

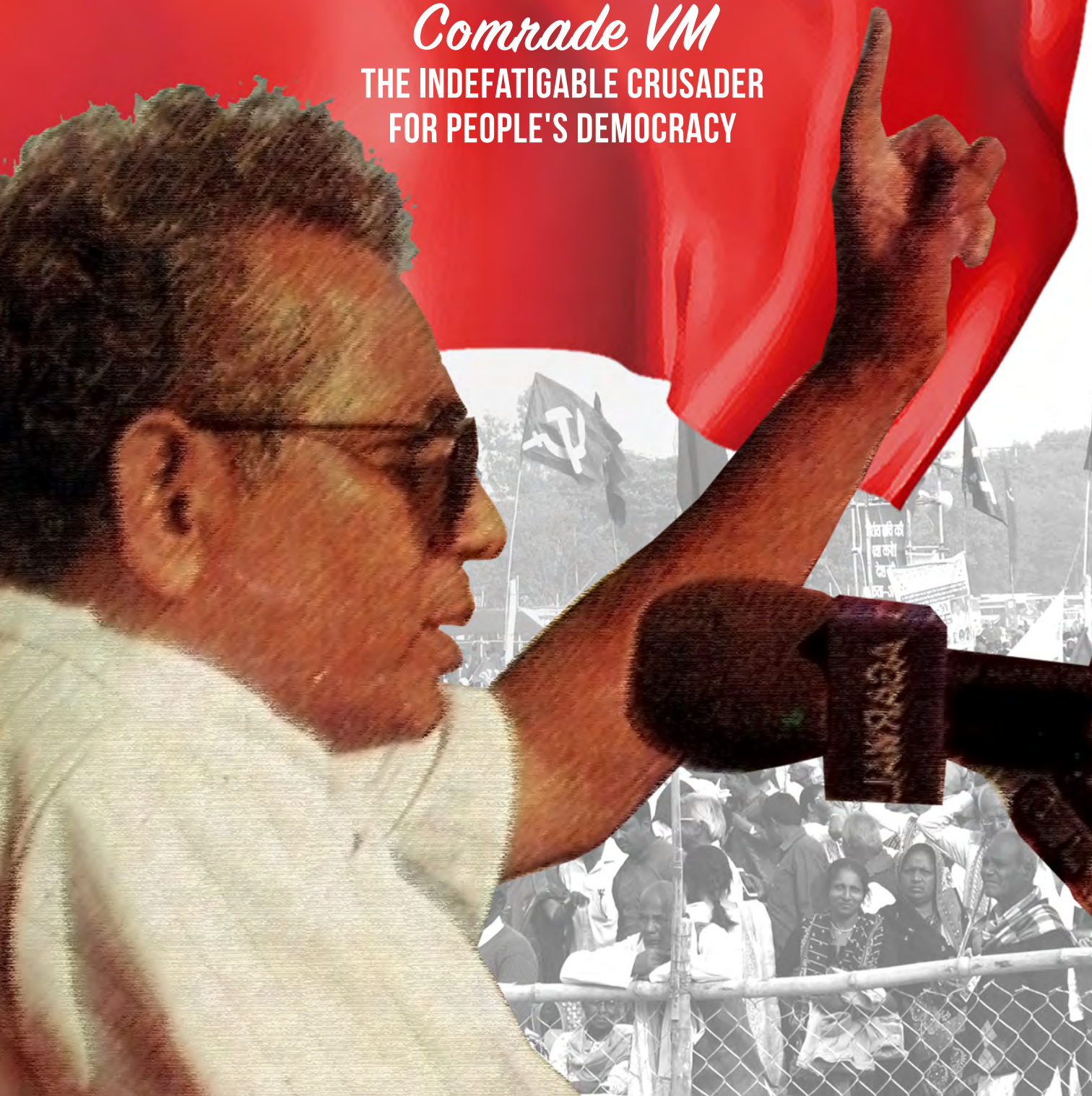
Liberation

JANUARY 2024

Rs. 25

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

Comrade VM
THE INDEFATIGABLE CRUSADER
FOR PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY



An Appeal

Contribute to the Tamil Nadu Flood Relief Fund!



The southern districts of Tamilnadu are totally submerged under water after a heavy downpour which couldn't even be predicted by the IMD or any other state agency. The heavy floods, at the scale which was not witnessed in this state since 1871, have caused immense devastation with more than 40 reported dead and more than two lakh acres of land submerged. The flood waters have not drained fully even after many days.

This month Tamil Nadu also witnessed the heavy impact of cyclone Michaung in Chennai and surrounding districts of Northern Tamil Nadu. Now the current disaster is being faced by four worst affected districts, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Kanyakumari. Thoothukudi was the most affected where some parts of the district have no access at all. And the next is Tirunelveli. The water was flowing more than 10 feet high on roads which meant flooding of all houses at the radius of two km around all water sources, including Thamirabarani river and several canals.

All businesses are affected, all hutments and dwellings along the river and canals are washed away, even concrete houses are not spared. The life-long earnings like hutments, household and consumer items including mobile phones, of poor and the lower middle-class people are swept away by the flood.

The extent of damage is not assessed yet. It was a downpour that caused a rainfall of 332 mm in 24 hours in some places. The government's own claim is that more than 28000 hectares of agricultural lands are damaged, and around 400 km of roads are damaged.

The relief camps are not able to accommodate all the people affected by the flood.

A CPIML team comprising Tamil Nadu state secretary Asaithambi, RYA leader Dhanavel and AISA leader Pandikumar have reached Tirunelveli to undertake relief efforts. Comrades G Ramesh, state standing committee member and Ganesan, SCM also joined the team, from Tirunelveli.

The CPIML has demanded from the government to declare floods in southern districts of TN a national calamity; food, clothing and shelter to the flood affected; the govt should undertake the responsibility of repair, renovation and construction of lost hutments and houses; to provide for the livelihood of flood affected until the normalcy is restored; proper compensation for the farmers who lost the crop and for the land damaged; the mega constructions responsible for flooding should be removed forthwith; the officials and contractors responsible for the negligence should be duly punished, and the people along the banks of Thamirabarani river and canals in the districts should be provided alternative shelters in another area without affecting their livelihood.

