numbers bring out that the government has not been able to make actual outlays for many of its flagship programs. The actual revised estimates for F.Y. 2023-24 for much talked about PM Awas Yojana has been put at Rs 54,103 Crore (Budget 2023 Estimate Rs 79,590 Crore), Swachh Bharat Mission Rs 2,550 Crore (Budget 2023 Estimate Rs 5,000 Crore) and PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Rs 2100 Crore (Budget 2023 Estimate Rs 4,000 Crore).

The government has been talking about increasing farmers' incomes but the real numbers of revised estimates bring out that Urea subsidy has been slashed to Rs 1,28,594 Crore in comparison to Actual Expenditure of FY 2022-23 at Rs 1,65,217 Crore and Nutrient based subsidy has been brought to Rs 60,300 Crore from actual expenditure of Rs 86,122 Crore in FY 2022-23. This is clear that the government is taking away from one hand from farmers and giving it from another in the form of PM Kisan Nidhi where farmers are being paid Rs 6,000 per year as income support. The actual cut in urea and nutrient subsidy from last year of Rs 62,445 Crore is more than the expenditure on PM Kisan Nidhi of Rs 60,000 Crore. The budgeted provision for urea and nutrient subsidy at Rs 1,19,000 Crore and Rs 45,000 Crore is even less than the actual expenditure which indicates in direction of further cut in these subsidies.

The budgeted food subsidy of Rs 2,05,250 Crore is lower than revised estimates of Rs 2,12,332 despite claims of garib kalyan. The much talked about skill development mission for skilling youth has paltry allocation of Rs 538 Crore for supposed skilling and reskilling of crores of unemployed and underemployed youths of the country. The refusal to increase taxes on big corporates and the ultra-rich has resulted in high fiscal deficit, in revised estimates it is pegged at 5.8 percent of GDP. The Debt to GDP ratio has worsened in ten years from 67% to 82% of GDP. Out of the total revised estimates of Rs 44.90 lakh crore of total expenditure, Rs 10.55 lakh crore is utilized only in service of interest payments which is about Rs 1 in every Rs 4. The government has been known to shift goal posts and create severe distractions and the interim budget 2024 presented today does the same.

The latest RBI Consumer Confidence Survey reveals that more than 80 percent of the population, which falls under the low income categories – with monthly earnings of less than Rs. 25000, Rs. 10000 and Rs. 5000 per month – are facing the brunt of Modi's economic policies. The people in these income groups see their economic situation worsened to a great extent during the last one year. Recently, the Caste Census of Bihar, which also is a reality check for the whole of India, indicated the actual scale of poverty where SC-ST, OBCs and minorities are economically more deprived while the general state of economy has worsened for all.

Modi-Shah regime's manufactured perception and false claims of economic growth in the name of Achhe Din and Amrit Kaal, promoted by the rich, are bound to have the same fate as was of 'India Shining' in Atal-Advani era, in the coming parliamentary elections. ■

BJP's Communal Bulldozer in Haldwani

The events of February 8 in Banbhoolpura in Uttarakhand's Haldwani show telltale signs of the BJP-RSS's script to stroke communal disharmony. Otherwise, why was the local administration so eager to destroy the mosque and Madrasa when the matter was subjudice by ignoring the warnings from local intelligence?

The demolition and police heavy-handedness sparked public rage, as people threw stones at the police and municipal workers and a group even set fire to a police station. The police responded with "shoot at sight" orders, leaving in its wake at least six people dead and many more seriously injured. The entire town was placed under curfew, with several reports of violent police retaliation against the local population.

CPIML Demanded An Immediate Stop to Violent Crackdown

CPIML criticised the state administration and police for inflicting indiscriminate violence on residents of Banbhoolpura in Haldwani. The party had asked to stop such retaliatory vengeful atrocities on people.

Regarding the demolition drive, the party has held Nainital DM and SSP directly responsible for the hastily and irresponsible action. The court had not ordered the demolition, but after the violence the Nainital DM gave misleading information that the drive was carried out as per the court order. In reality, the high court, while refusing to grant interim relief in the petition against the demolition, had posted the next hearing in the case on February 14 for further hearing.

CPIML Uttarakhand State Secretary Indresh Maikhuri noted that such ghastly violence by police and

administration on one side and residents of a Muslim dominated area on the other was unprecedented in the entire history of Uttarakhand. The police are raiding houses in the name of search operation and brutally beating up people, not sparing even women and children. Widespread arrests were carried out under UAPA or NSA.

