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Keep Doors of Universities Open For The Poor And Marginalised!

Hindustan is proud of Pandit Firoz Khan

Amitabh Kumar Das

Pandit, a Sanskrit/Hindi word means a scholar. Mahapandit means a great scholar. Today, I salute a great Sanskrit scholar Pandit Firoz Khan. Firoz Khan, a Sanskrit Professor at the BHU, is facing protests from Hindu fanatics who maintain that a Muslim is not entitled to teach Sanskrit! This is Trishool Terrorism at its worst. Or “bhagwa aatankwad” as they call in Hindi.

In the Indian culture, scholars enjoy a higher stature than kings. “Swadeshe poojyate raja, vidwaan sarvatra poojyate” we read in our Sanskrit classes. The saying means that a king is honoured only in his kingdom while a scholar is honoured all over the world. But the so called Sanskrit lovers, blinded by hatred, have forgotten the ancient wisdom.

In fact, Sanskrit has always suffered due to bigotry. In the caste ridden Hindu society, the study of Sanskrit language was a monopoly of Brahmin “devatas”. Shudras were barred from learning Sanskrit. After all Sanskrit was the “dev bhasha” (the language of Gods). Through this language, Brahmins communicated to Gods! Something like a code language which non Brahmins didn’t understand. And Sanskrit became a language of elites over centuries. Gautam Buddha, a great revolutionary, understood Sanskrit’s elitist nature. He gave his sermons in Pali, the language of the masses. Most Buddhist scriptures were written in Pali. Gautam Buddha didn’t touch Sanskrit with a barge pole. The Brahmin dominance continues to this day and most Sanskrit gurus are Brahmins, the holy twice born of the hierarchical Hindu society.

I, an unholy non Brahmin, have always loved Sanskrit. Under the three language formula, every Indian state is supposed to teach Hindi, English and a third language of its choice at schools. The Bihar Govt, in its wisdom, chose Sanskrit as the third language. Therefore, I grew up reading Sanskrit at my schools. I was fascinated with Panchtantra stories. Timeless stories told by Pandit Vishnu Sharma. And Hitopadesh stories also. Then there were “shlokas” from the Gita. And “subhasitanis” (wise sayings). The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam (the whole world is a family) first entered my mind through my Sanskrit textbooks. As I enjoy iftar with my Muslim friends, I always have this great idea in my heart. When you treat the whole world as your family, you don’t send Muslims to Pakistan! You leave these hateful ideas for the likes of Giriraj Singh.

Sanskrit, like Greek and Latin, is a classical language. Not spoken by the aam aadami. But a treasure of great classics. But who says that Sanskrit is a language of only Hindus? Max Mueller, a Christian from Germany, was a great Sanskrit pandit. So is Firoze Khan, the BHU Professor.

Do we want to learn Sanskrit from Vijay Mallya, a Saraswat Brahmin? Or Nirav Modi, a vegetarian Hindu? Certainly not. But unfortunately India is going through dark days where fair is foul and foul is fair. Modi’s BA degree is still traceless. A fake certificate calls him a graduate in “Entire Political Science”.

Muslims are being targeted in the name of Ram Mandir, love jihad, goraksha, ghar wapasi etc etc. The Prime Minister seeks votes for Sadhwi Pragya, an accused in the Malegaon bomb blast. Gopal Kanda is an honorable MLA while Sanjeev Bhatt serves a life sentence. In this “andher nagri, chaupat raja”, Firoze Khan is barred from teaching Sanskrit because he was not born a Hindu. That too at BHU, an institution which was financed by the Muslim Nizam of Hyderabad also. But I salute Pandit Firoze Khan. His opponents are, to use a term from Panchtantra, are “kshudrabuddhis” (mean minded)!

(Mr. Amitabh Kumar Das is a 1994 batch IPS Officer. His views are personal.)

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COVER GRAPHIC:

RebelPolitik

Editors' e-mail: liberation@cpiml.org

MANAGER

Prabhat Kumar

Phone: 7042877713

Website: www.cpiml.net

E-mail: manager.liberation@gmail.com

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Ayodhya Verdict: Secular India Has Lost The Legal Battle, Must Win The War

Twenty seven years ago modern India had witnessed a shocking spectacle of vandalism. Cheered by senior BJP leaders LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, and empowered by the patronage provided by the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh led by Kalyan Singh, an organised mob of vandals demolished a sixteenth century mosque in Ayodhya in broad daylight. The demolition was watched live on television by the whole country even as the police looked away. The mosque had been built by Mughal emperor Babar, but the Sangh brigade claimed the site as the birth place of Ram and whipped up an orchestrated frenzy insisting on the construction of a grand Ram temple right in place of the mosque.

Twenty seven years since that dastardly demolition, the perpetrators are yet to be brought to justice. But meanwhile the demolition brigade, which had been periodically tasting power since the early 1990s, has solidly entrenched itself in state power and predictably the apex court has now chosen to decree in favour of a Ram temple on the site, offering as compensation an alternative site for the construction of a new mosque. If the December 1992 demolition act was shocking enough, the November 2019 Ayodhya verdict of the Supreme Court has been even more so. On 6 December 1992 it was a mob of vandals that defied the Supreme Court. This time round, we had a five-member-bench of senior Supreme Court judges overturning the tenets of justice.

Rarely does one come across a judgement which cites facts and states principles only to assert a contrary conclusion that stands in glaring contradiction with all those facts and principles. Thus we were reminded how the conspiratorial placement of the idols in 1949 desecrated the mosque and robbed Ayodhya Muslims of their legitimate right to offer prayers in the mosque and how the demolition of the mosque constituted a brazen violation of the rule of law, yet the Supreme Court threw its weight behind completing the process that had begun in 1949. The judgement tells us that the case is a title suit concerning the land and that it must be decided on the basis of evidence and not faith, and then goes on to add an addendum to highlight the importance of the disputed site in the realm of faith!

The biggest difference between December 1992, the moment of physical demolition of the Babri mosque, and November 2019, or the hour of juridical demolition, can be seen in the palpably different popular reaction to these two shocking incidents. In 1992 there was widespread disbelief and anger among common Indians at large,

not to speak of the deep sense of alienation among Muslims, but this time round the public response has been strikingly muted. This is not difficult to understand in the given context where the alienation of India's largest minority has only deepened, and the dominant media has become shockingly partisan and majoritarian and the state and the Sangh brigade has unleashed an all pervasive reign of terror, incriminating and silencing dissent in every sphere.

The Sangh parivar was pretty confident in anticipating the pro-temple nature of the verdict and we therefore found the RSS, VHP and BJP leaders all appealing for 'calm'. The same people who were most vocal in their open condemnation of the Supreme Court verdict in the Sabarimala temple entry case, were now out in support of the Supreme Court all through the run-up to the verdict. While the Sangh brigade is celebrating the Ayodhya verdict, unfortunately, the opposition has also by and large chosen to echo the BJP line. The Congress is in fact competing for credit with the BJP, and even sections of the Left are lauding the verdict as a step towards reconciliation. But can there ever be reconciliation without justice?

The verdict may signify a legal conclusion to the dispute, but certainly not a comprehensive or fair closure for the country to move on. For reasons best known to it, the apex court has disregarded the more recent and evident crimes of 1949 and 1992 and based its verdict on the basis

of the alleged lack of evidence of exclusive Muslim control over the mosque prior to 1857. This is adding insult to injury and the compensatory gesture of allocation of five acres of land in a nearby site can by no means heal this compounded wound. By entrusting a secular state with the responsibility of founding a trust for the construction of a temple in the disputed site, the court has also contributed to the hollowing out of the lofty ideas enunciated in the Preamble of the

Secular democratic India has lost the legal battle of Ayodhya, rather than covering up this defeat as reconciliation and peace, we must focus on winning the protracted war of democracy with renewed determination.

Indian Constitution. All this may appease the so-called collective conscience which the Supreme Court had ominously invoked while confirming the death sentence for Afzal Guru against all norms of natural justice, but for India's beleaguered Constitution, this is yet another body blow.

Ayodhya was and remains a crucial test for India's evolution as a secular democracy. Overcoming the traumatic tragedy of Partition, after 1947 India adopted the Constitution and embarked on its journey as a modern democratic republic. The RSS, we must remember, did not merely stand away from the freedom movement, it actively conspired against the very vision of a modern secular democracy.

The assassination of Gandhi - the plot was actually to eliminate a group of key leaders - and the clandestine installation of idols in the Babri Masjid were two typical post-Independence acts that bore the stamp of the Sanghi design to derail the fledgling republic. The incompatibility of the RSS with the idea of a secular democratic India compelled India's first Home Minister, none other than Sardar Patel who Modi so desperately seeks to appropriate, to ban the RSS soon after the Gandhi assassination.

Today the Sangh-BJP establishment is bent upon executing its failed design of the 1940s. Key policies, the economic and foreign policies in particular, have already been reversed to negate every aspect of India's aspiration to assert the economic sovereignty of the country. The combination of NRC and Citizenship Amendment Bill threatens to rewrite the basic terms of our Constitution and citizenship. The Ayodhya verdict fits in perfectly with this ominous design, fructifying a seventy-year-old conspiracy. The criminal demolition of a mosque and its court-ordained replacement with a temple is intended to assert the rise of a Hindu Rashtra within the formal constitutional shell of secular India. Secular democratic India has lost the legal battle of Ayodhya, rather than covering up this defeat as reconciliation and peace, we must focus on winning the protracted war of democracy with renewed determination. □

Modi PMO Introduced Electoral Bonds, Repeatedly Broke Laws

So That Black Money Could Fuel The BJP

The CPIML manifesto for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections had demanded, “scrap the Modi Government’s Electoral Bond scheme which helps to hide cronyism and corruption” and “ensure transparency in political funding.”

The BJP is known to have garnered 95% of all political donations made through the first tranche of Electoral Bonds – making it the main beneficiary of a scheme it introduced allowing for unlimited, secret donations from corporate and foreign sources, including offshore accounts housing black money.

Recent revelations have confirmed that Electoral Bonds, introduced by the Modi Government, facilitate corruption. More significantly, the revelations also confirm that the RBI and Election Commission warned the Government that Electoral Bonds would encourage black money to flow in Indian elections – and the Government overrode those warnings – and lied to Parliament denying that such concerns had been expressed. The Government also repeatedly broke rules framed specifically to try and curb the potential of Electoral Bonds to be used for money-laundering.

In a series of investigative reports simultaneously appearing in the Huffington Post in English, as well as in other media in Hindi and Odia, journalist Nitin Sethi, with the help of RTIs filed by Commodore Lokesh Batra, has laid bare the blatantly corrupt and illegal scheme.

Days before the then Finance Minister, the late Arun Jaitley planned to unveil Electoral Bonds in February 1, 2017 Budget Speech, a tax official pointed out that the scheme would require amendments in the Reserve Bank of India Act. On January 28 2017, the finance ministry sent a token email seeking comments from the RBI. The RBI promptly responded, on January 30 2017.

RBI Said Electoral Bonds Would Promote Corruption, Destabilise Indian Currency

Strongly advising against the move, RBI chief general manager P. Vijaykumar wrote to the finance ministry: “The proposed mechanism militates against the Reserve Bank’s sole authority for issuing bearer instruments in cash.” He added: “Bearer instruments have the potential to become currency and if issued in sizeable quantities can undermine the faith in banknotes issued by the central bank. Amending Section 31 of the RBI Act would seriously undermine a core principle of central banking legislation and doing so would set a bad precedent.”

But the Modi Government ignored the RBI’s concerns and legislated the Finance Bill 2017, legalising Electoral Bonds. The Government claimed that Electoral Bonds were a means to promote transparency and “cleanse the system of political funding in India,”

knowing fully well that the RBI had held the opposite view.

As a result of the scheme, “Indian companies, including shell companies which have no business but to channel money to political parties, individuals as well as other legal entities, such as trusts, can now anonymously buy unlimited amounts of electoral bonds and quietly hand them over to a political party of their choice to encash. Foreign companies can also now route money to Indian political parties.” (Nitin Sehti, Huffington Post)

In another letter to the finance ministry in August 2017, the RBI deputy governor BP Kanungo warned again that there was an “inherent scope of misuse of such bonds for undesirable activities,” adding, “You may appreciate that globally there are hardly any precedents in recent times for issuance of bearer bonds.”

Government Lied To Parliament About Election Commission Objections

The Election Commission, in May 2017, had written to the Ministry of Law and Justice, saying that the provision of the Electoral Bonds scheme exempting parties from reporting contributions made under the scheme “is a retrograde step as far as transparency of donations is concerned.”

The EC also pointed out that “it cannot be ascertained whether the political party has

taken any donation in violation of provisions under Section 29B of the Representation of People Act which prohibits political parties from taking donations from government companies and foreign sources.”

The EC also noted that amendments made to Section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013 “open the possibility of shell companies being set up for the sole purpose of making donations to political parties.”

The EC had sought modifications in the scheme “to provide for transparent reporting of contributions received by the political parties through electoral bonds.” Repeated attempts to mislead the EC on the nature of the Bonds scheme did not succeed.

However, a year later, when TMC MP Nadimul Haque had asked in Parliament “whether it is a fact that the EC had raised concerns on the issue of electoral bonds”, the MoS for finance Pon Radhakrishnan had lied, saying “the government has not received any concerns from the Election Commission on the issue of Electoral Bearer Bonds.”

To cover up this lie, the Government then concocted a cocktail of lies – all now exposed by documents obtained through RTI.