In such a situation, we appeal to you all to join the relief measures and contribute to the CPIML Tamil Nadu Flood Relief Fund.

*Issued By Prabhat Kumar,
On Behalf of the Central Committee,
CPIML Liberation,
22 Dec 2023*

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Editor-in-chief

Dipankar Bhattacharya

Editor

Arindam Sen

Editorial Board

V. Shankar

Sanjay Sharma

Sucheta De

Ajit Patil

Clifton D' Rozario

Maitreyi Krishnan

Akash Bhattacharya

Editors' e-mail:

liberation@cpiml.org

Art: V Arun Kumar

Manager: Prabhat Kumar

Phone: 7042877713

Website: liberation.org.in

E-mail: manager.liberation@gmail.com

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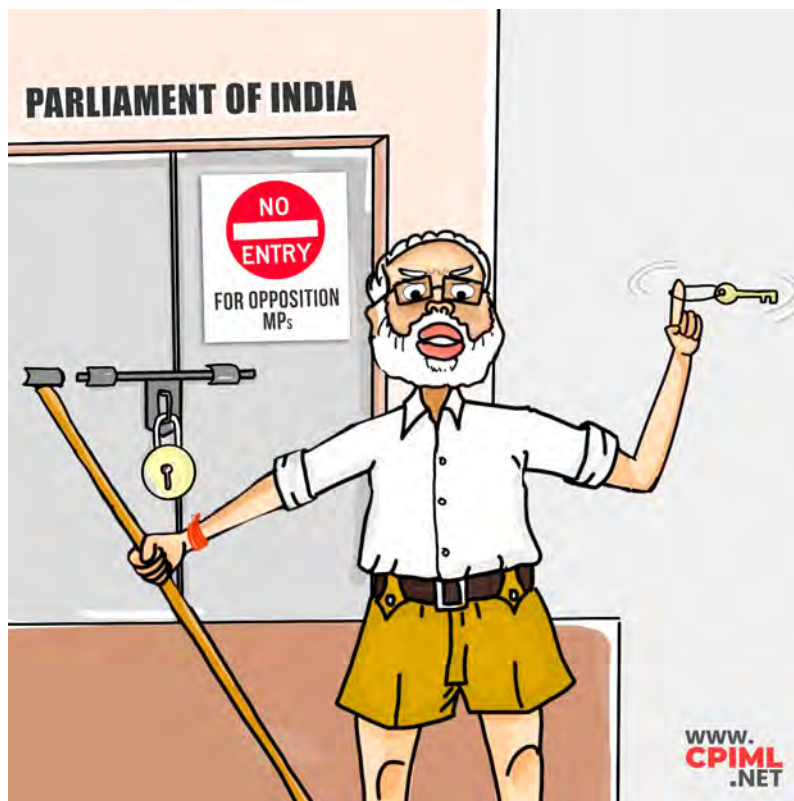
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India's Parliamentary Democracy Must Be Saved from Being Turned into a Presidential Tyranny



It was the month of December thirty-one years ago. The BJP was yet to win power in Delhi, but it had found its way to power in Lucknow. In broad daylight on December 6 it demonstrated before the whole world what it could do with a slice of state power. The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh empowered a mob led by veteran leaders of the Sangh Parivar to demolish the Babri Masjid even as the dispute was being heard by the Supreme Court. The BJP even provided a 'logical' justification for this brazen act of vandalism. The court, according to the BJP, could not adjudicate on matters of faith concerning the majority community.

The message was loud and clear. If the BJP could throw such an open challenge to the Constitution while in power in a state, it was not difficult to see what it could do on the basis of control over state power at the centre. Ten years later Gujarat 2002 gave us a louder and clearer warning. The UP BJP government had been dismissed for its complicity in the demolition of the Babri Masjid, but in Gujarat the BJP government remained ensconced in power despite overseeing a carnage that was internationally condemned as a pogrom or genocide of Muslims. The term 'double engine government'

had not yet become fashionable, but we had a clear forewarning about the shape of things to come.

Twenty-one years down the line, December 2023 will go down as the clearest glimpse of the Modi government's vision of India's political future. Emboldened by the BJP's victories in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan elections, the government decided to bulldoze the opposition in Parliament. The assault that began with the summary expulsion of TMC MP Mahua Moitra on the basis of a dubious Ethics Committee report has reached absurd lengths with the mass suspension of MPs from both houses of Parliament following the December 13 breach of parliament security. And in the absence of opposition MPs, the regime has been ramming through? one bill after another, bills of far-reaching import that threaten to convert India into a veritable police state with the executive armed with sweeping powers of surveillance and coercion and citizens left with hardly any constitutional safeguards.

India's parliamentary democracy now truly resembles a royal court running at the whims and mercy of a tyrant. In Mahua Moitra's case there was hardly any discussion on the Ethics Committee report and Moitra herself was not even allowed to speak and respond to the allegations and the report. While Mahua Moitra has been charged with jeopardising India's national security by sharing her parliamentary login credentials with others, BJP MP Pratap Simha from Mysore on whose recommendation protesters secured passes to the visitors' gallery and managed to enter with smoke canisters has not been subjected to any kind of parliamentary scrutiny. Earlier in the previous session of Lok Sabha BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri was allowed to get away with virulent Islamophobic abuses and threats against BSP MP Danish Ali.

In a parliamentary democracy, the government of the day is ultimately accountable to the people and when

the parliament is in session, the executive is firstly accountable to the parliament. The Modi government has made it a habit to avoid the parliament in every possible way. The Prime Minister hardly attends Parliament except to deliver speeches that sound more like rhetorical demagoguery full of false claims, distorted and twisted references about past events and leaders without any historical foundation and not-so-veiled threats against political opponents and dissenting citizens. The opposition had to come up with a no-confidence motion to get him to open his mouth about the violence in Manipur. And now the demand for a statement from the Home Minister on the December 13 breach of Parliament security has resulted in wholesale suspension of members from both Houses of Parliament.