In view of increasing crackdown, on February 10, a delegation of CPIML and other INDIA coalition leaders and civil society representatives met the Uttarakhand Governor seeking a high level judicial inquiry into Haldwani violence. A memorandum was also submitted to the National Minorities Commission on February 22 condemning the crackdown on Banbhoolpura residents and reiterated the demand for high level judicial inquiry.

A Pattern

Banbhoolpura, a Muslim majority locality, has long been in the target list of right-wing forces and the BJP government in the state. In 2022, the area witnessed massive protests by the locals against the move by Pushkar Singh Dhami government to demolish houses of more than 4000 families. The BJP government claimed that the land belonged to the railways, and it was acting on a court order. Dhami, along with the Sangh machinery, left no stone unturned to vilify the protesters and delegitimise their demands. The demolition was stayed by the Supreme Court in 2023, stating that such a large number of people can't be thrown out of their homes overnight.

In the past two years, across the state of Uttarakhand, several mazar and other structures of Muslims communities have been aggressively razed to ground either by the government machinery or BJP-RSS backed groups. These targeted demolition drives are

fomented by chief minister Dhami himself. Dhami, while addressing a gathering in Nainital district, on April 7, 2023, declared, "It has been found that at more than 1,000 locations, either a mazar or other such illegal structures have been constructed. When these locations are dug up, no remains are found. Such acts of encroachment will not be allowed." According to reports, by August 2023, the 'demolition drives' razed around 465 mazars/Muslim structures.

There is a clear 'bulldozer raj' pattern visible of using the state machinery to build up fear and corner the minority community to the extent of provocation followed by heavy police repression and then holding the aggrieved minority members themselves responsible for the happenings.

The Question of Nazul Land

As was in the case of the 2022 demolition drive, the Banbhoolpura mosque and madarsa that was demolished on February 8 was built on Nazul land. Nazul land refers to non-agricultural land that is owned by the government which can be leased to families and, in some cases, even given as freehold. Although it belongs to the government, Nazul land is not directly administered by the state authority. In fact, the majority of Haldwani town rests on Nazul land.

Most of the residents on Nazul lands pay taxes and have patta (lease) to prove the ownership and even Aadhaar cards, but according to activists, the BJP government is systematically denying rights to Muslim applicants in relation to these lands.

Tales of Repression

A fact-finding report released by Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR), 'Bulldozing Peace:



State Violence and Apathy in Muslim Settlements of Haldwani documents disturbing information from Banbhoolpura post the February 8 incident.

According to the interim report, the entire area is engulfed in fear and dread. There are discrepancies in official accounts regarding casualties and arrests, along with alleged brutality during raids and detentions, which raise questions about the police efficiency and intentions.

“The state government led by Chief Minister Pushkar Dhami and radical right-wing citizen groups have together contributed to a highly polarising narrative with many disturbing elements. One strand of this discourse is about creating Uttarakhand as a ‘Devbhoomi’, the holy land for Hindus, which would have no place for other religious minorities. Other strands of this divisive discourse include unsupported extravagant claims of a series of “Jihad” allegedly waged by the Muslim population of the state including ‘Love Jihad’, ‘Land Jihad’, ‘Vyapar Jihad’, and ‘Mazar Jihad’. The consequence of this discourse has been calls for economic and social boycotts of Muslims. The eviction of Muslim tenants from houses and shops and demands and threats to them to leave the state”, said the report.

Using the Banbhoolpura incident, BJP-RSS ecosystem is attempting to dehumanise the Muslim community with several incidents of ostracising Muslim families and shopkeepers being reported from the state. Just after Banbhoolpura incidents there were many incidents when Muslim shopkeepers and vendors in Hindu majority localities in Haldwani were threatened and not allowed to conduct their business by organised Hindutva groups. Violent calls for economic and social boycott of Muslims and threats for them to leave the state are being issued by Sangh groups to bulldoze the pluralist traditions of Uttarakhand.

The incidents of violence in Haldwani reflect the Sangh’s ploy to otherise and ghettoise the Muslim community. ■

40 UP Dalit Activists Convicted in 29-Year-Old Fabricated Case



In a reprehensible act of injustice, 40 dalit activists, primarily rural landless poor, in Uttar Pradesh’s Deoria district, were convicted and sentenced to 10 years life imprisonment in a 29 years old fabricated case filed by feudal forces to suppress the CPIML-led people’s movement for rights and dignity.