PMO Ordered Illegal Sale of Bonds

To regulate the sale of bonds and place some restraints on unchecked money-laundering, the rules notified in January 2018 specified that SBI could sell bonds to donors only in four 10-day windows in January, April, July and October each year, with an additional 30 days sale of electoral bonds in years when a general election was scheduled. In fact, the RBI had recommended that bonds

be sold only twice a year for short durations – a recommendation that was overruled.

But in fact, the Modi Government, and specifically the Prime Minister’s Office, repeatedly violated even these lenient rules, effectively using Electoral Bonds as an “ATM” window that could be opened as and when needed by the ruling party.

According to the reports in the Huffington Post, “SBI was supposed to sell the first tranche in April 2018, but the first round was opened a month earlier in March 2018 instead. Rs 222 crore worth of bonds were bought in this round, with 95% going to the BJP.

The following month, in April 2018, SBI opened another window for political donation — in this, bonds worth another Rs 114.90 crore were purchased and donated. But the government was still not satisfied.

With the Karnataka state elections due in May 2018, the PMO instructed the finance ministry to open a special and extra window of another 10 days.

The finance ministry in its files claimed that this illegal sale of electoral bonds just before Karnataka assembly elections, on the instructions of the PMO, was being approved as an exceptional case.”

But the exception soon became the norm. In October 2018, the Finance Ministry signed off on an additional 10-day special window for issuance of Electoral Bonds, this time proposed openly “in view of the forthcoming State assembly elections in five states.” (Nitin Sethi, Huffington Post)

Bonds worth Rs 10 crore, purchased during the “special” window opened at the PMO’s behest before the Karnataka elections, failed to be redeemed within 15

days of the purchase, as stipulated by the rules. However, soon after the 2018 Karnataka state elections resulted in a hung assembly, the central government directed SBI to accept these expired bonds! Who was the beneficiary of this broken rule? That is anyone’s guess. Would the central government go out of its way to break the rule if the BJP were not the beneficiary?

Government Can Trace Donors’ Identity

Jaitley had claimed that the donor alone would be able to know how much they had donated to a party: thus eliminating the possibility of quid pro quo or cronies calling in favours.

In fact, journalists found that “electoral bonds don’t really provide a donor with anonymity from the government of the day. In fact, the only people in dark about the source of these donations are the Indian public and opposition parties.”

In April 2018, The Quint bought two bonds worth Rs 1,000 each, and reported that they actually carried a secret alphanumeric code that was visible under UV light. The ministry of finance then claimed that “this number is not noted by the SBI” and cannot therefore be used to trace the donor.

Now, documents obtained through RTI reveal that “SBI does use the alphanumeric code to keep track of who bought how many bonds, and the political party to whom the bond was eventually donated. This mechanism of tracking these bonds was approved by the Finance Ministry. The rules governing electoral bonds require SBI to share this data with law enforcement agencies if required.” (Nitin Sethi, *Huffington Post*)

Remember, the Modi

Government forced demonetisation on the country in spite of the RBI's warning that this move would have no effect on black money. On that occasion too the PM himself lied to the people, promising that demonetisation was a "surgical strike on black money." The result

was the devastation of India's economy and the livelihood of India's poor. Meanwhile the same regime overruled RBI's and the Election Commission's warnings that Electoral Bonds would fuel black money and electoral corruption, allowing untold sums of

black money to secretly flow into the ruling BJP!

The Modi regime and the BJP must be taught a lesson for promoting corruption in Indian elections and risking the stability of India's currency – all to secure black money funding for itself. □

Relevance Of Guru Nanak Dev's Teachings To Society Today

(CPIML organized a symposium on 'Guru Nanak's Philosophy: Historical Importance and Contemporary Relevance' at Mansa in Punjab on 10 November 2019. In this article, Dr Shyam Sunder Deepti, Professor at the Government Medical College Amritsar, the main speaker on that occasion, reflects on Guru Nanak's relevance in historical and contemporary times.)

We are in the midst of the 550th anniversary year of Guru Nanak's birth. This is a time when there is a marked crisis for scientific temper – i.e. for a life without superstitions and irrational, cruel customs and hierarchies. In his time, such customs, atrocities and social tyranny had moved Guru Nanak to devote his life to fighting them.

Guru Nanak's life has three phases. The first phase of his life lasted till his decision to work to change society. He observed that society was riven by narrow religious and caste divisions. Untouchability and hatred prevailed. Both Hindus and Muslims practiced intolerance, fanaticism, and hollow ritualism. He understood that the all-powerful rulers patronised the major faiths, temples and mosques, and used them to keep in place an inhumane, cruel and exploitative system.

Guru Nanak, during the second

phase of his life which began at the age of 30, went in search of "Gian" – knowledge. He widely travelled to all kinds of places of worship. He travelled about twenty five thousand miles, covering what would today be India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Arab countries.

Guru Nanak's age is also known as the Bhakti Period of medieval India, when saints like Kabir, Guru Ravidass, Namdev, Baba Farid, all raised their voices against the inequalities of the caste system and urged a rational and humane philosophy. Many of these saints themselves hailed from oppressed castes.

Guru Nanak himself belonged to dominant Khatri caste. He was accompanied everywhere by Bhai Mardana, a man born in a Muslim, oppressed caste household. About Nanak, it was said, "Nicha andari nichu jati nichu hu ati nichu. Nnak tinke sanghi sathi, vadia sio kia ris" (he is the lowest among the lowly, he is their companion and had nothing to do with the so called rich elders.) He stood with Bhai Lalo and not with Malik Bhago, and "Jo Rat Pive Manas" (those who suck the blood of the poor).

In the third phase of Guru Nanak's life, he settled in Kartarpur (now in Pakistan), to which the Pakistan

Government has just opened the Langha (corridor to reach the Gurudwara). It was at Kartarpur that Guru Nanak assimilated what he had learned from his travels, and preached his own unique teachings.

His way of preaching to people was "Goshti" - i.e. meeting, discoursing. He claimed that truth is discovered by a conscious dialogue with the enlightened Sidhas. In his process of discourse, he told his followers - "Kuch suniye, kuch kahiye" (first listen carefully then speak consciously) and "Rosh na kije, uttar dije" (Do not get angry, reply patiently).

The main themes of Guru Nanak's teachings are Kirat, Kudrat and Gian i.e. manual work, respect for nature, and knowledge. All of these aspects are interwoven. Though Guru Nanak was seen as a mystic, he didn't believe in or prach withdrawal from life and the world. He was against the practices of yogis and sidhas, who withdrew from real life. He was a keen observer and took deep interest in social, cultural and religious problems that the people of that time were facing. His hymns oppose casteism and exploitation, and preach t equality, brotherhood, truthful living, social responsibilities and social justice.

His second main concern, along with active manual work (Kirat) in society, was respect for nature. He recognized that all creatures are part and parcel of Nature, and are dependent upon each other. So he said, "Pavan Guru, Pani Pita, Mata Dharat Mahat" (Air is a great teacher, water is like father and Earth is our beloved mother). Water is so essential that we can't think to live without it ("Pehal Pani Jio Hai").

Guru Nanak's travels (called Udasian) were a quest for knowledge, through posing

questions and seeking the answers. If we have to sum up the philosophy of Guru Nanak in one sentence, it would be "Sachu urai sabhu ko, Upari sachu acharu" (the thought, the knowledge of truth is a very high ideal, yet truthful living is the highest).

Guru Nanak was once asked which was the righteous way, that of Hindus, or that of Muslims. He had replied that only practice (amal) decides whether or not the way of life is righteous. He went beyond sectarian distinctions and fostered

a community, which is universal in character. He demanded the cultivation of Sach (Truth) and Achian (Practice of truth i.e. Truthful Personality)

He practiced and preached brotherhood and selfless service (Sangat and Pangat). This ethic of service can be seen all over Punjab even today.

Guru Nanak's teachings resonate with especial relevance today, as an antidote to the intolerance, fanaticism, and inequality we see all over India. □

Support JNU Movement!

Keep Doors of Universities Open For The Poor And Marginalised!

The spirited struggle of Jawaharlal Nehru University students has brought the issue of the right to education to the political centre-stage.

JNU, in Delhi, is one of the handful of institutions in India where the offspring

of the poor can afford to achieve an excellent University education. Now, the JNU Vice Chancellor appointed by the Modi Government has sought to close the doors of the University to the poor, by steeply hiking hostel room rents, and commercialising hostel

facilities by demanding that students pay steep service charges, and water and electricity bills.

Thanks to JNU'S long-standing admission policies that welcome the poor and marginalised, 40% of students are from households



whose family income is under Rs 12000 a month. The fee hikes and service charges would require such households to spend more than their entire monthly income on hostel fees to keep their son or daughter in University! Also thanks to JNU admission policies, more than half of JNU students are women: the fee hikes and commercialisation of hostels would evict them also from the University.

JNU students are not struggling for themselves alone. If hostels were successfully commercialised in JNU, where the student movement is so powerful, other colleges and Universities with low fees (including BHU, AMU, HCU) would soon face the same fate. The students are fighting to make sure college and University education is a right of every Indian, not a privilege reserved for the rich.

The Modi Government has declared war on the JNU students – allowing paramilitary CRPF troops into the campus, and unleashing vicious police lathicharge onto the students every time they make their voice heard on Delhi streets. Delhi Police, which is controlled by the Home Minister Amit Shah, illegally shut off street lights and brutally

beat up students under cover of darkness. A visually challenged student was thrown on the ground and kicked with boots by the police. Women students were subjected to sexual violence.

The JNU students, however, are continuing their movement undeterred by the violence. And they are winning the war of ideas as well. The Sangh propaganda machinery, including prominent TV channels is trying to desperately to project JNU as a waste of taxpayers' money and JNU students as a bunch of . Their propaganda is at its ugliest when it is targeting JNU's women students in the most misogynist terms. But in fact, JNU students and teachers have made the truth heard above the clamour of lies. It is widely recognised now that the fight is for the poor to be able to send their children to University. Taxpaying citizens are demanding why the Government which claims it lacks funds for higher education, has left nearly Rs 100 crore collected as Education Cess unspent. They are also asking why lakhs of crores of corporate taxes are waived every year, which if collected could fund hundreds of new Universities.

JNU students have also busted

the eyewash of "roll back" of fees and "concessions for BPL students." In fact, the supposed roll-back and concessions cannot benefit any actual students in JNU.

Rattled by the fact that the JNU students' unity is forcing even the Sangh's own student wing ABVP in JNU to claim it supports the movement, the MHRD has set up a committee, ostensibly to resolve the issues raised by students. The JNU VC, however, has reportedly avoided attending a meeting even of this Committee. JNU students are clear on their demands that the fee hike and hostel commercialisation proposal must be withdrawn with immediate effect, and any Committee discussing the issues must have JNUSU representation.

JNU's movement is spreading fast – to campuses and students all over the country. The Sangh and BJP hate Universities because their questions, unlike that of India's main Opposition parties, cannot be tamed by threats of CBI and ED raids! They are exposing the anti-poor, anti-education face of the Modi Government. People of India must extend solidarity to the student movement which is fighting for the future of India's youth. □

JNU Students Beaten, Arrested For Peaceful Protest - ABVP Thug Free After Trying To Set Teachers On Fire

Dipak Upreti of ABVP, the students' union president in Almora campus of Kumaon university doused petrol over the campus director Prof. RS Pathni and Prof Daya Pant on 15 November when Prof. Pathni was talking to them regarding some demands of the students' union. This ABVP leader spilled petrol over himself too supposedly to press for whatever demands they

were negotiating. Such dramatized acts of threatening, intimidation and even self immolation threats are not new in that particular stream of student politics which represents ruling parties and government policies. They try to dramatise and depoliticise the serious discourse concerning genuine student community. This is same brand of student politics which thrives on money and muscle

power and on the backing of ruling party politicians. In fact they are sponsored by such politicians and power lobbies who in turn use them as bargaining tools for their vested interests.

What is more worrying in this incident was the fact that the so called student leader threatened to kill his own teachers. This cannot in anyway be bracketed within any type of student activism,

and police rightly arrested him under criminal sections including charges of attempt to murder under IPC section 307. The next day many teachers in Almora campus assembled together to condemn this incident and demanded security for Prof RS Pathni. They also raised their collective concern regarding safety and hooliganism inside the campus. Many non-teaching staff also came to their support. But this wasn't going to be so smooth for the teaching community.

The Vice Chancellor of Kumaon University the very next day removed Prof. Pathni from the campus directorship and appointed another teacher. In a couple of days the ABVP leader got bail from the sessions court, although to get bail in an attempt to murder case is considered to be tough if not impossible. Prof Pathni under pressure is now on leave while the said 'student leader' is roaming freely, inside the campus too. There is BJP government in Uttarakhand and many ministers and senior BJP leaders are coming openly to support their 'cadre' while the professor who only did his duty is now under stress. The student leader has not even been suspended from the college or university for this act.

While a teacher is being victimised for nothing, the deputy chairman of Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha, BJP's Raghunath Singh Chauhan has asked his party's minister for education Dhan Singh and the concerned senior officers in administration and police to remove criminal sections from the FIR filed against ABVP leader saying students are fighting for their demands and its not a crime. Even dousing his teacher with petrol and threatening to kill him is not a crime.

This is same BJP which is adamant to destroy JNU and its

excellence by filing FIRs under various criminal sections against very peaceful, innocent and decent students of this eminent institution! Even in Kumaon University in BJP-ruled Uttarakhand, where the whole administration is under the BJP rule it would not have been so difficult for Deputy Chairman of Vidhan Sabha and the education minister to heed the demands of the students in Almora campus. Why attack the teachers for the failure of the Government, if not to divert



attention from the real culprit, the BJP Government?

Many teachers in Almora campus came in support of Prof Pathni and expressed their solidarity the very day he was removed. Many teachers met on 18 November and offered to resign from various administrative posts they had been assigned by university in protest. DSW Prof DS Bisht and many other teachers sent their resignations from their administrative responsibilities.