The Modi government is fast completing its arrangements to secure a total and tight grip on the state without any check and balance within the system. The Supreme Court verdict on the appointment of Election Commissioners has now been overturned by effectively vesting the entire power of appointment with the government. Without neutrality of the ECI the notion of free and fair elections can only become a pipe dream with electoral bonds and EVMs making the whole process increasingly opaque. The three new criminal bills passed with the dubious claim of decolonising India's legal architecture actually reduce free citizens in a free republic to the status of disempowered subjects. Going beyond the Emergency era suspension of democratic rights, what we are witnessing now is a fundamental restructuring of the Indian polity – conversion of parliamentary democracy into a de facto authoritarian presidential system in a republic of fear. We can call it India's rapid descent into Modicracy which negates every tenet of the preamble to India's existing constitution. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections will be India's last chance to stall this descent and save our constitutional democracy. India will have to win this decisive battle. ■

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Smoke Canisters in Parliament on the 22nd Anniversary of Parliament Attack

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

On the twenty-second anniversary of the December 13, 2001 terror strike on India's Parliament, the new parliament building witnessed a stunning smoke scare. A young man, identified as Sagar Sharma from Lucknow, suddenly jumped from the visitor's gallery and opened a yellow smoke canister leaping across tables before being overpowered and handed over to the police by parliamentarians even as the zero hour was underway. Sagar had a companion, D Manoranjan from Mysuru, who too opened another smoke canister spraying yellow smoke remaining seated on the visitor's gallery. A few minutes earlier, two other young persons, Neelam Azad from Hisar, Haryana and Amol Shinde from Latur, Maharashtra, had burst red and yellow smoke canisters outside the building and raised slogans against unemployment and atrocities on women, hailing the motherland and denouncing dictatorship.

Two more persons have been named involved in this smoke canister episode - Lalit Jha, at whose Gurgaon home the group stayed before undertaking the operation, and Vicky Sharma, also from Gurgaon. Manoranjan and Sagar Sharma had secured visitor's passes at the recommendation of Pratap Simha, BJP MP from Mysuru since 2014. Manoranjan is known to be an engineering graduate who used to help his father with their family farming. Neelam has a number of degrees and also cleared the National Eligibility Test for a teaching job but still has not got one. Sagar drives a

rented e-rickshaw in Lucknow and Amol, an Army job aspirant, has now crossed the age limit following the introduction of the Agniveer scheme. Lalit Jha used to give tuition in Kolkata before leaving the city in early 2022.

All these young people were reportedly members of a Facebook page dedicated to Bhagat Singh. Indeed, the smoke canister episode seems designed to invoke memories of the historic Central Assembly bombing by Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt on 8 April 1929. Just as Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt wanted to draw the people's attention to the injustices of British rule, Neelam, Manoranjan and their companions tried to protest against raging unemployment in today's India. Evidently, like Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt, they too did not want to hurt or kill anyone, they only wanted to draw attention to the growing plight of the people and shrinking democratic space in the country.

The incident has exposed a major breach in Parliament security. There has been a lot of talk about the tight security system of the new parliament building. Given this, the entry of smoke canisters into the building inevitably raises serious questions. For the Godi media, the smoke canister episode became yet another occasion to indulge in competitive sensationalism, with reporters literally jostling among themselves to grab the canister as a propaganda war trophy.

It is also not difficult to imagine what the media reaction would have

been like had the visitor's pass been obtained using a recommendation from some opposition MP or if the group of six included any Muslim name. Surely, the media would have lost no time discovering some major terrorist conspiracy, maybe even some act of 'jihad' attributed to Hamas.

The Modi government surely owes an urgent explanation to the people about the entire episode. An opposition MP has just been expelled allegedly for jeopardising national security by sharing her parliamentary login ID, another MP has been admonished for publicly commenting on the Ethics Committee proceedings. What happens now to a BJP MP for recommending the entry of visitors who caused a smoke scare right inside the Lok Sabha? But far from answering the people, the regime has arrogantly suspended more than a dozen MPs for demanding answers from PM Modi and Home Minister Shah. And now the protesting youth have been booked under UAPA.

The BJP keeps blaming the nomenclature used in colonial historiography that described Bhagat Singh and his comrades as terrorists and not patriots. Today, nearly a century later, with young protesters seeking to emulate the mode of protest employed by our freedom fighters, the government is following the same colonial approach of persecuting the protesting youth as terrorists. Indeed, the regime now seeks to rule by snuffing out every expression of dissent and criminalising every mode of protest and agitation. This is precisely what Bhagat Singh had forewarned us about when he spoke of 'bhure angrez'. Freedom must not be reduced to the rule of brown Englishmen imitating white Englishmen and subverting constitutional democracy with colonial era repression. ■

A Silver Lining

Struggle for Justice by the Victims of Caste Violence in Karnataka's Dunda

▲ RAGHUPATHI S. AND CLIFTON D'ROZARIO¹

Speaking at an seminar titled “Caste and the law” many years ago, Balagopal began his talk by saying, in India, caste is the law! This inescapable reality of caste that dictates where one lives, what work one is hereditarily obligated to perform, what and how one eats, who and how one marries, where and how one sits, stands and walks, is performed and reinforced in these minute regulation of subjugated masses in the country. This system of social stratification thus results in social inequality, marginalization, and the denial of basic rights and opportunities for subjugated caste individuals and communities. Any attempt to alter this status quo is met with immediate reprisals, most often violence and social boycotts, against the whole community. As such Dalits, every day, face systematic humiliations, degradations and violence solely on the basis of the caste they are born into. “Whether caste clashes are social, economic, or political in nature, they are premised on the same basic principle: any attempt to alter village customs or to demand land, increased wages, or political rights leads to violence and economic retaliation on the part of those most threatened by changes in the status quo.”