The court in Deoria ruled against the activists who led a peaceful protest under the banner of Indian People’s Front (IPF) on 17 January 1995 against oppression and slavery by the feudal forces in Ram Baluan village. During the protest, the upper-caste feudals opened fire, killing a woman and child, injuring several protesters. Comrade Ramkishore Verma was shot at and brutally beaten up.

A case was filed against this attack, but in collusion with the police, the murderers also filed a counter-case. Fifty-nine people, including seven minors, were named in the counter-case filed by the attackers. Ten died during the trial. While the court convicted the peaceful protesters, three out of four criminals who attacked the peaceful protest and killed a woman and a child were acquitted by the same court.

CPIML senior leader and UP State Committee member Ramkishore Verma, AIARLA Deoria district president Prabhunath Paswan and party’s district committee members Chhotelal Kushwaha and Nathuni Sharma, Radhakishun and Jalesar Patel are among 40 people convicted under IPC sections 395 & 397.

The CPIML leader Rajesh Sahni has said the party will file an appeal against the judgement in the higher court. A statewide protest was organised by CPIML on February 19 against this travesty of justice.

Under the Yogi led BJP regime, the confidence of criminals and feudal elements has reached its peak. In collusion with the government, these forces have unleashed false cases against CPIML members and other democratic activists.

In another incident, activists in Mirzapur have been falsely charged, jailed and expelled from the district under the instigation of BJP henchmen. In Azamgarh, a CPIML local committee member, Rajendra Ram, was sent to jail on 14 February after he was charged in a fabricated case. ■

The Case of Ram Baluan Village and the Court Verdict

▲ RAJESH SAHNI

The echo of anti-feudal struggles in districts of Bihar in the 80s also reverberated in bordering districts of Uttar Pradesh. Next to Siwan in Bihar is Deoria district of UP where rural poor, mainly from dalits and backward communities, started organising themselves under the banner of Indian People's Front (IPF), an organization of CPIML in Khurvasia Chanda village of Bankata block. Dalits in Khushia village revolted against upper caste feudals' dictates that forced the people into begaari (slave labour) and also prohibited them from basic rights like sitting on a cot.

These feudal practices, as well as usury and physical attacks by landlords, as well as police, started facing resistance with people rising-up. This infuriated the upper castes. People like Bhola Gupta, Prabhunath Paswan and Barrister Chauhan of Baluan village contacted IPF cadres to invite them to their village.

Dukhi Lal, Vyas Lal and Ajay Lal were dreaded feudals of Baluan known for their oppressive acts of usury, slavery, and theft of cattle of lower caste people. People from Paswan, Lohar, Kushwaha and Gupta castes organised themselves under the IPF banner against the feudal domination of Dhukhi Lal.

The enraged Dukhi Lal began to attack IPF cadres and active members in the village. In one such incident, his gang attacked a local IPF leader Amarnath Sah who was campaigning for the national rally to be held in Delhi in 1989. He was able to escape by hiding in a house, which was then surrounded by goons. The next day, 500-600 villagers from nearby reached the spot and freed him. This

built up some pressure on the feudal forces to the extent that Dukhi Lal had to publicly apologise in a panchayat meeting, although tension continued as before.

Meanwhile, AISA leader at Allahabad University, Ramkishore Verma decided to dedicate himself to the struggles of the poor and oppressed. As a full-time activist, he began working in the area around Khurvasia and Baluan villages. By this time dalit upsurge against feudal domination had spread and sharpened and the IPF had also emerged as a strong political force in the region. This also led to a counter reaction among feudals who strengthened their links with organised gangs in adjoining Bihar districts, also they started filing false cases and giving fabricated information to police against IPF leaders. This was the socio-political reality at that time, and the police usually supported the feudals and suppressed dalit assertions for dignity and equality.

On 17 January 1995, Chhotelal Kushwaha was attacked while he was on his bicycle by a henchman of Vyas Lal. The enraged villagers called for a meeting, which was attended by Ramkishore Verma. The villagers decided to meet Dukhi Lal the next morning. Dukhi Lal got the information about this meeting and called Vyas Lal and his gang to be present in the morning. When villagers reached his house in the morning, they saw goons deployed on the rooftops with firearms. Suddenly, they faced a volley of bullets that killed one woman and a child.