The University VC has meanwhile set up an "investigation committee" but has asked the said committee to declare the whole incident to be a "misunderstanding", and to "resolve" the "misunderstanding" between students and teachers! In JNU, a students' movement against fee hike, supported by

teachers, is branded criminal and subjected to FIRs by the BJP regime and its pet VC – but in Kumaon University, an ABVP thug's attempt to burn teachers alive is a mere "misunderstanding"!

This action of the Vice Chancellor testifies to his pro BJP leanings, and make things worse in establishing an environment for just, rational and democratic discourse within university. This became evident when a member of the Executive Council of Kumaon University, Kailash Chand Joshi, asked the VC through a memorandum to reinstate prof Pathni in director's office and to ensure safety of teachers and non-teaching staff in the university. He also reminded the VC of earlier incidents of this kind of hooliganism where university VC did not take any exemplary action so that a repeat of such incidents may be stopped. Mr. Joshi said that such criminal incidents are deteriorating educational atmosphere and academic standards of this reputed university.

CPIML state secretary in Uttarakhand Raja Bahuguna said that there has been a glorious history of vibrant and sensitive students' politics that addressed many important social issues and concerns inside the Almora and Nainital campuses. But now the state government and university administration is openly encouraging anarchy and criminalisation of student politics which is nothing but a concerted attempt by RSS to kill voices of reason and serious concerns towards the society. He demanded a judicial inquiry into whole incident, and also demanded that the Uttarakhand Government and Kumaon University Administration must address all the genuine concerns of students while punishing violence by the ABVP leader. □

Why We Must Listen To JNU

(Article by JNU faculty member Dr Parnal Chirmuley in *Indian Express*, November 21, 2019)

University students and faculty speaking up for publicly-funded higher education have been the object of intense vilification in sections of the media and the general public countless times in the past few years. And yet, they refuse to fade away, spilling out of campuses, fighting for equitable access to publicly-funded higher education. They refuse to be shamed into submitting to education policies that exclude large sections of the population to make way for the elite few. The background to their persistence needs to be sketched out, especially because trained and paid armies of trolls continue to plague the discourse on higher education with vitriol and lies.

The attempt to construct stereotypes of students in the public sphere as lazy, good-for-nothings who want to survive on the taxpayer's money is a clever sleight of hand by the ruling party and its offspring. Students of research universities like JNU are repeatedly castigated, supposedly by a "taxpaying public" for not earning their own living and paying fees. The argument is that money spent on their education is "a waste". It helps obfuscate the true nature of education policies by this government.

It seeks to draw your attention away from the fact that equitable access to inclusive higher education actually transforms lives for the better, wherein a street vendor's child, a former chowkidar, a young woman from a slum in Mumbai can each seek an education that helps them climb out of the pit of deprivation and achieve intergenerational mobility. For a ruling dispensation that stands triumphant on the shoulders of social divisions based on caste, gender, and religion, this disruption of inequality is frightening. And, this is why you are being relentlessly fed these stereotypes so that you will continue as passive participants in the drama of the oppression of the marginalised and the underprivileged.

Here are a few facts that might help us to cut through the vitriol and ask some hard questions: According to the CAG Report of February 2019, Rs 94,036 crore of the secondary and higher education cess and Rs 7,298 crore of the research and development cess remained unutilised. Where will this money go? The fee hike in JNU (which has led to massive protests in recent weeks, bringing down upon our students the wrath of paramilitary and police), if implemented, will lead to over 40 per cent of our students being completely abandoned by the education system, and render JNU as one of the most expensive public

universities in the country.

Here, the question of where the taxpayer's money is going can be sharpened: In 2017-18, the total expenditure on JNU was Rs 556 crore, seeing over 8,000 students through one academic year, over a 1,000 research articles published in reputed journals, 1,086 special lectures being open to the public, and 4,594 MPhil and PhD dissertations being submitted. Contrast this with the Rs 1,313 crore spent on mere publicity of the central government and its schemes. The imbalance in priorities is crystal clear. In JNU, some 2,500 students with fellowships pay Rs 7,500 (Rs 22.5 crore per annum) per month as housing allowance to the university. In the last two years, Mphil/PhD (especially reserved) seats have been left vacant, despite the Delhi High Court castigating JNU for causing a national waste of resources. The struggle against seat cuts now joins the struggle against fee hike to make the same point over and over again — the decimation by the present government of the inclusive and representational higher education for all.

A deeper reflection of this imbalance is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2019, which is really what students in JNU and across campuses are fighting against. This policy is nothing more than a deliberately planned eclipse of equitable access to publicly funded



Wall graffiti by students in JNU

education. Here is why.

The setting up of the Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA) by this government to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) requires that institutions of higher education function not on grants, but on loans that are to be recovered through fee hikes and other “internal resource generation”, a pseudonym for placing education in the marketplace rather than at the disposal of the social good. The vision and the methods of the NEP 2019, which is built on the fundamentals of the HEFA, have nothing to do with universal humanistic values that underlie education policies in many countries where human rights, bridging social, economic, and regional chasms are the objectives of education at all levels. In fact, in many of them, university education is free, even though the average per capita income is far higher than in India.

In these imaginations, the subject is defined by her rights and her needs. Moreover, the Constitution of India requires that education policy provide for equitable access to publicly funded education.

The NEP 2019, however, has little beyond the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution” as the driving impetus, in which, the individual is seen as mere kindling in the fire of economic activity. It sees no other function to education other than producing cheap labour that toils away on the lowest rung of the labour ladder.

It renders complete the shift from education as a right to education as a commodity. In the real world, in real-time, this policy casts a highly porous net that will benefit but a small section of the population that can buy education from private profiteers, rendering even basic education an unaffordable luxury. Increasingly, the bottom of even

the social section that believes it might be able to afford this luxury is also falling out, given the state of the economy where unemployment is the highest in 45 years. In the absence of publicly-funded education, parents and students will be driven in the direction of education loans and a lifetime of indebtedness. This puts education out of the reach of even the middle classes.

This is why students in universities like JNU are at the barricades, in a movement that is spreading like a necessary conflagration through campuses in the country, for they want to ensure their own rights and pay it forward, so that coming generations can rightfully seek solid and affordable education instead of choosing between indebtedness and illiteracy. We need to listen to them, now.

Diversity, Democracy and Dissent: JNU

Shivani Nag

In a country marked with sharp inequalities of various kinds (class, caste, gender and many others), it is in education that many see a ray of hope, a hope to be able to lead a life of dignity. Right to life is incomplete if the life guaranteed is a life without dignity, equality and justice and it is impossible to imagine these in the absence of equal access to information, knowledge, knowledge construction and skills needed for dignified sources of livelihood. In other words, it is impossible to imagine these in absence of equal access to education. Therefore, it is a tragedy of our times that affordable quality education is a right and must be ensured for all, requires convincing. It is nothing but an absolute tragedy that of all

the possible uses of the taxpayers' money, it is the expenditure on quality public education that is sought to be made a mockery of by the elite and the media alike.

The battle that is being fought in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) today is a battle to resist the attack on equal access to education and on the right to life with dignity and equality. The fight JNU students and teachers are fighting today, is not a fight to save themselves a few hundred or thousand rupees, they are fighting to ensure that education in an institute that has been internationally recognised for its quality of research and academics, remains accessible to all.

The battle for affordable

quality higher education becomes particularly relevant in a country where the schooling system is characterized by multiple hierarchies (between private and government schools and also within the different kinds of government schools). Our schooling systems, far from bridging gaps between the privileged and the marginalised, have only served to further intensify them. The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), by keeping the better quality government schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas and Sainik Schools outside its ambit, ensured that the ‘Act’ remained weak. The result of this unequal schooling system has been that only those with resources can afford quality schooling and it

is the ones without resources and voice who are condemned to the lowest rung of government schools that frequently lack academic infrastructure, including sufficient numbers of qualified and trained permanent teachers. It is this state of government run schools that force parents to opt for private high fee paying schools, even when they are pushed to go beyond their means. Many of us who grew up in middle class families have witnessed our parents' struggle to fund our school education because 'free' government schools lacked quality, quality government schools lacked enough seats to accommodate us all and the only option that remained were the high fee charging private schools. The flourishing of the latter required a systematic destruction of the public schooling and the saga is all set to repeat at the level of the higher education. To breathe life into the Lovelys, Amitys, Ashokas and the yet to be born Jio Institute, the public higher education needs to be smothered and killed.

And it is important to remind ourselves who suffers when public higher education institutes are smothered and killed. In past few days, we have heard of several narratives emanating from JNU campus of students who would not have dreamed of being in higher education had it not been for the

affordability of JNU. From the children of agricultural labourers, security guards, scheme workers to the children of the very jawans and police personnel (against whom some would want to pit the students fighting for educational rights of all), they all could aspire and realize the dream of a world class education because there existed an equal space like JNU.

The affordability of tuition fees, hostel fees and also of the dhabas around ensured that learning was never left to the classroom alone and intense debates/ discussions spilled over to the community built around those classrooms where (in) ability to afford never became a barrier in participation or in an opportunity to learn from one another. JNU is not just a higher education institute that provides quality higher education to all, it is a space that pricks the bubbles of privileges and entitlements and forces those who come here to acknowledge and confront the same. An equal space where they paid the same fees as anyone else and hence had the same claims to the academic space and its infrastructure as anyone else did! By charging the same low fee, the space didn't encourage any entitled souls to feel that their claim to the space was more, rather the equal conditions of all and presence of all is what also over the years has led to humanising of most. It is no coincidence

that students of this university have been at the forefront of several socio-political. For example, it was the students of JNU, who by coming out in huge numbers in the winters of December 2012, forced the government of the day to revisit anti-rape laws and make them more gender just. They have been part of movements against forced displacements and land acquisitions, corruption, caste based oppression and many others. The diverse and inclusive space that JNU is and the nature of interactions and exchanges that such a space facilitates, does make it difficult for even those coming from privileged locations to stay in cocooned and rose-tinted worlds where 'self' and 'self interests' rule.

With JNU being a research university, the question is not merely of access to knowledge, but importantly of access to participation in knowledge construction. 'What will be the idea of development and who would be considered inconsequential enough to bear the collateral damage of the same', 'who will write the history and whose story will the history textbook render invisible', 'who will write textbooks on sociology and which genders will find a voice in those textbooks', 'what agricultural equipments will students of mechanical engineering create and which class of farmers will these inventions help



Wall graffiti by students in JNU



the most', 'whose and what kind of labour will economic models consider worthy of wages'... let alone the answers to these questions that university spaces researching in these disciplines may provide, the very asking of these questions depends on who gets to research in the universities.

A university space where the fee is a deterrent for most, questions of the marginalised and oppressed will forever remain unarticulated and not just the space but even disciplinary knowledge will remain impoverished, shallow and exclusionary. The idea of JNU as an equal space also comes from the fact it has been an equal space where everyone paid the same fees as anyone else and hence had the same claims to the academic space and its infrastructure as anyone else did!! By charging the same low fee, the space didn't encourage any entitled souls to feel that their claim to the space was more, rather the equal conditions of all and presence

of all is what also over the years has led to humanizing of most.

It is also important to remember here that one enters research only after completing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (something most media channels may never bother to point out, as they comment on the age of research scholars in universities). This implies that there is a huge opportunity cost involved in pursuing research. I entered the M.Phil. programme of JNU after finishing my Masters, at the age of 25. I was in a huge dilemma at the time. I knew my heart lay in research but most of my friends and acquaintances my age had begun to earn. Yes, the thought of depending on my parents for fees when my father was nearing retirement and while friends my age were earning, was very troubling. At the time, the fact that the fee in JNU could be covered by the UGC fellowship was a huge motivator. It helped me pursue my interest in research, ask the questions that had been echoing within me

and contribute to my discipline by way of my findings. Not to forget, I currently teach in a university— a research degree is a pre-requisite for teaching in universities, and when the opportunity of entering research degrees is denied to most, also denied to them is the opportunity to enter university spaces as teachers. Hence exclusion from opportunity to research implies exclusion from asking your questions, enriching the knowledge domain and also be denied a chance to teach. Pushing us back to times where the privileged taught the skills reserved for the privileged to the privileged.

A democracy is not a democracy if the access to knowledge and knowledge construction is not democratised. A nation can barely progress if ignorance rules and information and skills are confined to becoming privileges of few. And hence, the fight of JNU students today, is a fight we must all be strengthening and cheering. It is a fight for all of us.

Courage Confronts Brute Power

(Article by Kavita Krishnan, first appeared in *Kochi Post*)

On November 18, the police and CRPF, many of them in plainclothes, repeatedly brutalised JNU students who set out from their campus to march to Parliament to protest fee hikes and commercialisation of hostel facilities. They arrested several lots of JNU students and detained them in police stations across Delhi.

But there were still thousands of students remaining, making their ways through the Munirka alleyways and various lanes and by-lanes, forcing the police to collect their barricades and try and keep pace with them. So, thousands

of students waited at Jor Bagh, not far from the prime minister's residence, demanding the release of their colleagues, and demanding that the JNU students union find representation in the committee constituted by the Ministry of Human Resources Development to address the JNU deadlock.

When the students finally dispersed from Jor Bagh and began walking back to the campus, they suddenly found the street lights switched off. Under cover of darkness, the police launched a final round of assault. JNUSU Councillor, Shashi Bhushan, a history student who is visually challenged, took off his dark glasses to tell the police he could not see. But they knocked him

down and kicked him in the stomach with their boots, saying, "If you're blind why did you participate in the march?"