Increasing violence against Dalits

The constitutional promises of equality, justice, liberty and fraternity remain an illusion and the constitutional abolishment of untouchability, still remain

unattained. The lack of political and bureaucratic will has rendered toothless the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The caste blindness and sometimes sheer caste prejudices of the Courts have reduced the hope for justice from the judiciary.

As a consequence of this, there is a sharp increase in violent crimes against Dalits in this “mother of democracy”. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) documents the recorded crimes across the country including the offences against members against Dalits. These include crimes such as murder, assault on women, sexual harassment, stalking, kidnapping, and assault of children among others. In its ‘Crime in India’ report for the year 2022. It is seen that Uttar Pradesh (15,368), Rajasthan (8,752), Madhya Pradesh (7,733), and Bihar (6,509) reported the highest number of crimes against Dalits. Coming to South India it is seen that Andhra Pradesh (2315) tops the list in cases against Dalits followed by Telangana (1787), Tamil Nadu (1761), Karnataka (1977) and Kerala (1,050).

Looking at the crime figures from 2018 to 2022 it is seen that the crimes against Dalits and Adivasis have risen steadily. Further analysis reveals that even as cases of atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis increased, the conviction and charge-sheeting rates remained abysmally low.

As pointed above, Karnataka too has witnessed high number of crimes against Dalits, and these are only the reported cases. Dalits who form

17.5% of the State’s population have seen 1977 cases of caste atrocities in Karnataka. These include the shocking incident in November 2022 in Heggotara Village of Chamarajanagar District, where ‘upper caste’ persons drained all the water from a tank, from which a Dalit woman drank water and ‘purified’ it with gomutra. The feudal mentality prevalent among “upper castes” was seen in the brutal trashing of two Dalit minors in two separate incidents in September 2022. In the first case, a 14-year-old Dalit boy was tied to a streetlight pole and beaten up at Kempadenahalli village in Chikkaballapur district, by “upper-caste” Reddys, who also trashed his mother when she intervened to save her son. In the second incident, in Ullerahalli in Kolar district, boy was slapped after he picked a fallen pole of a palanquin and entered the temple during a procession. The procession was cancelled and the panchayat asks the boy’s mother to pay Rs.60,000 so that the deity defiled by his touch can be purified. In both these incidents cases were registered only after the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS) intervened. These increased caste atrocities in Karnataka were a dominant feature of the BJP rule in the state.

In this context of increased caste atrocities and low conviction rate, comes of the judgment of the Karnataka High Court in the case of a caste violence against Dalits in the village Dunda, Tumkur district, in August 2008. This judgment is the result of the dogged struggle by the Dalit victims for the past 15 years.

[1] Raghupathi S. and Clifton D’ Rozario represented the victims before the Karnataka High Court

Quest for justice by the Dalit victims of Dunda village, Karnataka

The fundamental pillar of a democracy is equal justice for all. Any action of the government that denies justice to the oppressed undermines the democratic system itself. A glaring example of this is the failure of the then BJP government to deliver justice to Dalit families subjected to brutal caste violence in Dunda village of Tumkur district in August, 2008. All talk of social justice flies out the window when the State fails to protect Dalits from caste atrocities, fails to prosecute the case and then fails to file an appeal when the Trial Court acquits the accused on untenable grounds.

On 14.08.2008, a heinous caste atrocity took place in Dunda village, Turuvekere taluk, Tumkur district. On that day two Dalit youth, Shivamurthy and Dilip, went to work in the farm of an 'upper-caste' person Gopal Krishna. When they were working there, Sudeep, another 'upper caste' person, who had a land dispute with Gopal Krishna, assaulted Shivamurthy and Dilip on the ground that they were working on his land.

Shivamurthy and Dileep proceeded to file a complaint against Sudeep at the jurisdictional police station in Dandinashivira, who refused to register an FIR. Angered that the Dalits had the "audacity" to file a complaint against them, Sudeep and a group of 'upper caste' people, armed with deadly weapons in their hands, barged into the keri (area) where the Dalit community resided while hurling abusive casteist abuses. In particular they said: "How dare Madigas dare to lodge a complaint against upper caste persons". They then assaulted all the Dalits they came across, causing grievous injuries to about a dozen persons. Of those injured, was a young

Dalit man named Govindaraju, the most highly educated person in his Dalit community, who suffered grievous injuries, as also his mother, Lakshamma and others.

Govindaraju's mother Lakshamma filed a complaint against the dominant caste persons at the Dandinashivara police station. The police registered an FIR against the accused under Sections 143, 147, 148, 323, 324 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 3(10), (11) of the Scheduled Caste and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. After completion of investigation, the police filed charge sheet against the accused on 04.12.2008 before the 3rd Additional Sessions Court, Tumkur, which proceeded to conduct the trial. However, despite there being sufficient evidence, the Trial Court acquitted all the accused on 23.06.2011 citing lack of evidence.

The verdict was a shock and disappointment to the victims and all the Dalits of the State for whom, the injustice of Kambalapalli had been repeated. On 11th March 2000, 7 Dalits were gruesomely murdered in village Kambalapalli in Chikkaballapur district (then Kolar district). They were assaulted, locked up in two houses, which were then set on fire, and the fire was fuelled till it was ensured that the Dalits were burnt to death. Such was this ghastly act that it shook the entire nation, not only Karnataka. Still the accused walked free, having been acquitted by the Trial Court and the High Court as well.

Govindaraju and his mother Lakshamma, however, refused to give up, and joined hands with Dalit organizations to ensure justice for his community. They brought to the attention of the government several times that the order of the Trial Court was erroneous, and ought to be appealed against. However, the then BJP government failed to

file an appeal against the same. It is needless to emphasize here that the reason for this is the complete apathy and neglect that the BJP government had towards the Dalit community.

However, the victims did not give up, and filed an appeal in the Karnataka High Court on 23.08.2011.