Comrade Ramkishore Verma was grievously injured in the firing. In the absence of any police and medical help, villagers blocked the

highway in protest with the dead body of the child. After the police came, the injured Ramkishore Verma was taken to the police station on the pretext of treatment, where he was kept until evening and then sent to the Gorakhpur Medical College. The police kept him in custody even in hospital and later filed a fake FIR against 59 people including Ramkishore Verma on the instructions of Dukhi Lal and Vyas Lal.

They were implicated in a case of dacoity and grievous attack under 395, 397 and a dozen other sections of IPC. All 59 were sent to jail, which included 7 minors. Villagers filed a case of murders and attempt to murder on the accused. The police only made Ajai Lal, Munna and two others as accused, while letting off the prime accused of the murder. Later, Dukhi Lal and his men tried to pressurise the villagers to withdraw the FIR, but they refused and decided to carry forward with struggle for justice.

After 29 years, on 12 February 2024 Upper District Session Court in Deoria found 40 people guilty of dacoity and grievous attack and announced a punishment of 10 years imprisonment and Rs. 1000 fine for each. During hearings, ten out of the 59 had died, and seven minors were set free. All 40 people were transferred from Deoria jail to Benaras jail on 17 February 2024.

Meanwhile, in the case filed by villages against the feudal criminals for firing and murders, only one of them was given a life sentence and three were acquitted.

This injustice done to the steadfast fighters for dalit rights, dignity and equality, will not break people's determination and struggle. The flames of resistance that were lit will continue to engulf the forces of oppression that today are in the form of BJP-RSS rule. ■

Anti-Fascist Rally at Thanjavur



Tamil Nadu unit of CPIML organised an Anti-Fascist Rally on Feb 1 in Thanjavur which has a revolutionary tradition of anti-feudal struggles of agricultural labourers. Several cadres of CPIML in the district, including Chandrasekar and Chandrakumar of Manalur, have sacrificed their lives in militant struggles in this region. The rally was well received by various quarters. Thousands of CPIML cadres joined the rally and convention which was party's one of the biggest mobilisations in the recent past.

Against the backdrop of the political coup in Bihar, the conspiracy in Jharkhand and the brazen stealing of the mayoral election in Chandigarh, leaders of CPI, CPI(M) and INDIA constituents like INC, DMK and VCK also joined in this impressive assembly and renewed the resolve to defeat the tyrannical Modi regime and foil the Sangh brigade's fascist design.

The rally resolved to fight out fascist forces in Tamil Nadu who are trying to take roots invoking Tamil gods, Tamil heritage, etc. linking with Kashi. They try to use every division in society including caste and religious sentiments. ED is being extensively pressed into service to frame up charges, threaten and pull political friends, including the functionaries of Naam Thamizhar Katchi (We, Tamils Party) led by Seeman. AIADMK led by Edappadi is being threatened to return

to the alliance. Modi has unusually written a long obituary on Vijaya Kanth, who recently passed away, to attract the support base of the DMDK (Desiya Marumalarchi Dravidar Renaissance Party). Tamil Nadu BJP is leading a state level yatra covering all districts, which is a damp squib and failed to evoke any big response. Modi was camping in Rameshwaram for days together in the run up to the inaugural ceremony of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

"Overthrow Fascism - Victory to India" was the theme of the massive Convention. Thousands of party members, workers, rural poor, peasants, youth and students from various districts participated. Some of the local cadres and leaders of INDIA alliance parties also joined.

Comrade Dipankar addressed the rallyists as chief guest and called upon people to defeat BJP regime in the coming Lok Sabha elections. He also emphasised on broader unity of all opposition forces. Only a sustained mass movement against the BJP on basic issues of the people can only be the best answer to the communal, corporate fascist forces, he said. He said, "I saw the great resolve of the people of Tamil Nadu to defeat the fascist forces and I saw a very reassuring unity of all the INDIA parties in Tamil Nadu during the event organized by VCK on January 26. Today, on 1st of February, in Thanjavur, I see similar

unity and similar resolve among the people. Tamil Nadu is in the forefront of the all-India opposition to the fascist forces and I congratulate you for your unity, for your determination and for your struggles."