The very fact that the Delhi Police, controlled directly by India's Home Minister and PM Modi's bestie, Amit Shah, attacked the students under cover of darkness shows that the regime waging war on students knows it has lost all claims to moral authority.

Some of the students I met in the Badarpur police station earlier that day were absurdly young. One young woman was just 17 years old, a BA student, nursing an arm swollen from being assaulted by a policewoman. What makes these first-year students come out

on the streets to face vindictive punishment and violence from their Vice Chancellor, and from the police and paramilitary? Most of them are not communists or Left activists, though many of them are.

What they're fighting for, is their dreams, their parents' dreams. If you're thinking, 'Why are they not studying, why are they fighting?', the answer is: 'They're fighting for the right to study.'

The Right to Study

When I was a student in JNU in the 1990s, the AISA slogan—'Struggle to study, and study to change the world'—appealed to my sense of duty and drew a very private, studious me into a public life of activism. The problem is that today, those who rule us brand young people seeking to change the world, "anti-national", "Urban Naxal" and so on. Much of the media amplifies this noisy abuse, and drowns out the voices of reason.

Examine the facts that fuel the JNU agitation. First, it is a lie that JNU students are complaining about having to pay a mere Rs 300 a year as room rent. The revised fee structure amounts to a total commercialisation of hostel facilities. Single room rent is raised from Rs 240 per annum to Rs 7200 per annum, and sharing room rent is raised from Rs 120 per annum to Rs 3600 per annum. And that is the least of it.

JNU hostels never levied service charges. Now, service charges are to be levied to the tune of Rs 20,400 per annum. This is not counting water and electricity charges, which the students are now being asked to pay according to usage. This will mean eviction from University education for a very large majority of JNU students.

Thanks in large part to JNU's system of deprivation points in



Sandeep Louis (top)
and Madhurima
Kundu (bottom)
injured by police
batons

admissions (won by students' struggles in the 1990s), 40 per cent of JNU students come from families with a household income of Rs 144,000 per annum. The hike in charges and fees would mean that every such family would have to spend over 40 per cent of its annual income to send just one child to University.

Also thanks in large measure to the deprivation points, more than 50 per cent of JNU students are women. A 999 per cent hike in hostel expenses will force a large number of these women to drop out of higher education.

What About Roll-Back of Fee Hike For BPL Students?

The Indian Express has correctly found that even after the so-called concessions for students whose families are in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category, those availing the concession would still have to pay an extra Rs 12,000 annually for hostel expenses. The "service charges" which are slated at Rs 20,400 per annum without concessions, are Rs 10,200 per annum with concessions. Under the present fee structure, no service

charges are levied.

Also the merit-cum-means (MCM) scholarship offered by JNU—for students whose parent's income does not exceed Rs 20,833 per month—would only cover roughly half of a student's annual hostel and tuition expenses, whereas under the old fee structure, it covered 75 per cent of the fee.

Why Special Treatment for JNU?

Actually, JNU's hostel fee is not the lowest among the country's best central universities. Visva-Bharati University, HCU, AMU, NEHU and Pondicherry University charge less, if not the same, as JNU. So if hostel facilities are privatised and its costs steeply raised in JNU, where the student movement is so strong, all other central universities will soon follow suit. So the question is not, "Why are JNU fees low?" The question is, "Why should university fees be high?" and "Why not build at least one JNU, offering excellent, affordable University education, in every state?"

Is there a fund crunch in JNU? Is JNU wasting public money?

The UGC allocation to JNU (including salary, pension and property tax & capital expenditure) for the year 2017-18 was approximately Rs 401 crore (for 8082 students). In contrast, the Central Government spent Rs 5200 crore/Rs1094.74 crore/year, in self-promotional advertisements for the Prime Minister from May 2014 to December 2018. Who is wasting taxpayers' money? According to a CAG Report of February 2019, Rs 94,036 crore, collected as secondary and higher

education cess, as well as Rs 7,298 crore collected as research and development cess from taxpayers remained unused. Why not use this amount rather than commercialising hostels?

The Corporate tax waivers in the Union Budget for successive years come to more than four lakh crore. (2013-14: Rs 57,793 crore, 2014-15: Rs 62,398.6 crore, 2016-17: Rs 86,144.72 crore, 2017-18: Rs 93,642.50 crore, 2018-19: Rs 108,785.41 crore) If the Government were to stop waiving taxes for the rich corporates, it could easily fund more than 250 JNUs.

Why don't Rich Students Subsidise Poor Ones?

In JNU, 2,500 students with fellowships pay Rs 7,500 (Rs 22.5 crore per annum) per month as housing rent allowance to the university. So, such students do, in fact, subsidise the University. But this is not charity. Charity promotes inequality, not equality – and so, should have no place on a University campus.

Why not Differential Fee Structure?

This is a bad idea, for the following reasons. First, the higher education cess is calculated as a percentage of income—so citizens with higher income (including parents of JNU scholars) already contribute more, or less, towards universities, based on their income. A differential fee model for students based on family income would mean that commercialised education is accepted as a norm, while some concessions are made to some students as charity.

This model in private schools has been known to result in

discrimination against EWS students. Moreover, differential fees will cause an escalation in living costs overall on the campus—the presence of students paying steep fees will fuel a demand for hikes in mess bills, costs of dhaba food, and other amenities generally. This will make the overall cost of living in JNU higher, and more hostile, for students from lower income backgrounds. This will inevitably result in a more hostile environment for such students.

The Prurient Right-Wing Gaze

What is especially disturbing to see now, is the flooding of social media and TV media with material that spread fake news about JNU students. Fact-checking websites can barely keep up with the fake news about JNU: claiming JNU students are too old to be at University, for instance. Plenty of this stuff is openly Islamophobic: claiming 23-year old JNU student Shubham Bokade is actually 45-year-old Ahmad Raza, or that 30-year-old JNU student Pankaj Mishra is 47-year-old Moinuddin from Kerala. One particularly absurd but viral fake news circulated a picture of CPI leader Annie Raja claiming she was a JNU student.

But by far the worst anti-JNU propaganda subjects women students of JNU, and in fact all women students, to the prurient, sexualised right-wing gaze. This gaze feigns horror, and titillates itself, with the bogey of the young college-going woman student who drinks, smokes, or has sex. Facebook is full of images of young women having a drink, or a smoke—being circulated to "discredit" JNU. The fact is that these women are not JNU students—but that is besides the point.

The point is that this gaze,

combining both moralistic condemnation and titillation, makes all women everywhere unsafe. Note that photographs of young men drinking or smoking or using condoms are not circulated to suggest sexual anarchy. The popular film Three Idiots portrayed young male students drinking on their IIT campus—but those images evoked humorous indulgence, not moralistic horror.

It is not just anonymous social media trolls who slut-shame University students. BJP MP Subramanian Swamy is known to repeat the notion, on TV and Twitter, that ‘modern girls’ and feminist and left activists, especially those educated in universities,

are “naxalites” who have “free sex”. BJP MLA and West Bengal state president Dilip Ghosh has slut-shamed Jadavpur University women students more than once.

It is time we refused to fall for such propaganda, and refused to look away from the real issue: the fact is that JNU students are fighting so that higher education can be accessed by the sons and daughters of farmers and workers. They are fighting to remind us that society must value people, based not on their wealth but on their social conscience.

Above all, we should understand why the Godi (pro-Modi) Media is fuelling hatred for JNU. Students are the one opposition that cannot

be intimidated by ED and CBI raids, or for that matter even by police beatings, FIRs and arrests. They continue to speak truth to power, boldly. That is why the regime and its propagandists think they must try and discredit students by any means possible.

But the student movement fire is fast spreading beyond JNU. A section of BHU is agitating to defend a Muslim professor of Sanskrit targeted by fascists, and is also standing in solidarity with JNU, with banners saying ‘Narendra Modi Shiksha Virodhi’ (Narendra Modi is anti-education). The students’ movement has exposed the Modi regime’s anti-poor, pro-corporate character. □

Solidarity With JNU

Solidarity messages and protests are pouring in from students and citizens all over India and the world, and are bringing together various struggles against privatisation of schooling and higher education. Here are samples of some of them.

Students Attacked in West Bengal

BJP goons brutally attacked AISA activists protesting against crackdown on JNU Students in Bali, West Bengal. AISA leaders Swarnendu Mitra and Subhadeep

along with several other comrades were severely injured.

Countrywide Protests

Earlier, on 14 November, AISA units at many centres in all the states held out protest demonstrations in solidarity with the movement in JNU. They demanded to address all the issues raised by JNU students which genuine reflect the concerns of student community in whole country against the highly regressive changes by the Modi government. The students in all the places also raised their demand to immediately withdraw the Draft New

Education Policy.

AIPWA held solidarity protests in Patna and Kolkata, pointing out that the JNU students’ movement is also a movement for the right of women students to go to University.

CPIML MLA demonstrated in the Bihar Assembly in support of JNU students.

RYA held protests all over India in support of JNU students.

On 23 November, a massive citizens march was held in Delhi in which students, teachers and others from Delhi and neighbouring states poured out in support of the issues raised by JNU students.



Students of Central University of Rajasthan

We express our complete support and solidarity to protesting students of JNU. We as part of a public funded educational institution are equally facing the crisis created as a result of massive privatization and commodification of higher education. There is an urgent need to create a large scale pan India movement against Privatization of Education and for rejection New Education Policy. Therefore, as a token of solidarity we want to assure JNU Students Union and protesting students that we will stand by them in every fight anti student, anti education moves and policies. Also we will be participating in the Citizens March called by JNUSU on 23rd November from Mandi House to Parliament.

AIIMS Students Union

The AIIMS students' union has not only extended solidarity to JNU students but has also announced its intention to resist the Modi Government's plans to hike fees of medical students as well as patient user charges at the AIIMS. "Under

no circumstances shall we allow the government to destroy the education and healthcare system of India. After striking down the autonomy of apex institutes, the government is moving to make education inaccessible to the common man," - said Mukul Kumar, president of the Student's Union of AIIMS-Delhi.

Gujarat College Ahmedabad

Student activists of AIDSO, of Gujarat College Ahmedabad collected signatures on a huge banner in support of JNU students.

Udaipur Citizens and Parents

Udaipur citizens held a march in solidarity with the JNU students movement, organised in the main by the Udaipur parents movement against fee hikes in private schools.

IIT Delhi Research Scholars' Statement

(Excerpts)

Students of this country play a major role in nation-building and their voices must be heard with an unfettered spirit of rationality and tolerance. It is necessary

to involve and hear them at the appropriate institute forums before any academic and/or administrative decisions are made. While we respect the autonomous status of these institutes, we worry about the growing authoritarianism and oppression on student communities.

We express our solidarity to students from all universities who are fighting against the unjustifiable fee hikes. We condemn the brutal police action on students, researchers, and teachers who are fighting for affordable education. Education must not be made a commodity, and for students of this country to avail quality education, they must be given grants and not loans. We see the ongoing fee hikes as a 'trend' and request the concerned to immediately interfere and put an end to this.

We hereby reject IIT Council's recommendation to increase the MTech tuition fee and stop the monthly stipend. IIT Council's decision will open a channel for fee hike across the country, and any steps to implement this without student consultation will call for severe student protests. We request MHRD to reject the IIT Council's proposal regarding the

IIT Mumbai



Lucknow University



Bihar Vidhan Sabha



Andhra Pradesh



MTech fee hike.

We are extremely saddened to hear about the shocking stories of suicides in IIT campuses. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends who have lost their dear ones.

We hope that the demands of protesting students at IIT Madras are heard, and proper actions are taken against individuals found guilty. IITs should revisit their counselling programmes, and appropriate measures must be

taken at all institutes immediately. An academic probe at the institute level must be initiated in case of an unforeseen incident.

IIT Delhi Research Scholars pledge our support to the student community in distress and will stand by their side to make our universities a better place.

IIT Bombay

IIT Bombay students protested saying “We stand against privatization of education. We

condemn police action against JNU students.”

Support From Pakistan and Bangladesh

The Progressive Students Collective (Pakistan), and Bangladeshi Students Union released statements in support of the Fees Must Fall movement in JNU and India, pointing out that students in their countries are waging such movements also. □

Students Are Rising in Pakistan

(Excerpts from ‘The Students Are Rising’ by Ammar Ali Jan, a historian and a member of the Haqooq-e-Khalq Movement, in The News, Pakistan. The similarities between the smear campaign against JNU students, and the one against Pakistani students, are impossible to miss.)

A palpable sense of despondency and disorientation characterizes Pakistan’s political landscape. Part of the reason is the abysmal performance of the PTI government that made lofty proposals of ending the country’s debt burden and

investing in jobs and public housing.

The induction of IMF-approved officials into the cabinet and the state machinery has eroded even nominal notions of financial sovereignty while facilitating the corporate and feudal elites with tax breaks. These subsidies for the elites are being doled out at a time of unprecedented hardship for ordinary citizens who are experiencing an exponential rise in inflation as well as unprecedented cuts to the social development sector.

It is no surprise then that the recent viral videos of students chanting revolutionary slogans at the Faiz Festival have struck a chord with large sections of the population. The fire and courage in their voice appeared as a glaring contrast to the overly calculated manoeuvrings characteristic of high politics. In the videos, they can be seen daring the entire spectrum of political leadership in the country, invoking the possibility of a new, untainted force on the political horizon.

Yet, apart from the well-deserved praise, there was also a serious backlash witnessed against the protesting students. Initially, many tried dismissing them as elites, particularly by obsessing over the leather jacket worn by Arooj Aurangzeb, the student leading the chants in the video. Those who made these accusations were embarrassed to find out that the students in the videos were enrolled in public-sector universities and belonged to humble family backgrounds. The accusation of elitism in particular stemmed from the limited public imagination of how assertive public-sector students can be. The fact that women were leading the chants only confirmed the suspicion that they must be “elite, liberal” women, ignoring how feisty and assertive middle-class and working-class women can be.