15 years after the heinous incident, the Karnataka High Court after hearing the arguments and thoroughly examining the evidence, passed its judgment on 31.10.2023 holding all 11 persons guilty of the said offences. The High Court held that the statement of eyewitnesses was not appropriately considered by the trial court, and that there was clear evidence that showed that all the accused were guilty of the offences. On 16.11.2023, the High Court sentenced the accused to undergo imprisonment for two months each for the offence punishable under Section 143 r/w/s 149 I.P.C, six months and pay fine of Rs.500/- for the offence punishable under Section 147 r/w/s 149 I.P.C, six months and pay fine of Rs.500/- for the offence punishable under Section 148 r/w/s 149 I.P.C, four months and pay fine of Rs.500/- for the offence punishable under Section 323 r/w/s 149 I.P.C. and one year, pay fine of Rs.1,000/- for the offence punishable under Section 324 r/w/s 149 I.P.C., one year and pay fine of Rs. 3,000/- for the offence punishable under Section 3 (1) (x) SC/ST (POA) Act r/w/s 149 I.P.C. and one year and pay fine of Rs.3,000 for the offence punishable under Section 3 (1) (xi) (POA) Act r/w/s 149 I.P.C. Importantly the High Court while passing the sentence on punishment rejected the pleas of the convicts for leniency since they chose: "... to assault complainant and others for the simple reason that though they belong to Schedule Caste, they had the courage or audacity of complaining against person belonging to forward community..."

The High Court finally after 15 years, rectified the errors of the trial court and ensured justice to the Dalit community

The Dalit community should not forget the apathy of the then BJP Government

In the face of the High Court's reversal of the trial court acquittal, the fact that the then Government failed to file an appeal against the trial court judgment requires close examination. In fact the then BJP government's failure to appeal to the Karnataka High Court against the acquittal order passed by the Tumkur District Court reflects a systemic failure that allows perpetrators of serious caste atrocities to escape legal consequences. Although the High Court's verdict has brought relief to the families of the affected Dalits, the fact that the government did not appeal against the trial court's order of acquittal raises serious questions among Dalits about the effectiveness and commitment of the BJP government to ensure justice. This case exposes the stark truth that the then BJP government had denied justice to the Dalits and had chosen to ignore the caste atrocities that occurred in Dunda village.

This apathy of the government was a direct assault of the core values of the Constitution that assures to all the promise of fraternity, equality and justice. The Supreme Court has held in several cases that unless the government is diligent in implementing the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 to ensure its original intent, the dream and ideal of a casteless society will remain just a dream and a mirage, and legal action should be taken against the investigating officer and the accused in cases of caste atrocity that are acquitted.

Although the victim's families would be relieved by the High Court's verdict, the questions remains whether those who have been convicted will repent their actions and emerge as reformed persons after their imprisonment. ■

Lessons from the Concluding Round of Polls in 2023

The outcome of the five Assembly elections held in November has proved almost all opinion polls and ground reports wrong. Even the few exit polls that predicted a thumping BJP victory in Madhya Pradesh gave the Congress a comfortable majority in neighbouring Chhattisgarh. The clean BJP sweep of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh has therefore come as a major surprise after the BJP's recent losses in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka and given the signs of a popular yearning for change in Madhya Pradesh after eighteen years of BJP rule and no such visible anti-incumbency against the Congress governments of Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. For the Congress, which was perceived to be on the ascendant after its Himachal and Karnataka victories, the only win has come in Telangana. The Telangana developments of course mark a significant change for this newly created state and also in the larger context of political balance in south India, but the Telangana victory of the Congress cannot but be overshadowed by the party's loss in the three big states in central and western India.

Before looking at the factors that led to this surprising outcome, let us take a closer look at the changes in vote share in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It will appear that in terms of vote share, the Congress has not suffered any major decline - its vote share has decreased by 0.6% in Madhya Pradesh (41 to 40.4), 0.9% in Chhattisgarh (43.1 to 42.2) and even registered a very marginal increase of 0.2% in Rajasthan (39.3 to 39.5). What dramatically changed the outcome is a major increase in the BJP's vote share - by 7.45% in Madhya Pradesh (41.1 to 48.55), 13.27% in Chhattisgarh (33 to 46.27) and 2.9% in Rajasthan (38.8 to 41.7). On the face of it, the increase in the BJP's vote share has therefore happened not so much at the cost of the Congress as other non-BJP parties, but we clearly need to look beyond the figures at the actual social and electoral shifts on the ground.

Having suffered defeats in Himachal and Karnataka, the BJP was of course desperate to retain Madhya Pradesh and wrest Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh from the Congress. The elections witnessed brazen use of the ED all through the election period, double standards adopted by the EC in dealing with alleged violations of the model code of conduct and reported administrative manipulations at different levels and stages of the election process. But fair elections cannot really be expected in today's India. For non-BJP forces to succeed in elections, an election campaign must turn into a veritable people's movement full of energy, mass participation and meticulous booth-level mobilisation. The victorious Congress election campaigns in Karnataka and Telangana exhibited considerable mass dynamism and energy, but

the campaigns in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and even Rajasthan, the best fought among the three, lacked this dynamism and energy.

In Karnataka, the Congress had won by exposing the corruption and all-round failure of the incumbent BJP government led by Bommai. But learning from Karnataka, the BJP in Madhya Pradesh tried to defuse the anti-incumbency factor by fielding several ministers and MPs as MLA candidates even as CM Shivraj Singh Chauhan ran a hectic personalised campaign focusing on the flagship schemes of his government. To counter the appeal of the promises made by the Congress, the BJP made similar offers and termed them 'Modi's Guarantee'. The fusion of the Modi cult and the model of targeted direct transfer-based 'welfare economics' aimed at converting 'beneficiaries' into bonded voters seems to have once again worked as a complement to communal polarisation and aggressive Hindutva. The BJP had successfully applied this formula earlier this year in UP elections and now once again in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

In the wake of its impressive Karnataka victory, the Congress centrally focused on two issues - the Adani-Modi nexus and caste census. For the Congress, which has never been a known votary of caste census and expanded reservation, the focus on OBC representation and caste census is a welcome new direction, but how far has the message percolated to the entire organisation and become an integral part of its political articulation? While the central leaders of Congress raised this issue, in Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath was busy seeking the blessings of Hindu Rashtra champion Bageshwar Baba (Dhirendra Shastri). Similarly the issue of Adani-Modi nexus does not just represent institutionalised

corruption, it represents the most brazen face of corporate aggression. The farmers' movement successfully challenged this arrogant corporate power and any effective political campaign against the Modi-Adani nexus will have to forge organic ties with the growing unity of farmers and workers for a reorientation of India's economic policy towards people's welfare and the rights of India's real producers.