He further added, "So this is why, ahead of the 2024 elections, of course elections are important, what is more important is our unity on the ground and our struggles on the ground. Tamil Nadu has been the bastion of communist movement and anti-caste movement. This is the land of Periyar. The land of rationalist movement against superstitions, against feudal violence, against the violence of dominant castes. This is movement we need to rebuild. We need to intensify our struggles across Tamil Nadu. Carry forward, the communist flag, the red flag, holding high, along with all the friendly parties, all social justice forces, here. I would appeal for the unity and consolidation of the forces of social justice, of the forces of human dignity, of the forces of caste annihilation so as to decimate the caste system, caste oppression, communal violence and communal bigotry in this country."

VCK leader comrade Thol. Thirumavalavan, MP, the Chief Media Coordinator of the headquarters of DMK, DKS Elangovan, State secretary of CPI(M) K Balakrishnan, state secretary of CPI Mutharasan and the district Congress president representing the state president KS Alagiri addressed the rallyists. Mr KS Alagiri, despite reaching Thanjavur could not reach the meeting venue as he fell ill.

TKS Elangovan said that the BJP has only renamed the British acts into Hindi, but the essence remains the same. The people of the country are being deceived and assured that the DMK will always stand with the forces like CPIML and like minded parties in the battle against fascism.

Thol. Thirumavalavan said that he

chose to attend the CPIML rally to be among the toiling masses instead of attending the Parliament on the same day and listen to the BJP government's manipulations of taxes, allocations and the interim budget. He said that it was more fruitful to join the rally to save democracy, to save the country organised by the CPIML at Thanjavur and to be among the people and CPIML who work for the victory of the INDIA alliance. He also thanked the CPIML General Secretary for attending the VCK Convention on 26 January at Trichy. VCK has always worked with left and Dravidian parties because VCK itself is a party that has maintained left politics as its core. Left politics is a more principled one that has challenged the domination of castes by sacrificing their lives. The BJP is scared of the Left because they are their ideological adversaries. The BJP does not only talk about Congress-mukt Bharat but also about Communist-mukt Bharat.

Comrade Balakrishnan appreciated the efforts of the CPIML to intensify the struggle against fascism. The Hindus and Muslims fought unitedly against the British in the course of the struggle for independence, while the RSS was resorting to communal riots to divide the struggling unity. The RSS also killed Mahatma Gandhi who worked for the unity of Hindus and Muslims. He criticised Modi for mixing religion with the state by visiting temples after temples to propagate the launch of Ram Temple in Ayodhya. They are hell bent on implementing CAA. They are also suspected for manipulating EVMs in their favour.

Comrade Mutharasan congratulated the CPIML for undertaking the task of fighting fascism. He also recalled BJP's role in toppling the UF government of VP Singh for implementing Mandal Commission recommendations.

The district secretary of the Congress said that we should take up the weapon of ideas to fight fascism and to defend democracy. He appealed to make INDIA alliance victorious in the coming elections in order to save democracy.

The rally was presided by Pazha Asaithambi, state secretary of CPIML in Tamil Nadu, welcomed by Kannaian, district secretary and vote of thanks by SM Rajendran, city secretary. The rally was also addressed by Shankar V and Balasundaram, Chandramohan and Balasubramanian. ■

National Conference of All India Municipal and Sanitation Workers Federation



The 3rd all India conference of the All India Municipal and Sanitation Workers was held on 3-4 February 2024 in Bengaluru. As part of the conference, a cultural session was organised, which was attended by hundreds of sanitation workers from Bangalore. 'Porakeya Haadu' (Song of the Broom), a theatrical performance on the lives of sanitation workers was staged, followed by a musical performance by Pragati Kala Tanda. Com Maniyamma and Com Suresh, safaikaramchis working in the city of Bengaluru, and leaders in the BBMP Powrakarmikara Sangha were the main protagonists in the play.

Comrade Rajiv Dimri, All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) delivered the inaugural address and insisted that municipal and sanitation workers should defeat the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The RSS-BJP dream of Hindu Rashtra is an attack on workers and Dalits. It is aiming to replace the constitution with the Manu Smriti of barbarian era. Modi is washing the feet of sanitation workers only to use it for publicity blitzkrieg. The government has not made any efforts to improve the living and working conditions of sanitation workers while trumpeting about Swachh Bharat. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan has only perpetuated caste discrimination and manual scavenging. We must defeat the BJP in 2024, he added. He also called upon workers to make the Industrial strike and Rural Bandh on February 16, called by all Central Trade Unions and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, a grand success. He also emphasised the need for

municipal workers to take an active part to fight against the anti-worker policies of the Union Government.