Once the social media world could see the clarity of purpose among these young citizens, the nature of allegations started becoming more serious. Some have started accusing them of being part of the opposition’s agenda, while others with even more fanciful imagination have begun accusing the students of playing on a secret “foreign agenda”. These allegations are gaining steam as students prepare for a Student Solidarity March to be organized on the 29th of November.

To understand the ‘mysterious’ agenda of the marchers, it is pertinent to delve into the background of the movement. For years, academics and concerned citizens have been complaining about the decrepit conditions of higher education in Pakistan. The lack of quality teaching, prohibition on asking critical questions and the breakdown of infrastructure such as water and housing, have all contributed to an accumulation



of anger among the younger generation. On top of these dismal conditions, the lack of employment opportunities is further fueling the resentment, with the ‘youth bulge’ often cited as a possible cause for social and political disturbances in the near future.

Despite the escalating crisis, students have little to no representation on campuses. The constitution guarantees the right to association to all citizens but the de facto ban on student unions has resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of a tiny, myopic set of university administrators. The frequent incidents of violence on campuses, including the tragic case of Mashal Khan, are indicative of the close nexus between the state, conniving administrators and certain student groups. The recent news of allegations of a seven-million dollar fraud at one of the premiere universities of Lahore is exemplary of the unbridled powers of these university administrations.

One can list a number of other shocking cases in recent times. The sexual harassment scandal at the University of Balochistan shook the country due to the details of the systematic way in which an opaque and criminal administration blackmailed female students. More recently, students at the University of Sindh were charged with sedition for daring to demand clean drinking water on campuses. Then, we heard the news of the rustication of six students from UET Lahore because they raised their voices against the unbearable fees hike.

The situation is comparable

across universities in Pakistan, a condition that led a group of dedicated students to organize a student solidarity march across the country. Their demands are commonsensical. Among other things, they want the restoration of student unions, a reversal of budget cuts to higher education, clean and safe environment on campuses, and the promotion of critical thinking among students.

One is perplexed to see how the desire to create a vibrant and safe universities could be part of a foreign agenda. Why would the country’s enemies celebrate if there is more investment and reform in our higher education? And who benefits when we accuse students fighting for these necessary reforms as ‘seditious elements’?

The fact that many are unable to understand the youth upsurge is testament to the stale language we are accustomed to in describing political events. The framing of every social movement as “foreign conspiracies” shows the limitations of our acquired language, with our socio-political crisis turning into a linguistic crisis. It is a sign that something new is emerging, a process that contains fluid contours that disturbs preconceived notions of doing politics.

In more delightful news, a workers’ rally will join the student solidarity march in Lahore. The ability to see disparate struggles as part of the same continuum of justice and equality is the basis of any shared political project. There is a long way to go before these young men and women can truly shake up the entrenched power structures in society. For now, they have emerged as symbols of hope from the ruins of a torn and paralyzed society. We must embrace and join them in demanding a just future for our country’s abandoned youth. □

Kerala Extra-judicial Killings

(From a Fact-Finding Report by All India People's Forum (AIPF), National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL))

On 28th and 29th October 2019 at the forest areas at Attapaddi, Palakkad district, the Thunderbolt which is the special wing of the Kerala police "encountered" 4 persons who they have termed as belonging to the Communist Party of India (Maoists). As per the police, 3 persons were killed on 28th October, and 1 person was killed on 29th October 2019 at the same spot. The Government has claimed that they have been shot in cross-firing.

On 9th and 10th November 2019 a team consisting of Dr E. Rati Rao, Maitreyi Krishnan and K. M. Venugopalan (All India People's Forum), Adv. P A Pouran & G. Haridasan (People's Union for Civil Liberties), Vilayodi Venugopal (National Alliance of People's Movements) and T. Vijayan Karippode (social activist) conducted a fact-finding enquiry into the reported encounters and death of 4 maoists in firing by Thunderbolt police. The team visited the Mele Manjikandi, which is the nearest village to the encounter spot, about 2.5 kilometres away and spoke to the resident adivasis. The team also spoke to others from different locations across Attappadi including the Adivasi hamlet Danyam, which is located in the valley on the other side of Manikandi hill. The team met and talked with Smt. Shivani, a member of Thaykulam, an adivasi women's organization based in Attappadi, and who works on the issues faced by adivasis. The Team also visited Agali police station and spoke to the Station House Officer and Inspector Mr Hidayathulla and few local police officials.

On the second day, the team went to the district police headquarters at Palakkad with a view to meeting few higher police officers including the SP. However, most of the higher officials were out of station and thus were not available in the concerned offices. The Team was able to have a telephonic conversation with Mr Feroz M. Shafi, DySP (Crime Branch), who is the investigating officer in respect of the incident. The Team spoke to Mr Sunil Kumar, Mannarkhad Divisional Forest Officer, Ms Shyamala, Range Officer over telephone and had conversation with few local forest officials as well. The Team also spoke with the lawyers representing two close relatives of slain Manivasakam and Karthi before the High Court and Sessions Court in the cases filed in relation to the "encounter".

Version of the police

The following is what the Team learnt from their conversations with Police Inspector, Agali Police Station, Mr Hidayathulla and had DySP (Crime Branch), Mr Feroz M. Shafi.

We were informed that two cases have been registered in regard to the "encounters". In regard to the incident that took place on 28th October, 2019 Crime number 291/2019 was registered. As per the said complaint registered on 28th October, 2019, 14 members of the Thunderbolt unit were on patrol, when, at around 12.20 p.m., a group of persons who belong to the Communist Party of India (Maoist) opened fire at the police. The members of the Thunderbolt unit fired back killing 3 persons, including 1 woman. The Police claim that the Maoists had camped at the said spot and

that they had found cooked rice in a tent. Crime Number 291/2019 has been registered under Section 143, 144, 147, 148, 253, 307 read with Section 149 IPC; Section 3 read with Section 25 (1)(b) of the Arms Act; Section 16, 20, 38, 39 and 49 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Section 27(1)(e) of the Kerala Forest Act against an unnamed group of people on the basis of a complaint given by one of the members of the Thunderbolt unit.

About the three slain persons, we were informed that one of them is Shri Karthik. In regard, to the other two persons, we were initially informed by the Police Inspector, Mr Hidayathulla that the two of them were Shri Aravind and Smt. Rema. When we asked him how they found out the names, he stated that it was through "sources". However, thereafter, Mr Feroz M. Shafi, DySP (Crime Branch) informed us that the person initially identified as Shri Aravind had actually been identified as Shri Srinivasan, by his family, through photos. However, he stated that his family was still to identify the body of Shri Srinivasan. To date Smt. Rema is not identified except by the name which the police claims it has received from its "sources".

When we asked them, as to how the provisions of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act had been invoked when the deceased persons had not been identified, we were informed by Mr Feroz M. Shafi, DySP (Crime Branch) that the same had been mentioned in the complaint itself given by one of the members of the Thunderbolt unit. No further information in this regard was provided.

As per the police, no FIR has been registered against any of the members of the Thunderbolt unit,

and the only FIR registered, as stated above, is against those who were killed.

In regard to the incident that occurred on 29th October, 2019, we were informed that about 60 people including several members of the Thunderbolt unit, members of the Q branch, Tamil Nadu, the Deputy Commissioner, Palakkad, the Superintendent of Police (Operations), the Police Inspector, Agali Police Station were present and the inquest was being conducted. According to Mr Hidayuthulla, they heard shots from the Western side, and all of them were directed to duck down. The Thunderbolt then shot and one person was killed, his name being Shri Manivasakam. They also said that other persons who were with him ran away. Crime number 292/2019 was registered against one accused, i.e. the deceased himself. Mr Feroz M. Shafi, DySP (Crime Branch) informed us that as per the postmortem, Shri Manivasakam had two fractures, on his knee and thigh. He said that those injuries were perimortem (i.e. injuries taking place at or around the time of death).

In regard to the incident that occurred on 29th October, 2019, it is necessary to note that after the incident occurred on 28th October, 2019, the entire area was cordoned off to a circumference of 400 metres. The body of Shri Manivasakam, according to the Inspector, Mr Hidayuthulla, was found within 40 metres from where they were standing, within the 400 metre cordoned off region.

We were informed by the DySP (Crime Branch), Mr Feroz M. Shafi that these cases after having been transferred to the District Crime Branch have been renumbered respectively as Cr No-495/CB CU-III/KKD/R/19 (Agali PS Cr. 291/2019) & Cr No-496/CB CU-III/KKD/R/19 (Agali PS Cr. 291/2019)

Meeting with the villagers and members of Thaikulam

The team met with some of the villagers of Mele Manjikandi, who told us that the incident had occurred the day after Diwali, and there was too much noise and they could not hear the firings on 28th October, 2019. While expressing that the killings were inhuman, they were apprehensive about giving specifics about the incident.

We also met Smt. Shivani, Smt Narjari and Smt Shivakami from the organization, Thaikullam. Smt. Shivanni is also a member of the district monitoring committee under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. She stated that there was serious doubts in the versions of the police, and that these doubts showed that the killings were not "encounters", but in fact extra-judicial killings. She stated that the body of the woman who was killed on 28th October, 2019 was decomposing at the time itself indicating that she had been killed at an earlier time. They said that they had visited the place on 29th October, 2019 and could see that there was cooked food there, indicating that those who had been killed could have been eating when they had been killed. She stated that she was informed that on 28th October, 2019, stretchers were brought before the incident took place, indicating the pre-planned nature of the incident. While it was being said that three casualties happened in the encounter on 28 October, why did they bring 4 stretchers instead of 3? She asked, suggesting that the second day's incident was obviously pre-planned. These women also wondered while Shri Manivasakam had suffered two fractures on his legs, how could he have walked or could have been

agile to be able to shoot at the police or the Thunderbolt.

They said that the conditions of the adivasis living in Attapaddi was very poor and they were a neglected population, and the State instead of addressing their needs was treating them with suspicion and harassing them. They said that subsequent to the incident the surveillance of persons residing in the nearby hamlets and those who were vocal, including themselves, has risen. This led to the people living a life of constant fear, knowing that their every move was being watched upon.

They also said that posters purported to be put up by an organization Adivasi Yuvata supporting the police action in the killings were put up. She said that such organization had not been heard of and it appears that the posters had been put up by the police themselves.

Response of the State Government

Mr Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala Chief Minister has defended the killing of the 4 persons and in fact has stated before the media not to paint the Maoists as "lambs" or "holy souls". The Chief Secretary of Kerala, Mr Tom Jose, has written an article titled "*It is like war: Kill or be killed*" appearing in Times of India on 5th November, 2019, where he makes the following statements amongst others:

"There is no rationale in stating that Maoists who indulge in armed conflict have got the same human rights and privileges as normal citizens. Not only that it cuts at the very root of the principles we live by, but also mocks and insults the ordinary people who go about their daily lives obeying the laws of the society...."

It is either kill or be killed. When our soldiers fight our enemies across the border, we don't portray

them in bad light. We applaud them. Then why blame our police forces when all they do is to protect the citizens from Maoist terrorists?"

The statements made by the Chief Minister, Mr Pinarayi Vijayan and the article penned by the Chief Secretary, Tom Jose are highly condemnable. The branding of those killed as Maoists, when admittedly they have not even been identified displays the pre-judged manner in which the State has responded. Even otherwise, comparisons of Maoists to terrorists or enemies from across the border and stating that they do not have human rights goes against the fundamental principles of the rule of law which assures equality and equal protection of the law to all citizens.

The pre-determined statements of the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary also give cause for apprehension that the investigation being carried out would not be independent and would be coloured by the existing bias and prejudice from which these statements stem. Short-circuiting of the judicial process and the encroachment of the executive into the judicial realm by passing judgment through such extra-judicial killings is a cause for serious concern.

While looking into the response of the State into the incident, it is also necessary to note a subsequent development, which indicates the manner in which the Government has responded to the issue at hand. Alan Shuhaib and Thaha Fasal, both law students, were arrested for distributing brochures criticising the extra-judicial killing of the four suspected Maoists at the Pantheerankavu market, Calicut on 2nd November 2019. Stating that they were distributing "pro-Maoist" brochures, both the students have been arrested and an FIR under the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act has been filed. This arrest

which has met with heavy criticism from all quarters once again raises very serious issue on the manner in which the CPIM-led LDF Government is dealing with dissent of any form, and the labelling of all persons who dissent in any form as Maoists and members of terrorist organization.

It is also necessary to note the words of the Kerala High Court in its order dated 22.05.2015 in W.P. (C) No. 24902/2014 in Shyam Balakrishnan vs. State of Kerala and Ors., where the Court awarded compensation of Rs. 1 lakhs to the Petitioner who was arrested on suspicion of being a Maoist and was thereafter released for lack of proof.

"12...Being a Maoist is no crime, though the political ideology of Maoists does not synchronize with our constitutional polity. It is a basic human right to think in terms of human aspirations. The freedom of thought and liberty of conscience is a natural right and cannot be surrendered by any human being and that freedom is ingrained in human mind and soul."

17...The action which resulted in deprivation is only on account of impervious outlook towards individual liberty and the inability of the law agency to regiment their power in tune with declaration of law by the Hon'ble Supreme Court while combating any criminal activities of Maoists. It is the activities of the Maoists which have to be curbed if it affronts to the law of the land. But, the State moved to nab the Maoist like a predator vying for prey. This is nothing but disguised aberration of law in the cloth of uniform and the protector has become aggressor.