“

The onus is of course on INDIA to get its act together without any further delay and launch an energetic mass campaign on the burning issues of the day to galvanise the people towards a decisive victory in 2024.

Another major weakness of the Congress campaign in these elections was the complete absence of any will or plan to harness the potential of the INDIA alliance. On the contrary, we saw a totally unwarranted war of words between the Congress and Samajwadi Party in Madhya Pradesh. In Telangana, the Congress has effectively channelised the accumulated anti-incumbency against the BRS government into a significant victory for the Congress, but we must remember that the BJP too has succeeded in doubling its vote share from 7% to 13.9% and the seat tally from the lone seat in the outgoing Assembly to eight seats. Any serious attempt at seat adjustment with the Left, SP, the newly formed Bhartiya Adivasi Party and at harnessing the INDIA potential in the campaign could have

made significant differences in all states and even further improved the Congress tally in Telangana.

There has often been a North-South divide in India's electoral outcomes, most notably we had witnessed a sharp contrast in the post-Emergency 1977 election when the Congress was wiped out from North India even as it did fairly well in the southern states. The doors being shut on the BJP in the south certainly marks a major blow to the BJP's ambitions to dominate India for decades, but the decisive defeat of the party in 2024 will have to be shaped north of the Vindhyas. In Mizoram, the ZPM has swept the polls dislodging the NDA-affiliated MNF from power, but here too the BJP has increased its tally from 1 to 2 while the Congress tally has gone down from 5 to 1.

The concluding round of 2023 elections has certainly been a big morale-booster for the BJP, and the Modi regime has already started talking of scoring a 'hat trick' in 2024. This is nothing but psychological warfare. The fact is if the Assembly results in the four states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Telangana are seen in Lok Sabha terms, the Congress actually improves its tally from its 2019 strength of 6 to 28 and BJP tally actually goes down from 65 to 46. The Assembly elections have certainly not settled the outcome of 2024 in the BJP's favour and if we draw proper lessons it is still perfectly possible to dislodge the BJP from power in 2024. The onus is of course on INDIA to get its act together without any further delay and launch an energetic mass campaign on the burning issues of the day to galvanise the people towards a decisive victory in 2024. ■

Expulsion of Mahua Moitra: **Fascist Strike on India's Parliamentary Democracy**

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The expulsion of Mahua Moitra, the fiery TMC MP from Krishnanagar, West Bengal, known for her powerful speeches exposing and challenging the Modi government and the Sangh Brigade, from the Lok Sabha, is the latest example of a brazen fascist strike on India's parliamentary democracy. On October 14 Supreme Court lawyer Jai Anant Dehadrai filed a complaint with the CBI accusing Mahua Moitra of corrupt practices, the next day BJP MP Nishikant Dubey wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla citing Dehadrai's complaint and demanding Moitra's expulsion on that basis, and on December 8 the TMC MP stood expelled from the Lok Sabha! The script and the process adopted to accomplish this expulsion with such electric speed give us yet another glimpse of the Sangh brigade's characteristic mode of conspiratorial planning and clinical execution.

Shortly after Nishikant Dubey's complaint to the Speaker, Dubai-based industrialist Darshan Hiranandani came up with an affidavit admitting to giving gifts to Mahua Moitra and posting parliamentary questions for her using her parliamentary login id. While Hiranandani's affidavit hardly gave specific details of the precise help he allegedly extended to Moitra, it did everything to discredit and delegitimise her in public perception by imputing careerist motives to her questioning of the Modi government and the Modi-Adani nexus. Moitra was accused of taking cash for raising

questions and jeopardising national security by sharing her login id with Hiranandani. The Ethics Committee which recommended Moitra's expulsion on the basis of this affidavit did not however summon and interrogate Hiranandani for his act of 'complicity' in Moitra's alleged crime.

Mahua Moitra accused the Ethics Committee chairperson of asking her completely irrelevant and objectionable personal questions of a sexist nature and several members of the Ethics Committee corroborated her and walked out of the Ethics Committee interrogation of Moitra in protest. The bulky report that was adopted with 6-4 majority recommended institutional probe by appropriate agencies into alleged receipt of cash by Mahua Moitra, but it still wanted her immediate expulsion from the Lok Sabha for sharing her login credentials with Darshan Hiranandani even though there was no such protocol prohibiting MPs from sharing their login details with their staff or other trusted individuals. In fact as pointed out by Moitra parliamentary IDs are routinely shared with researchers and team members assisting MPs with their questions and is never considered a breach of privilege or threat to national security.

To complete the farce, Mahua Moitra was not even allowed to present her own position before Lok Sabha even as the motion to expel her was passed by a voice vote with hardly any discussion within a short time after the tabling of the close to 500-

page report of the Ethics Committee! Passing bills without any debate and suspension of opposition MPs on the flimsiest of grounds has become a characteristic feature of the Modi government. As many as 94 suspensions have taken place in the Lok Sabha since 2014, in the Rajya Sabha the number has been a staggering 48 since 2020!

The expulsion of one of the most vocal opposition MPs is clearly intended to send out a message as to the Modi government's cherished model of the 'mother of democracy': an opposition-free Parliament in a dissent-free republic where citizens carry out duties assigned by the state without demanding any accountability from the government of the day. The Modi government has been particularly sensitive about stopping questions related to Adani's corporate fraud and the Modi-Adani nexus which had catapulted Adani to the second richest position in September 2022 before being pushed down by the Hindenburg revelations. Rahul Gandhi had his parliament membership revoked before a Supreme Court stay order restored it, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh languishes in jail and now Mahua Moitra stands expelled. The vendetta politics against Mahua Moitra has perhaps only begun and more acts of persecution may now follow.