The report was presented by the General Secretary of the federation Comrade Shyamlal Prasad and delegates actively and enthusiastically joined the deliberations. The conference was conducted by a presidium elected by the house consisting of comrades Uday Bhat, Chandrasekhar Kumar, Santosh Kumar, Sobha, Balasubramanian, Mahendra Parida, Srinivas Rao, Nirmala, Sucheta and Mahesh Kumar Singh. The deliberations were translated into multiple languages from the stage.

The conference resolved to change the name of the federation to "All India Municipal and Sanitation Workers Federation (AIMSWF)" in order to synchronise it with the expanding practice among sanitation workers that extends beyond municipalities too. The conference also resolved to launch an all India campaign against the BJP which is deceiving municipal and sanitation workers with its rhetoric and lies. The campaign is expected to begin on 15th March or so which will be subsequently decided by the newly elected committee soon.

The Conference also unanimously elected a 39-member National Executive Committee which, in turn, elected 18-member committee of Office Bearers. Comrade Uday Bhat was elected as the President, Comrade Nirmala as the Working President and Comrade Mahendra Parida as the General Secretary. Comrade Shyamlal Prasad, the founding General Secretary of the federation paved the way for the election of new faces into the committee and its leadership. Comrade Shyamlalji was directly leading the federation, since its inception, to spread its wings all over the country, until the age of 91 and will continue to inspire and

guide the organisation as the Vice President.

Comrade Shankar, all India President of AICCTU, in his concluding address to the conference said, "Defeat Modi! Save Workers!" shall be the slogan of an all-India campaign from March onwards till the parliamentary elections.

Com. Shankar said: "We keep saying that Modi should be defeated. Because if Modi comes back to power, there is no question of regularisation which is one of the most important demands of sanitation workers today. If sanitation workers should get minimum wages, Modi should be defeated in 2024 elections because the Labour Codes say that minimum wage is not mandatory and only floor wages to the tune of Rs 4500, as on date, is sufficient for workers. Hence, Modi should be stopped at any cost.

We talk about dignity. But Modi is dreaming of Manu Smriti in place of the constitution written by Dr Ambedkar. The fight for the dignity of sanitation workers includes a sustained campaign against Manu Smriti which is nothing but a script for slavery of the working class, particularly the sanitation workers who are the most downtrodden in the society. We should expose Manu Smriti and carry the message among the municipal and sanitation workers.

We always talk about permanency and wages. But, that's not enough. We should also talk about health, education of children and housing. The hazardous sanitation work should be replaced by machines and the children of sanitation workers should not be a sanitation worker anymore. But, Modi says that workers should only engage in the occupation of their parents and the family. Vishwakarma Yojana is nothing but a conspiracy to maintain caste-based occupation and the caste hierarchy which should be opposed tooth and nail.

Comrade Shankar also gave a call to take up and achieve a target of one lakh membership before the AICCTU all India conference at the end of 2024. He also called upon workers to March to Parliament to assert the demands of municipal and sanitation workers at an appropriate time.

The federation is undergoing a transition. It is very much crucial to develop municipal and sanitation workers as the vanguard of the society.

AIMWF President Comrade Uday Bhat said, "It is only due to the working-class movement that the Modi Government has not been able to implement the anti-labour codes. The workers must unitedly fight against the BJP and RSS to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of sanitation and municipal workers. The dignity in the life of sanitation workers is not a charity to be awarded by someone but a right of all sanitation and other segments of the working class as a whole. The newly elected office bearers Comrade Nirmala, the Working President and comrade Mahendra Parida, the General Secretary reaffirmed their commitment towards fulfilling the responsibilities assigned by the conference.

Comrade Clifton, all India secretary of AICCTU, proposed a definition of sanitation workers to cover all sections of workers who are related to solid waste management and also came down heavily on the practice of outsourcing and against urban governance being handed over to the undemocratic structure of companies and CEOs.

Comrade Maitreyi Krishnan honoured the volunteers who tirelessly worked for the success of the conference. The conference ended with a positive note of marching ahead steadfastly to implement the resolutions of the conference. ■

Conference of VCK



The conference on 26 January, the republic day, hosted by Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi (VCK – Liberation Tigers Party) reverberated with the slogan of Jai Bhim – Jai Democracy against the Jai Shriram of the communal fascist forces. The conference was attended by lakhs of people from all over Tamil Nadu representing almost all districts. The enthusiastic participation of largest number of youths inspired a lot of hope and confidence among all the parties that joined the conference. VCK is definitely an emerging major political force of Dalits in the state with overwhelming Left moorings.