Summary executions of suspected militants and militant sympathizers in staged "encounters" have a history in counter-insurgency operations throughout India. The present

incident is required to be seen in the context of other extra-judicial killings that have taken place in the past in Kerala.

Guidelines of the Supreme Court in regard to extra-judicial killings

The Supreme Court in its order dated 23.09.2014 in People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India [(2014) 10 SCC 635] has laid down detailed guidelines in respect of encounters and the steps required to be taken in case of the same placed in Appendix – II. The Guidelines include inter alia the registration of an FIR in every case of an encounter, independent investigation into the same, information to the next of kin and surrender of the weapons for forensic and ballistic analysis.

In the instant case it becomes clear that the guidelines have not been complied with. Firstly, there is requirement that if any information in respect of any persons suspected of having arms is received the same must be immediately put down in writing. However no such information appears to have been put down in writing. Secondly, the Supreme Court has clearly stated then FIR must be registered immediately on any such encounter. In the instant case an FIR has been registered only against those who have been killed whereas no FIR have been registered against the members of Thunderbolt or the police. Thirdly, the question of surrendering the weapons has also not been done by the officers involved.

The Team met Advocate Soya and spoke to Advocate Tushar who are representing Smt. Lakshmi, sister of Shri Manivasakam and Shri. Murugesan brother of Shri Karthi. A petition had been filed before the Sessions Court at Palakkad praying

for an order to preserve the bodies until postmortem examinations were done and further seeking for the strict compliance of Supreme Court guidelines in *People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India* [(2014) 10 SCC 635]. The Sessions Court while directing the Police to preserve the body until 04.11.2019, rejected the prayer to register an FIR against the members of the Thunderbolt.

The Kerala High Court has passed order dated 12.11.2019 directing the Police to comply with the directions in *People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India* [(2014) 10 SCC 635] and has held that "*Causing death in fake encounters is nothing but cold blooded and brutal murder by persons who are supposed to uphold the law. The encounter philosophy is a criminal philosophy*". The High Court has, while finding that there was delay in handing over the weapons, directed for the immediate seizing of firearms. The High Court has also directed the investigation of the circumstances and causes of the death of Shri Karthik and Shri Manivasakam.

Conclusions and Findings

1. Contradictions and circumstances that place serious doubts on the versions of the police: Three persons were killed on 28th October, 2019, allegedly after they opened fire on the Thunderbolt. The police have categorically admitted that not a single member of the Thunderbolt unit has suffered any injury. The presence of cooked food as has been noted in various reports, raises doubt in regard to the version of the Thunderbolt especially in regard to the police claim of firing from the other side.

2. The incident that occurred on 29th October, 2019 raises several questions. Admittedly Shri Manivasakam had fracture of his

knee and his thigh, and was found around 40 metres from where everyone was standing, within the cordoned areas (of circumference of 400 metres). How did Shri Manivasakam enter the area armed undetected and how could he have made such attempts to shoot when he was so severely injured?

3. The Police admit that of the 3 people killed on 28th October, 2019, they have not identified two of them. When such persons remain unidentified, on what basis have they been declared as Maoist and how has the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act been invoked against them?

4. The failure of the police to register an FIR in respect of the death of the four persons is in violation of the order of the Supreme Court in *PUCL vs Union of India*, and raises questions as to what they State does not want investigated.

5. The statements made by the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary branding those who have been killed as Maoist and justifying the action of the Thunderbolt, apart from being wholly improper and violative of constitutional obligations, raise concerns about the possibility of a free and fair investigation into the extra-judicial killings that have taken place.

6. The complaints of harassment and surveillance of the members of the adivasi communities by the Government in the name of investigation or "combing operations" suggest further assault on an already vulnerable and historically exploited community. The Government instead of addressing socio-economic issues at hand is further victimizing the adivasi community

Demands

In this context we demand the following:

1. An FIR under Section

302 of the Indian Penal Code for murder must be immediately registered against the members of the Thunderbolt unit, who are responsible for the killing of the four persons and a fair and impartial enquiry must be conducted into the same.

2. The directions of the Supreme Court in its order dated 23.09.2014 in *People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India* [(2014) 10 SCC 635] must be strictly complied with.

3. No out of turn promotion or gallantry awards must be given to any of the members of the Thunderbolt unit involved in this incident

4. Immediate steps must be taken identify the families of those who have been killed, who must also be compensated for such extra-judicial killing.

5. The government must stop all forms of harassment and surveillance of the Adivasi communities and must instead address the socio-economic issues being faced by them.

6. We condemn the arrest of Alan Shuhaib and Thaha Fasal, both law students under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and demand their immediate release.

7. The article written by the Chief Secretary and the statement given by the Chief Minister are highly condemnable and are violative of the fundamental principles of the Constitution. We seek that the same is immediately retracted and an assurance must be given that a fair and proper enquiry into this incidents will be carried out.

8. We demand a judicial enquiry to look into all extra-judicial killings that have taken place in Kerala and for steps be taken to punish those responsible for the same and further compensate the families of those killed. □

Farmers' Struggle in Punjab Wins Justice

Kisan leader Manjeet Singh Dhaner whose life sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court has been released on the strength of people's struggle. In the following piece we attempt to give a brief summary of the facts of this important and unusual case which has gone on for 50 years so that readers may understand this issue and the importance of the 22-year long people's struggle.

This case began on 29 July 1997, the day on which 17-year old Kiranjeet Kaur—daughter of physically handicapped government school teacher and resident of village Mahal Kalan in Barnala Master Darshan Singh—was returning home from college. She was kidnapped on the way by some people. When her family and the villagers failed to find her after searching till late evening, the matter was reported to the police.

The family and villagers suspected some boys from a wealthy and feudally dominant family in the village who were already notorious for such mischief. In addition to being wealthy the family also had high political connections, and was close to the police, administration and leaders from the Congress and other parties. As a result the police dared not question them despite the villagers' suspicions. Instead,

the police turned on the girl's family and said that the girl must have run away with some lover. They advised the family to wait, as the girl would return by herself.

In this situation, all the farmers' workers', and people's organizations of the area organized a meeting for justice for the family, and formed a joint committee which decided to launch a mass agitation to find Kiranjeet. Rallies were organized and Thanas and police officers were gheraoed. Under pressure from the agitation the police were forced to search the fields belonging to the suspected family, and on 11 August 1997 they found the girl's body, clothes and books buried in those fields.

The post-mortem revealed that the kidnappers had gang raped the girl and then killed her after which they buried the body in order to erase evidence. After this came to light there was huge anger among the people and a mass agitation was organized in the Malwa region of Punjab to punish the rapists and killers. CPIML's organizations AIPWA, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha and Kisan organizations participated in this agitation. Party leaders including the late Comrade Jeeta Kaur addressed the meetings every year on 12 August in memory of Kiranjeet Kaur.

The joint committee is known all across Punjab as the 'Action Committee Mahal Kalan against the Kiranjeet Murder Case'. Active members of the committee included Manjeet Singh Dhaner, electricity workers' leader Comrade Narayan Dutt, and Democratic Teachers' Front leader Master Prem Kumar. The Action Committee organized a strong people's movement to carry forward this struggle, as a result of which the Sessions Court Barnala found four of the accused in this case guilty of rape and murder and sentenced them to life imprisonment in August 2001. But a few days before the verdict was pronounced, an incident occurred which posed a new and serious challenge in front of the movement. The family of the perpetrators had an old enmity with some other people also in the village, in which regard another case was going on in the Barnala court and a hearing in that case was due on 3 March 2001. The members of the perpetrators' family clashed with members of their enemy family inside the court. 85-year old Dileep Singh from the perpetrators' family was injured in the clashes and died in hospital after 10 days.

The perpetrators' family hatched a conspiracy to save the 4 guilty youth through a cross case of

Greeting the people after the release; (R) Manjeet Singh Dhaner (left) and Sukh Darshan Natt (middle)



Dileep Singh's murder against the Action Committee leadership. They registered an FIR naming Manjeet Singh Dhaner, Narayan Dutt and Prem Kumar. This action on their part further strengthened the people's struggle and the police were forced to enquire into the matter. The police enquiry found that these 3 persons were innocent and were nowhere near the spot when Dileep Singh's murder took place.

However, the judge hearing the case was fanatically anti-Left and anti-progressive, so when the perpetrators' family demanded that the 3 accused be produced in court despite the police enquiry report, he asked them to be produced in court, arrested and sent to jail. The court pronounced the 3 leaders and 4 others guilty and sentenced them to life imprisonment. This verdict so outraged the people that thousands staged about 18 huge protests in Barnala city to demand release of the innocent leaders. Under pressure, the then Badal government submitted a recommendation to the Governor for waiver of punishment. The Governor waived their punishment on 24 July 2007 and the 3 leaders were released from jail.

But an appeal in this case was also being heard at the Punjab and Haryana High Court. On 11 March 2008 the High Court ruled that the President or Governor cannot waive any punishment while the case is sub-judice in a higher court. After recording this remark, the High Court acquitted Narayan Dutt and Prem Kumar but upheld the punishment for Manjeet Singh Dhaner and the 4 other villagers.

An appeal against this verdict was filed in the Supreme Court. By now Dhaner had emerged as a well-known kisan leader in Punjab and State Senior Vice President of the Bharatiya Kisan

Union (Dakonda Group). 11 years later on 3 September 2019 the Supreme Court pronounced its verdict on the appeal and upheld the life imprisonment sentence of Manjeet Singh Dhaner.

The Supreme Court verdict angered the people and once again hundreds of protests and rallies were held across the State. A joint committee of 44 farmers' and workers' organizations decided to launch a mass people's struggle against this unjust verdict. On 11 September a delegation met the Governor and demanded cancellation of the sentence. Holding the Punjab government responsible, it was decided to organize a protest on 20 September at CM Capt Amrinder Singh's city Patiala. When thousands of farmers, workers, students and youth reached Patiala on 20 September they were stopped by the police some kilometers before the city where the protests continued the whole day. The next day an indefinite dharna began at the village (Mahamadpur) mandi. When the Sangharsh Committee declared that the rally would march to Patiala on 22 September, the administration felt cowed down. The SDM Patiala came to the spot and delivered a letter fixing a meeting of the delegation with the Principal Secretary on 26 September at Chandigarh. Thousands of people including women in large numbers gathered on 26 September. It now came to light that the office of the Governor had sent this case file back to the Punjab government and it had been gathering dust for the past 2 months. The Sangharsh committee then decided that the dharna would be staged in front of the Barnala District jail instead of Patiala, because as per the SC verdict Manjeet Singh Dhaner had to be present at the Barnala Court

on 30 September to be taken to jail.

On 30 September thousands of people accompanied Manjeet Singh Dhaner when he came to the door of the jail after presenting himself at the Barnala Court. The Sangharsh Committee declared that they had brought Dhaner to the jail with full enthusiasm, and would release and take him back with the same enthusiasm. The dharna continued in front of the jail and became converted into 'Sangharsh Gram' (Village of Struggle), attended by thousands of farmers, workers, students, youth, women, writers, theatre artists, lawyers, intellectuals, electronic and print media and all justice-loving people. Women were especially strong and vociferous in their support.

On 22 October the Punjab government was forced to agree to a meeting with the Sangharsh committee, where it was decided that the Punjab government would take the case for release of Dhaner with its recommendations to the Governor within 2 weeks and would appeal for an early decision.

On 7 November the Governor ordered waiver of the life imprisonment sentence for Manjeet Singh Dhaner. Thus Manjeet Singh was released after 54 days and was greeted and welcomed back by the people on 15 November and accompanied to his home in village Dhaner some 40 kilometers away. Among those welcoming Dhaner were AIKMS President Comrade Ruldu Singh Mansa, CPIML CC member Comrade Sukhdarshan Singh, Punjab Kisan Union leader Comrade Karnail Singh Mansa, Harjinder Singh Mansahiya, Advocate Balkaran Singh Balli, and Balbir Kaur. This entire struggle and victory shows the way to dealing a befitting reply to those unleashing repression on democracy pro-people activists. □

Landless Dalit Youth Brutally Murdered in Sangrur

32 year old dalit youth Jagmel Singh who was brutally beaten by feudal forces died on 6 November at PGI Chandigarh on 15 November 2019. Jagmel came from the village of prominent Congress leader Rajinder Kaur Bhattal's in-laws, where she owns 40 acres of land and has close contact with feudal forces. The chief accused Rinku Singh belongs to a feudal family. The victim Jagmel is survived by three small children, his wife and aged mother.

Jagmel Singh worked as a driver for Rajinder Kaur Bhattal's family after initially working as an agrarian laborer and kiln worker. He came into contact with boys from rich families and became addicted to drugs. The villagers say he was a good driver and later worked for a private bus company but lost his job due to addiction, and suffered from depression as a result of poverty and unemployment. On the night of Diwali 27 October Jagmel had an argument with the accused persons who then came to his house and beat him up. The next day Jagmel reported them to the police but the police arranged a compromise and the accused persons agreed to pay Rs 5000 for

Jagmel's treatment. However, they later refused to pay the money and neither the police nor the Panchayat listened to Jagmel. Disappointed, he even lay down once or twice in front of the accused persons' tractor as a protest. They considered this an affront to their feudal pride and decided to teach him a lesson. On 6 November they took him with them on the pretext of giving him money for treatment, tied him up, beat up both his legs brutally and forced him to drink their urine. It was a chilling replay of the horrifying and heinous crime against Bant Singh Jhabbar which had taken place some years ago. They threw Jagmel back in front of his home. As his wife and family were away from home his neighbors took him the next day to Laheragaga Civil Hospital where the doctors, seeing him penniless and without an attendant, neither informed the police nor admitted him for proper treatment but sent him back home with makeshift bandages. It was only after his wife came back that she collected some money and admitted him on 10 November to the Sangrur District Hospital. From there he was taken to the Government Rajindara

Hospital in Patiala and then to PGI Chandigarh where both his legs were amputated due to gangrene. But he could not be saved and he died on 15 November. On the basis of Jagmel's dying statement, the police have arrested the four accused persons under Section 302 and SC/ST Act. Agrarian workers and student-youth organizations have formed an Action Committee and from 17 November onwards a dharna was held at the bus stand and the State Highway blocked. The demand of the Action Committee is that 50 lakhs compensation should be paid to the family of Jagmel and his wife should be given a government job, the arms license of the accused persons and their supporters should be cancelled and their fire arms confiscated, the role of the hospital doctors and the police should be impartially probed and strict action should be taken against the guilty. The CPIML's Mazdoor Mukti Morcha is part of the Action Committee.