There is an unmistakable element of misogyny in the whole affair. Nishikant Dubey, the BJP MP from Godda, home to the controversial Adani power plant, has made derogatory remarks about Mahua Moitra in Parliament long before the current episode. The BJP did not just take the dubious 'ethics committee' route to get Mahua Moitra expelled from the Lok Sabha, it ran a vicious slander campaign against her in the social media and other platforms of mass communication. Moitra has rightly invoked the Mahabharata

imagery of the disrobing of Draupadi to describe the ordeal she has been subjected to. The Modi government never misses a moment to wax eloquent about women's empowerment, it presented the women's reservation bill as a measure of worshipping women's power (Narishakti Vandan), and here it exposes its true colours by persecuting a woman MP who dared to speak truth to power.

Mahua Moitra has been expelled for her alleged 'unethical conduct' in accepting gifts from, and sharing her login credentials with, a supposed business rival of Gautam Adani. Meanwhile BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri, the perpetrator of the worst unethical conduct on the floor of parliament continues to be condoned and even rewarded. Another BJP MP, the notorious Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh from Uttar Pradesh, remains entrenched in his parliamentary privilege in spite of serious charges of sexual harassment levelled by India's champion women wrestlers. It is unfortunate that Moitra did not get much support from her own party in the initial phase. And now Danish Ali, the Ethics Committee member who boldly stood by Mahua Moitra, has ironically been suspended by his own party BSP even as the BSP did not really stand by Ali when he was targeted viciously by Ramesh Bidhuri on the floor of the Lok Sabha with Islamophobic hate and open threats.

The entire parliamentary opposition and the civil society at large should therefore oppose the vindictive expulsion of Mahua Moitra with all their might. Voting out the arrogant power-drunk Modi government in the forthcoming LS polls will be the best rebuff by the Indian people. ■

Comrade VM, the Indefatigable Crusader for People's Democracy

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



This year we are observing the twenty-fifth death anniversary of Comrade Vinod Mishra. As we recall his historic contribution to the reorganisation, expansion and consolidation of the CPI(ML) in the post-Naxalbari phase and pay tribute to his ever-inspiring revolutionary legacy, it will be most pertinent to revisit his core ideas and contributions in the context of today's central challenge of foiling the fascist raid on India's constitutional democracy.

When the Party Central Committee was reorganised on July 28, 1974 two years after the martyrdom of Comrade Charu Mazumdar, the CPI(ML) was battling a severe setback across the country. Almost the entire central leadership of the newly formed party had either been killed or jailed by the state. Thousands of party activists had embraced martyrdom or were facing acute repression. The fledgling party organisation was ill equipped to face such a severe crackdown; and confusion, demoralisation and division in the movement and organisation became the order of the day. It was in this extremely challenging situation that Comrade VM had taken over the responsibility of leading the party after Comrade Jauhar's martyrdom on 29 November, 1975.

What were the key ideas or factors that drove the party's recovery and expansion in the late 1970s and 1980s amidst an upsurge of anti-feudal struggles and vibrant multifarious mass initiatives? A dialectical evaluation of the past and the development of a revolutionary tactical line on the basis of a serious study of Marxism-Leninism and writings of Mao, deep social investigation and analysis, and a critical engagement with the Indian polity from the standpoint and



perspective of revolutionary social transformation - these were the two crucial factors propelling the party's trajectory of growth. Comrade VM paid keen attention to every aspect of this trajectory and the party took a series of bold political steps in response to the demands of a dynamic situation.

The Naxalbari uprising was not just a major milestone of the communist movement but a great turning point for modern India. One could see its impact in its immediate aftermath in the electrifying speed with which the CPI(ML) took shape and spread its wings, and the massive pull it generated not just among India's predominantly Dalit-Adivasi rural poor but even among the educated urban youth and intelligentsia. It became independent India's first major mass upsurge for radical transformation. The massive crackdown and setback created two opposite erroneous responses - one trend started disowning and maligning the upsurge in the name of rectification of mistakes while the other adopted a defensive approach of elevating the slogans and forms of struggle of the Naxalbari period to a level of strategic permanence and finality.

Under Comrade VM's leadership the reorganised CPI(ML) developed the dialectical approach of learning from mistakes and carrying

forward the spirit and lessons of Naxalbari in changed conditions and circumstances. Once we succeeded in seeing Naxalbari in the context of a specific juncture, we could begin to address the challenge of extricating tactical questions from the strategic course or perspective. This was how the party moved on in cautious but bold and confident steps, imbibing the revolutionary spirit of Naxalbari and spreading it to the wider arena of mass initiatives. Charu Mazumdar's last words in which he urged keeping the party alive, forging close ties with the masses and upholding their interests as the supreme duty of the party, immensely helped this process of the party's recovery and reorganisation.

The formation of the CPI(ML) in the wake of the Naxalbari peasant upsurge was a crystallised expression of the rejection of economism and keeping politics in command. Immediate - often economic - demands are invariably central to the development of mass struggles, and communist politics which seeks to end human exploitation has to link up this mass work with the ideological and political challenge of motivating and mobilising the struggling forces to achieve the larger goal of changing the capitalist order. Herein lies the great challenge of combining the current task with the future goal. As the reorganised CPI(ML) started focusing on mobilising the people

around their immediate demands, it paid special attention to linking up immediate demands and local struggles with the national vision of a democratic alternative. This was to lead to the emergence of the Indian People's Front as an all-India radical democratic platform.