The conference was addressed by the General Secretaries of CPI, CPIM and CPIML along with the president of DMK and the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu MK Stalin. The key leaders of Congress, DK, IUML, MDMK, MMK, TVK and AAP also addressed the conference.

The preamble of the constitution was displayed at the centre of the stage, consistent with the central theme of the conference, The Democracy Will be Victorious. The portraits of Ambedkar, Marx and Periyar were displayed in the stage.

The Chief Minister MK Stalin said that the rule of BJP was against democracy and federalism which was exposed in its dismantling of special status to Jammu and Kashmir. He appealed for the consolidation of opposition forces and votes in the state in order to defeat BJP in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

Comrade Thirumavalavan narrated the disastrous actions of the Modi-Shah duo in last ten years since the BJP assumed power at the union government. He also critiqued that the BJP aim is to establish Brahmin Raj which is why the country's constitution written by Dr Ambedkar is their top most adversary.

Comrade Dipankar said “In a democracy, the government is elected by the people. We have a parliamentary democracy where the government is answerable to the people. But now PM Modi says he has been chosen by God, his supporters even call him an incarnation of God, and he hardly attends Parliament, never holds a press conference, never listens to the people.

“From a modern secular democratic republic, we are being pushed in the direction of what can only be called a corporate backed theocratic

monarchy. The Constitution described India as a Union of States. That federal framework is also being turned upside down. The states are being reduced to extensions of Delhi Darbar ruled by agents of the Union Government.

“The need of the hour is to unite and save the country from this fascist offensive and stop the destruction and disaster the fascist regime is inflicting everyday in every sphere. We have to unite as extensively and fight as resolutely as our predecessors had done during the freedom movement. Just as several ideological streams had united in the battle for freedom from British colonial rule, today Communists and socialists, Ambedkarites and Periyarists, Gandhians and Nehruvians will all have to come together to protect the highest gains of the freedom movement - the Constitution and the goal of a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic.

“Tamil Nadu has been in the forefront of opposition to the fascist Modi regime and the RSS-BJP conspiracy to divide the people and destroy democracy. It has also not allowed the BJP to grow as an electoral force. I am sure in the coming elections Tamil Nadu will again give a fitting rebuff to the BJP. The rest of the country is also getting ready to dethrone the Modi regime. Let us unite and fight and fight to win.”

Comrade Pazha Asaithambi, the state secretary of CPIML extended solidarity with the struggles of VCK against fascism and in the battle for democracy.

Comrade Shankar V, Polit-Bureau member and In-charge of Tamil Nadu, Central Committee Member Balasundaram, Trichy district secretary Desikan, Pudukottai district secretary VM Valathan, Karur district secretary Ramachandran, SCMs C Rangaswamy and Raj Kumar were also present. ■

The Memorial Meeting of Comrade John K Erumely at Thrissur

The first death anniversary of former state secretary of CPIML, Kerala, comrade John K Erumely was observed at Thrissur on 11 February. The memorial programme was presided by the state secretary Johnson Ambatt and the participants were welcomed by Ajithan, district secretary of Thrissur.

Shankar V, Polit Bureau Member, inaugurated the memorial meeting and fondly remembered great contributions of comrade John K Erumely in keeping aloft the revolutionary banner of the party in the state of Kerala.

In addition, comrade Shankar expressed his concerns about the intentions of LDF government to replace OPS (Old Pension Scheme) with New Assured Pension Scheme,

instead of scrapping anti-worker NPS and restoration of OPS. Similarly, he also pointed out the assertions of LDF to follow the corporate path of development along the lines of Vizhinjam Port and K-Rail in place of a pro-people path of development. The hurry to establish foreign universities in Kerala was also a matter of concern.

Comrade Shankar called upon the people of Kerala against the social engineering and communal designs of BJP in the state which can cause a havoc in the lives of the people of the state. He also explained that defeating BJP is directly related to the lives of the working masses as the anti-worker, anti-people legislations, including Labour Codes, are waiting on the wings for implementation. He insisted that “Defeat BJP to Save Workers and

the people” should be the slogan of the people’s movements.