On 17 November a 4-member team of the CPIML visited the village and spoke with the victim family, farmers and workers in the village, and Action Committee leaders. The team included CC members Sukhdarshan Singh Natt and Bhagwant Singh Samaon and State Committee members Gurnam Singh Bheekhi and Gurjant Singh Mansa. The team members addressed the dharna and condemned this heinous act of social atrocity and reiterated CPIML's full solidarity and support for the struggle for justice. They declared that this fight will be fought relentlessly till the victim family gets justice. □



Jagmel Singh in hospital

Interfaith Couple Harassed By Communal Forces in Chhattisgarh

An AIPWA team enquired on 5-6 November 2019 into the oppression of interfaith couple from Dhamtari, Anjali Jain and Aryan Arya (Ibrahim Siddiqui). The enquiry team led by Dr Lakshmi Krishnan visited the One Stop Centre (Sakhi) Raipur, Women and Child Development Department Raipur, and also met the Raipur Collector and the victim's husband. Although they were unable to meet the victim Anjali face to face, they succeeded in having a detailed telephonic conversation with her.

The team first went to the One Stop Sakhi Centre from where they were directed to the Women and Child Development Officer, who again directed them to meet the Collector. The Collector expressed his inability to arrange a meeting of the AIPWA team with Anjali on the premise that it was not permitted by the Court.

The next day on 6 November the AIPWA team met Anjali's husband Ibrahim (Aryan) and also spoke at length with Anjali on the phone. Anjali and Aryan told the team that they got married on 25 February 2018 according to Arya Samaj rites. Before the marriage Ibrahim got converted to Hinduism as per Arya Samaj procedure and took the name of Aryan. When the girl's parents came to know of the marriage they shut her up inside the house.

Her husband then filed a habeas corpus at the Bilaspur High Court. Anjali asserted strongly at the High Court that she had married Ibrahim of her own free will. The Court, instead of ensuring that Anjali was not kept in custody of her parents, then directed her to "take time to think", and said she could

stay either at her parents' home or at the Sakhi Centre. This was effectively subjecting her to judicial punishment and imprisonment in the hope she would abandon her marriage.

Anjali said she would rather stay at the Bilaspur Sakhi Centre but not with her parents. Her father contrived to have some medicines fed to her which made her ill and her father took her away and sent her out of Chhattisgarh without informing the police. Ibrahim then filed a case in the Supreme Court where the victim Anjali said (under pressure, as she told the AIPWA team on 6 November) that she had married Ibrahim of her own free will but was willing to go to her parents' home for some time. Meanwhile a false case was slapped on Ibrahim and he spent about 2 months in jail.

Anjali's relatives pressurized her to file an FIR against Ibrahim but she steadfastly refused to do so. Her father and relatives then abused, beat and tortured her. Her

husband complained about this to the police but no action was taken. Finally Anjali herself phoned the DGP Chhattisgarh and asked him to rescue her as otherwise her father would kill her. Then the police rescued her from her home and she was kept in the One Stop Sakhi Centre at Dhamtari. The Jain community and other elements conducted protests which raised security and safety questions for Anjali, following which she was transferred to the Raipur Sakhi Centre where she has remained for the last 8 months.

Anjali and her husband Ibrahim (Aryan) are adults and therefore they have the Constitutional right to stay together and marry if they so wish. This Constitutional right has been reaffirmed in the Supreme Court verdict in the Hadiya case. In the light of the above facts, AIPWA demands that the Supreme Court should act without delay. The victim Anjali should be called and her side of the story should be heard and her right to live with her husband should be respected. AIPWA also demands that adequate security should be guaranteed to both Anjali and Aryan (Ibrahim). □

Boiler Blast Kills Mid-day Meal Workers in Bihar

A CPIML fact-finding team visited Sugauli in Eastern Champaran on 17 November 2019 to enquire into the recent horrific boiler blast which killed several people. The team enquired into the various aspects of the incident and found the State government, District administration, Education Department and an NGO responsible for the murderous incident. The decision to hand over mid-day meal preparation in government schools to NGOs results in negligence as well as

outright danger. NGOs centralise the kitchens, rather than let fresh, hot food be cooked locally in every school kitchen, by cooks employed from the local community.

The CPIML team reached Sugauli on 17 November to enquire into the boiler blast in the NGO-based centralized kitchen for preparing the mid-day meals. They visited the blast spot, the local primary health centre, and Motihari Sadar Hospital. The enquiry team comprised CPIML PB member Dharendra Jha, MLA and

AIARLA Honorary State President Satyadev Ram, Eastern Champaran former Party Secretary Prabhudev Yadav, Vishnudev Yadav and others. The team's report and conclusions are as follows:

BJP leader Ramgopal Khandelwal's go-down was situated on the road side just before Sugauli Bazaar. Rice, urea etc used to be stored in the go-down. In this same complex the DEO and BDO inaugurated the centralized kitchen on 16 October 2019. The contract for the centralized kitchen was given to an NGO named Navaprayas whose Director was Narendra Kumar Singh. The contract was for supplying mid-day meals to 1100 children in 57 schools. The big boiler was set up at zero distance from the main road on a kutchra foundation. No NOC was obtained for safety and other standards. Coal was fed in to prepare steam on which the meals were cooked. 13 workers did the work of operating the boiler, preparing the meals and doing the other tasks and lived on the premises day and night. After the meals were prepared, other workers and vehicle drivers used to come and take the meals for distribution in the schools.

In the morning of 16 November all the workers were busy doing their work. Preparations for vegetables, dal and rice were on. The worker operating the boiler told the other workers that they could start their work as the boiler was about to be started. At about 4.50 the huge blast occurred. The entire area shuddered. The upper part of the boiler weighing thousands of kilos flew out and fell 100 meters across the road. The office wall

was shattered, as was the wall of the neighboring building. Pieces of human bodies flew and scattered on the road and in the paddy fields. Hearing the cries and shrieks, people came running, freed the injured workers crushed under bricks and sent them to hospital. Three workers died on the spot. At least two others are battling severe burn injuries in hospital.

At the time of the blast, the workers present were:

Seven cooks – Guddu Das, Ranjit Das, Sonu Kumar, Vishwajit Kumar, Balram Prasad (from Dharmuha village) and Rajkumar (village Jhakhra), all from Thana Piprakothi

Two boiler operators: Vijay Kumar Yadav (village Murdachak, thana Piprakothi), Umesh Yadav (village Chitariya, thana Kotwa)

Two munshis: Naveen Kumar (village Bada Bariyarpur, thana Chatauni), Abhimanyu Kumar (village Panapur, thana Harsiddhi)

One driver: Shivkant Kumar Singh, (village Bhavanipur, thana Sangrampur).

The workers were not local people but from neighboring blocks. Most of the workers were aged between 20 and 30. Of these, Abhimanyu Kumar, Vijay Yadav, and Umesh Yadav died, while Guddu and Naveen Kumar, were (at the time of the team's visit) undergoing

treatment at the Motihari Sadar Hospital, where basic investigations and medical treatment too had been lacking. We learnt that later, the NGO paid for them to get treatment in a private hospital, hoping to hush up their complaints.

The administration and NGO have remained silent on this issue and neither the Chief Minister nor the usually quick-to-comment Deputy Chief Minister has given any statement.

The CPIML demands that a high level judicial probe should be conducted in this matter; the State government should give a report to the people of Bihar regarding the condition of the workers working in the plant; the terms and conditions of the Labor Department; safety of boilers and other equipment etc.; the State government should also put an end to the centralized kitchen-NGO management system and strengthen school-based mid-day meal arrangements. The CPIML and Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Rasoiya Sangh demands Rs 10 lakh compensation for the families of the dead victims, proper and adequate treatment for the injured, arrest of BJP leader Ramgopal Khandelwal and Navaprayas NGO Director Narendra Singh who are responsible for the incident, and immediate black-listing of the NGO Navaprayas. □



Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Rasoiya Sangh Protest in East Champaran

Save Kalyanalova Reservoir

(Fact-finding report conducted by a team led by Com. D. Harinath, Andhra Pradesh State Secretary to All India Kisan Mahasabha and State Committee Member of CPI-ML, on Kalyanalova Reservoir, Visakhapatnam District.)

Com. D. Harinath, Andhra Pradesh State Secretary to All India Kisan Mahasabha, AIPWA leader Com. Aruna, CPIML State Secretary Com. Bangara Rao and others visited to assess the grave dangers to adivasi land, water, and livelihood caused by the granite quarrying in the Kalyanalova Reservoir.

This Reservoir was built in 1977 across the river Varaha at a location in Ravikamatham Mandal of Visakhapatnam District. This project which caters to the drinking water facilities of 15 villages and the irrigational water for about 5,000 acres of land belonging to the poor tillers, was almost destroyed during the erstwhile Telugu Desam Government led by Chandrababu Naidu. As much land in this area was illegally given on lease to granite companies, livelihood of the Adivasis here turned bleak. In this scenario, the protection of the Reservoir became a question of life and death for the Adivasis. This Reservoir was such a blessing for the land belonging to the Adivasis as water would always flow to it from the Patti Manchaala Gadda, Somalamma Gadda, Singarapu Gadda, and several other hillocks and valleys around. The destructive consequences of the granite quarrying are very many. Some of the important ill-effects are:

1. Flow of water into the river was broken for the last 2 years due to the granite blasts. The Reservoir which was always full was seen dried up during the visit, but now

after the heavy rains, water flows into the Reservoir. The water is shallow as desilting was neglected and not done.

2. The rain water carries the dust and the waste materials of the mining into the Reservoir, leading to the pollution of the Reservoir apart from bringing down the depth of the Reservoir.

3. Besides the decrease in water, the earth-shaking vibrations and the loud noise caused by the blasts have led to cracks in the walls of several houses in the surroundings.

4. The dust caused by the blasting ruin the cashew crops at the flowering stage itself. Thus the cashew cultivators and those depending on allied works have lost their livelihood.

5. The State has lost another source of good income as the cashew crops were thus destroyed.

6. The tribal fisher-people numbering about 40 families also have lost their livelihood as the mining led to the drying up of the Reservoir.

7. The tippers/huge trucks carrying the heavy granite have spoiled the roads very badly, leaving behind huge potholes leading to increased accidents.

8. The severely damaged roads are grave hurdles for travellers especially the pregnant, the children, the elderly.

9. The badly damaged roads keep the people away from accessing facilities like medical and the like. Medical facilities hardly reach them.

10. The environment there has become fully polluted on account of this mining.

11. The loud noises, tremor-like vibrations, increased pollutions

of different kinds led to the closure of schools in the surroundings.

12. Diseases like asthma, allergies etc due to the various kinds of pollutions caused by this mining has increased by leaps and bounds.

13. More than 5000 farmers are in the grip of constant fear that the earthen Kalyanalova Dam may give way not only due to the tremors caused by the blastings, but also due to the heavy movements of the huge dumper trucks used to transport the huge loads in the vicinity of the Reservoir.

14. Drinking water is now brought from distant places by women of the villages like Ajaypuram.

15. No word given to the tribals by the Government and the mining mafia is kept or heeded to. The promises just remain writings on water.

16. The loud blasting sound has so much affected the children around the place that they cry aloud and wake up trembling with fear from their sleep.

17. The mining has so much transformed the natural growth of the bamboos that the Adivasis do not get bamboo shoots which they were using as one item of their food. It is only one example to show how the mining has destroyed a peaceful environment and a once-flourishing eco-system.

Petitions after petitions by the Adivasis and the other affected farmers were submitted not only to the District Collector and Magistrate, but even to the higher-ups who are in Delhi. Yet no response to the legitimate demands of these poor people, was received from the callous officers and the governments. Even though the

Supreme Court has given verdict that gram sabhas too cannot grant permission to do such mining in catchment areas. It is clear that permissions were illegally granted.

The authorities have granted permission to 4 companies to operate mines here without any rhyme or reason, in naked contempt of court. Though there are so many tribal villages nearby, false reports denying the existence of the nearby villages are made so as to allow mining. The team visited the nearby villages and interacted with the villagers.

As it is a non-agency area, the girijans here have no opportunities to avail the many services intended for them by the governments. In addition to it, the mining related blasting, heavy transport etc., hang like a Damocles' sword on these poor girijans denying them their right to live in dignity as their health, crops, houses are destroyed by these illegal activities. The irony is that the very officials, the people's representatives and the political leaders who are bound to protect the laws instead violate them by joining side with the mining mafia. It is a fact that the majority of them are party to the destruction of the natives' livelihood and lives. The authorities in the departments of Forests, Irrigation, Pollution Control etc. are puppets in the hands of the mining mafia and dance to their tunes, ignoring their duties and the natives' rights.

In the recent gathering of people's opinions conducted by the Revenue Divisional Officer, the Adivasis and the farmers protested against the permission granted to the mining companies in the vicinity of Ajaypuram village and demanded the immediate cancelling of the mining lease. As a result of the continuous struggle by the girijans, 2 companies are closed. Blastings continue in the vicinity of Ajaypuram

village by the other two. Now, it is said that 20 more companies are waiting for permission to be granted to mine granites from the same area. The people of Cheemalapaadu, Jeddogampeta, Raachupanuku villages are terrorized by the ear-cracking blastings. The mafia manages to get false reports lying that the mining sites are far away from habitations and villages. This being a non-scheduled area, the companies get permissions to mine easily. Our visits proved that such reports are wrong as we have interacted with the people of the adjacent villages.

Several protests were and are organized by CPI-ML (Liberation) under the leadership of Comrade P. S. Ajay Kumar, describing the critical situation of gross violations of the human rights of these poor villagers. The Chairperson of Water Board, Sri Rajendra Singh, Sandeep Pandey, Sri E. S. Sarma, IAS (Retd), have studied the effects of granite-mining in the area adjacent to the Reservoir, its impacts violating the rights of the poor girijans, the urgency to safeguard and protect the Reservoir. If the Reservoir gives way, it would wash away many villages leading to a huge man-made catastrophe.

More than 250 girijans and other farmers had reached Visakhapatnam and demanded the immediate cancellation of the permission for mining of granites in the area. They demand forthwith declaration of the area as 'No Mining Zone'. CPI-ML State leader, Com. D. Harinath, has demanded the authorities to cancel whatever permissions were granted for mining, without any further delay. CPI-ML, State Secretary, Com. B. Bangara Rao and AIPWA State President Com. T. Aruna also were members in this fact-finding team. □

BJP Tries To Meddle In UK Polls

In the United Kingdom, the Overseas Friends of the BJP is meddling in the upcoming General Elections, calling for support for the Conservatives and spreading misinformation against the Labour Party.

The outfit – affiliated to India's ruling far-right party BJP, is indulging in an openly Islamophobic WhatsApp campaigns to intervene in the UK elections.

A report in the Guardian titled 'British Indians warn Hindu nationalist party not to meddle in UK elections' says the BJP campaign is not getting much traction among British South Asians.

British author Peter Jukes compared the campaign of the Overseas Friends of the BJP to Russian or Israeli interference, calling it "illegal". In July, Canadian officials had warned of potential election interference from the BJP in Canada's upcoming elections. At Modi's Howdy Modi event, PM Modi had shared a stage and campaigned for President Trump. A report by Sunny Hundal in Open Democracy observed, "It is extremely unusual for a group explicitly tied to a foreign political party to openly declare its intent to campaign for a specific British political party during an election", noting that the pro-BJP outfit has announced that "it will target Britain's only two Sikh MPs – Tan Dhesi and Preet Gill – both of whom are Labour, and replace them with Conservatives."

Urging Labour not to succumb to far-right BJP pressure to roll back its statement on Kashmir, South Asia Solidarity Group issued a statement saying "Groups like Hindu Council UK which are quoted simply as 'charities' in the media have a long history as mouthpieces of the Hindu Far-Right and try to influence the wider Indian-origin community but do not represent it. There is no clear evidence that the Kashmir motion will lose votes for Labour and in our experience most Indian diaspora voters are more concerned with issues which affect their lives in Britain." □

People's Movement in Chile Demands New Constitution

A massive people's uprising is underway in Chile, to protest the rising inequality, cost of living and the anti-people policies of president Sebastián Piñera. The protests were sparked off by metro fare hikes – but in fact these were only the tipping point. The protests are an outburst of a deeper discontent over the legacy of the long Pinochet dictatorship that continues to scar Chile. Pinochet had led a coup that unseated the elected socialist Allende Government in 1973 and unleashed brutal repression, ending only in 1990. But the Chilean Constitution is still the one brought into being by the brutal dictatorship. The dictatorship had also unleashed the neo-liberal economic policies, eroding labour rights and retirement benefits, and privatising health care and other social services. Thanks to Pinochet-era policies, temporary contract-based workers are not covered by labour laws and have no rights to unionise. As a result, less than 3% of Chile's workers are covered by labour laws. Even permanent workers often are not allowed to be part of unions, but are just members of "bargaining groups" that do not have the right to strike.

The unemployment rate for workers at the bottom 10th of Chile's socioeconomic ladder has averaged nearly 30% since 1990, while unemployment for the top 10th of earners has stayed around 2%. Pinochet had also replaced the original retirement system – which was based on combined contributions from workers, employers and the state – with a

privately managed pension system, under which all workers except the military and national police were made responsible for their individual retirement accounts, with the state



and employers contributing nothing. Even after the Michelle Bachelet led Government in 2008 made pensions mandatory for all, pensions here are less than minimum wages.

Chile is one of Latin America's most prosperous nations – and also has the highest levels of inequality. Education is expensive and privatised in spite of repeated movements against privatisation. As a result, the poor cannot afford education. High rates of tax evasion among Chile's wealthiest citizens make the income inequality even sharper. People want the Constitution to address social and economic inequalities.

On November 11, the Chilean government finally bowed to protestors partially and agreed to write a new constitution to replace one dating back to the Pinochet dictatorship, and submit it for approval by a referendum. But the movement is demanding a referendum even before the process begins so the people can determine the mechanism for drafting the new Constitution.

The Government declared a

temporary state of emergency, and even after the emergency was lifted, has unleashed brutal repression. At least 24 people have been killed, more than 2300 people are injured, and of those, 220 suffered severe eye injuries and blindings, according to data from Chile's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The NHRI has filed 58 legal actions against police and armed forces for alleged sexual violence, and 246 for torture and other cruel treatment.

Youth are at the forefront of the Chile movement.

Though these young people are born after Pinochet's dictatorship ended, they are bearing the brunt of its consequences, and they are determined to ensure lasting change. □

Protests Force Ecuador To Withdraw IMF Austerity Package

Protests forced President Lenin Moreno to withdraw an IMF-backed plan of withdrawal of subsidies on fuel. Indigenous people and their organisations protested this plan in huge numbers.

After two weeks of fierce protests in which seven people were killed, Ecuador's president Lenin Moreno struck a deal with leaders of indigenous groups, withdrawing the austerity package.

The protesting indigenous people have also been demanding higher taxes on the wealthy and the firing of the interior and defence ministers over their brutal repression of the protestors. □

Coup In Bolivia Followed By Massacre of Indigenous Peoples

Bolivian president Evo Morales is now in asylum in Mexico, after being forced to resign by the military soon after the last elections in Bolivia.

Evo Morales, the only elected head of state in Latin America who stayed 14 years in power through democratic means, has impressive achievements, including the tripling of per capita income, decrease of the percentage of Bolivia's population that is poor from 60% to 35%, and Constitutional provisions ensuring the participation of indigenous people in governance and decision-making. He continues to enjoy very great popularity with the indigenous people who constitute at least 50% of Bolivia's population. This section of people were completely excluded

from power before Morales became President, with power being concentrated in the hands of the European-origin white, racist elite. They would face atrocities (like having insecticide sprayed on them) for even venturing into Government offices. Morales, a peasant leader, successfully resisted the US policy of criminalising coca cultivation, defending its traditional and medicinal use by Bolivia's indigenous communities. His tenure also saw an enormous surge in respect for indigenous culture and attire – now seen as a mark of pride. He had the Wiphala flag - ancestral flag of the indigenous peoples - declared a second national flag and included as a logo on the uniform of the armed forces. His Government

also restricted the police's power to inflict lethal violence.

In 2008, a referendum was attempted, to remove Morales from Presidency, just two years after he was first elected. Morales won that referendum.

Bolivia's Constitution stipulates a maximum of three terms for a single person as President. In 2016, nearing the end of Morales' third term, he held a referendum seeking to amend the Constitution to allow him to contest a fourth time. He lost that referendum by a small margin. He then appealed to the Supreme Court citing his human right to contest an election, and the SC upheld his plea. He contested a fourth time and won – but the victory was called into dispute.



An indigenous woman seeks justice for protester killed at San Antonio in Bolivia

In Bolivia, if a Presidential candidate leads by a margin of 10% votes in the first round of counting, he or she doesn't need to undergo a second round. Morales had a lead margin of 7.9% votes when counting was stalled for 24 hours for no clear reason. When counting resumed, Morales got a huge lead, winning 47.8 percent of the votes, nearly 11% more than his nearest rival. Morales' party Movement for Socialism (MAS) attributed the lead to the counting of rural and indigenous votes. But this 24-hour gap sowed the seeds of doubt. An observer team of OAS (Organisation of American States – a body notorious for being an agent of the US) objected and alleged manipulation in elections. Their report did not submit evidence of manipulation.

Massive protests led by Opposition parties hit the streets demanding Morales' resignation. Morales agreed to hold a re-election – but the Opposition then said he is a traitor and must be arrested. Morales feared for his life. Military and police encircled his home and protestors in large numbers attacked his home. He was forced him to resign and flee to his own home area of Cochabamba. He later fled to Mexico, where he was granted asylum.

After Morales' exit, Jeanine Áñez, a Christian conservative leader whose Democratic Unity Party got only four percent votes in the same elections, and who was second Vice President, called a meeting of the Senate. With two third of Senate members belonging to the MAS having boycotted the meeting, she lacked a quorum, but declared herself as the interim president on November 12 anyway. She declared re-election in 90 days, and also announced that Morales would not be allowed to contest and if he returned, he would be treated

as a criminal, and arrested on charges of election manipulation.

Significantly, Áñez took oath with a huge copy of the Bible in her hand, signalling a “victory” for conservative Christian racists over the indigenous faiths and culture. She declared, “thank god, the bible has returned to the Bolivian government.” In an October 5, 2019 tweet (now deleted), Áñez called the then president Morales a “poor Indian” “clinging to power,” alongside a cartoon of the politician



hanging on to a throne, with the message “last days in power” added in yellow letters. This tweet made a blatantly racist jibe at Morales' indigenous identity. In a November 6 tweet (also deleted later), Áñez shared a photograph of indigenous people in their traditional attire, suggesting they were not really indigenous because they wore shoes.

Now, confirming the fact that Áñez is heading a far-right military-backed coup, the armed forces have torn off the Wiphala logo off their uniforms, and right-wing demonstrators have burnt the Wiphala flag on the streets. Patricia Arce, the mayor of Vinto, in the MAS stronghold of Cochabamba, was attacked by right-wing mobs who shaved her hair, doused her in red paint (the colour of the right wing in Bolivia) and forced her to walk barefoot through Vinto, kneel and beg for forgiveness for supporting

Morales.

The so-called “transitional” government headed by Áñez approved a decree allowing the Armed Forces full license to shoot at sight, exempting them from criminal prosecution for killing protestors. Thousands of protestors, including women and children, are on the streets of El Alto protesting the coup – and they are being massacred. 23 indigenous people are reported killed in this massacre.

Speaking to the *New Yorker*, Morales has said, “It pains me to see what we have built with such effort and sacrifice being destroyed. The problem here is a class difference; they cannot stand to see an Indian as President. I remember that, when I got the Presidency, some groups said, ‘Poor little Indian, let’s let him have fun as President for four or five months, but he won’t be able to govern, and then we’ll get him out of there.’ But then, after my first year in power, they realized they had made a mistake and said to each other, ‘This Indian is going to stay in for a long time, so we have to do something.’”

Morales has said that the legislature is legally required to vote on his resignation – if it votes to approve his resignation, he has repeatedly promised to resign. But he has added, ““The people will triumph, I am convinced of that. The peasants and Indians, the original people of Bolivia, they will keep up the struggle, and they have all my admiration and my respect. I want to tell you something. Back in 2002, I was expelled from Congress, but I was returned the following year, and not just with one deputy on my side but twenty-seven. Now, in 2019, I’ve been expelled from Bolivia, but I will return with millions and millions (of supporters) and with the power to continue serving the people of Bolivia. Don’t doubt it.” □

Comrade Gurudas Dasgupta

Veteran trade unionist and CPI leader Comrade Gurudas Dasgupta passed away at the age of 83. He passed away on October 31 - the day of 100th anniversary of the founding of AITUC of which he remained General Secretary for almost 17 years since 2001.

Born in Barishal (now in Bangladesh) Comrade Gurudas joined the CPI in his teens in 1952, though his family supported the Indian National Congress. In 1958 he became the president of the Bengal Provincial Students' Federation (BPSF). From 1967 to 1977 he was a member of the West Bengal Committee of All India Youth Federation.



During the Emergency, Comrade Gurudas showed the ideological clarity and moral courage to actively resist the CPI's decision to back the Congress and support the Emergency. He did so even as he remained a staunch CPI member. He was one of the earliest to warn that the Congress' neo-liberal policies would pave the way for the rise of the far-right in India.

He played a pivotal role in organizing Bank and Insurance employees, apart from other sections of workers. He was a fine Parliamentarian, raising issues of workers and people inside Parliament with skill and humour. As an MP, he exposed the financial scams of the Nicholas Piramal Group and achieved a Parliamentary probe into the illegal operation of the Bailadila Coal Mines in Chattisgarh, which helped win the CPI lasting support in South Chhattisgarh. He was known for his crusade against black money and scams.

As befits a Communist MP, Comrade Gurudas always lived a simple life, and was involved with workers' movements till the very last.

Red Salute to Comrade Gurudas!



JNU protesters confront police on 18 Nov during the March To Parliament in Delhi

EDITORIAL OFFICE

CHARU BHAWAN, U-90, SHAKARPUR, DELHI - 110 092 PH.: 91-11-22521067

email : liberation@cpiml.org ; website : www.cpiml.net

facebook & twitter : @cpimliberation ; YouTube : OfficialCPIML

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