Chandramohan, the Central Committee Member of the party paid his tribute to comrade John K Erumely and elaborated on various facets of fascism in the country. He also invited the attention of participants to the challenges of building an alternative Left movement in the state while defending the Left politics in general.

Comrade Rajesh K Erumely who was present along with his mother, the life partner of comrade John K, addressed the meeting and assured to publish the biography of comrade John K Erumely in English by next memorial day along with another book on Naxalbari movement.

The members of State Leading team of the party OP Kunjupillai, Venugopal, Sujith, Shivashankaran and Joy Peter also addressed the memorial meeting. ■

CPIML Fact-Finding Team Visits Sandeshkhali



A 20-member CPI(ML) delegation led by party Central Committee member Indrani Dutta today visited Sandeshkhali. Other members of the delegation included State Committee members Chandrasmita Choudhury and Archana Ghatak, senior trade union leader Basudev Basu, Secretary of North 24 Parganas District Committee Subrata Sengupta, Secretary of South 24 Parganas

District Committee Kishore Sarkar and several other leading activists of greater Kolkata region. The delegation formed several teams to cover nearly a dozen villages and talk to more than a hundred families. On the basis of their interaction with the local people the delegation prepared a memorandum of demands and submitted it to the BDO and SHO of Sandeshkhali.

The delegation found tremendous

anger among the local people against TMC leaders Shibu Hazra and Uttam Sardar and their boss Sheikh Shahjahan over rampant extortion and assault on people’s livelihood and liberties including instances of harassment of women. The delegation therefore demanded strong administrative and judicial measures to inspire confidence among the people including arrest of all culprits, formation of women’s cell in local police stations and payment of compensation to all victims of loot and extortion.

Sandeshkhali and adjoining areas have been a major centre of peasant movement and social harmony since the historic Tebhaga movement in the 1940s and 1950s. Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims have been living in peace and harmony for decades. The delegation condemned the BJP’s attempts to use the people’s anger in Sandeshkhali to spread hate and lies and promote its political agenda of communal polarisation. ■



Giridih District Conference of CPIML

The 13th district conference of CPIML in Giridih was held on 17-18 February in Mirzaganj of Jamua block. The conference was preceded by a Jan Sankalp March which was led by comrades Dipankar Bhattacharya, Janardan Prasad, Vinod Singh, Manoj Bhakt and Rajkumar Yadav. A large number of people and delegates marched with the slogans on a five kilometre stretch of road up to the Conference venue. The campus where the conference was held was dedicated to the memory of Comrade Kartik Das and the conference hall was renamed after Comrade Ibnul Hasan Basru. The conference began with the hoisting of red flag by veteran communist leader Tribhuvan Ram followed by floral tributes to the martyrs and one minute silence in their memory.

Comrade Dipankar in his address in the open session said this conference is held in the land of struggles by comrades Mahendra Singh and Ibnul Hasan Basru whose legacy we

cherish. At a time when the Supreme Court has declared Electoral Bonds as unconstitutional then how the government led by the party which came to power with the help of those bonds be considered legitimate! Jharkhand foiled the BJP attempt to destabilise the state government by arresting Hemant Soren. Our leader and MLA Vinod Singh was at the forefront to foil this fascist conspiracy inside the Vidhan Sabha as well as outside. CPIML has won the hearts and confidence of the state's Adivasi and democracy loving people and we are confident that the revolutionary red flag of Mahendra Singh, Ibnul Hasan Basru and Gurudas Chatterjee will be victorious in forthcoming parliamentary elections from Koderma.

Vinod Singh, Politburo member and MLA from Bagodar, said for a very long time BJP candidates have been elected from Koderma but the fulfilment of people's aspirations has

never been on this party's agenda. The Raghuvar Das and Babulal Marandi's tenures as chief minister were marred by huge corruption. The CPIML has fought this kind of corrupt politics with intense mass mobilisations and effective interventions inside the state Assembly.

Rajkumar Yadav, state committee member, reiterated the party's resolve to fight for the rights of workers and peasants in the district and strengthen the struggles for Mica mining workers, for forest rights, and against evictions and displacements of poor in the district.

The open session was presided over by Ashok Paswan and conducted by Vijay Pandey. Comrade Vinod Singh presented the work report which was passed by the house after discussions. The conference elected a 51-member District Committee which elected Comrade Janardan Prasad unanimously. Comrade Bhubaneshwar Bedia was the Observer for this conference. ■

Shankar Pandey

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