The development of an all-India political platform unleashing a series of bold initiatives with a radical democratic vision lent a new impetus and dimension to the growth of local mass activism. The all-India political thrust served as a built-in counterweight against the common tendency of localism, keeping economism in check and politics in command. In the latter half of the 1980s when IPF decided to contest elections, it became a bitter struggle to secure the right to vote for the oppressed poor by resisting booth-capturing by feudal forces. The transition from election boycott to electoral participation meant a determined battle for the electoral assertion of the excluded and oppressed people, and in a state like Bihar it invited a tremendous feudal backlash. Serial massacres by private armies, killings of leaders and activists, and persecution of organisers by implicating them in false cases and subjecting them to prolonged incarceration - all-out attempts were made to stop the electoral assertion and advance of the revolutionary movement.

Under the leadership of Comrade VM the CPI(ML) withstood these challenges with great courage and determination and held high the banner of revolutionary democracy against all odds. The power of militant anti-feudal struggles of the people and multifarious democratic initiatives for social justice and transformation sustained and strengthened the party in the face of adverse conditions and concerted attacks by feudal-criminal forces. But the electoral emergence of the party in the then central Bihar (south Bihar after bifurcation of the state) in the late 1980s and early 1990s also strengthened the feudal reaction. The rise of the Hindutva brigade riding on the Ram Mandir campaign brought a palpable change in Bihar and the feudal violence against the fighting rural poor and their party CPI(ML) started acquiring vicious fascist overtones. After the Bathanitola massacre in Bhojpur, the first major carnage perpetrated by the infamous Ranvir Sena, Comrade VM detected unmistakable communal streaks in the Ranvir Sena's approach. Indeed, the violence against the women and children in Bathanitola was a precursor to the pogrom we witnessed in Gujarat in 2002.

Ever since Advani's rath yatra and its eventual culmination in the December 6 1992 demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Comrade VM had been very clear about the fascist nature of the entire build-up. He never saw it as a clash between fundamentalism or fanaticism and liberalism, for him it was a clear battle between communal fascism and constitutional democracy. The threat to democracy had started aggravating with the simultaneous rise of Hindutva and corporate power, and Comrade VM paid close attention to this growing danger and did his best to sensitise and prepare the party for this new challenging phase. In the tenth year of the Modi government at the centre when we look back at the short-lived

first NDA government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the late 1990s, it may look pretty mild, and many political observers were indeed misled by the manufactured 'moderate' image of Vajpayee and his government, but Comrade VM continued to forewarn us about the shape of things to come. His last days were totally focused on building an anti-fascist political campaign in India.

For Comrade VM, the focus on democracy was never a matter of compromise with the status quo but rather an essential aspect of social and political transformation. From the late 1980s onwards, Comrade VM highlighted the key lessons from the collapse of the Soviet model of socialism and drew our attention to the challenge of socialist regeneration through more participatory democracy and socialist economic dynamism. The collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union also created a unipolar moment and US imperialism took full advantage of this juncture. From the 1990-91 Gulf War onwards, it forged a new US-led western alliance marked by 'Clash of Civilisations' anti-Muslim rhetoric which evolved into the global War on Terror. It is this alliance combined with the more recent wave of far-right global consolidation which is the bedrock of support for Israel today in its ongoing genocidal campaign in Gaza.

The disappearance of the Soviet bloc meant an aggressive expansion of global capitalism and a concerted campaign of liberalization, privatisation and globalisation, and Comrade VM saw within this expansion the seeds of new contradictions and deeper crisis. The multiple crises of global capitalism in the last two decades coupled with the havoc being created by climate change have borne him out. This has also led to a new crisis of liberal democracy and the welfare state and renewed rise of fascism on a global

scale. Writing on the Communist Manifesto in the 150th year of its publication, Comrade VM highlighted the challenge of exploring forms of proletarian democracy transcending the limits of even the best forms of bourgeois democracy so that the defeat of capitalism in future is seen not just as victory of socialism but also democracy.

At the time of adoption of the Constitution of India and the introduction of parliamentary democracy, Babasaheb Ambedkar had warned us about the contradictions and limits of the new system - the contradiction between mere equality of vote and deeply entrenched social and economic inequality, and the clash between India's traditional undemocratic soil and the top-dressing of democracy applied from above through constitution. In their own contexts, Ambedkar the radical democrat and VM the revolutionary communist addressed the same anomalies and contradictions within India's society and polity and sought ways to promote the assertion and expand the rights of the oppressed and marginalised people. Ambedkar was initially hopeful of reconciling socialist economics and parliamentary democracy; while VM, though never under any illusion of finding a parliamentary path to socialism, was committed to using and expanding the potential of whatever democracy was available to advance the forward march of the Indian people. Today when parliamentary democracy in India is facing a serious fascist offensive with a growing clamour for a new constitution or at any rate for a complete subversion of the existing constitution and the institutional architecture of parliamentary democracy, the ideas and contributions of Comrade VM remain an inspiring guide in India's battle to defeat fascism and secure a robust democratic future. ■

25th Memorial Day of Comrade VM Organised across the Country



On the 25th Memorial Day of Comrade Vinod Mishra, the rank and file of CPI(ML) Liberation organized 'Sankalp Sabha' [Pledge Meeting] across the country to salute the revolutionary mission of our great martyrs and departed leaders, and

resolved to carry forward Comrade VM's revolutionary legacy in today's challenging situation.

In Patna, thousands gathered at Miller School Ground and took a pledge to fight hard and save democracy in the country from the clutches of fascist forces. Twenty-

five years ago, thousands of people had thronged the same ground to pay their last respects to their beloved leader and comrade VM. Patna's 'Sankalp Sabha' brought together generations of comrades working on diverse fronts across Bihar, including Comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya, who was part of the three-member Central Committee (along with Comrades Subrata Dutt (Jauhar) and Vinod Mishra formed on July 28th, 1974 to re-organise the party) and hundreds of other comrades who had fought alongside Comrade VM between the 1970s and 1990s, to thousands of activists who have joined since his departure.

Addressing the rally, CPI(ML) General Secretary Com. Dipankar said that the Naxalbari was independent India largest people's movement – of workers and agricultural labourers and of Dalit and Adivasi – which spread across the country with tremendous energy and enthusiasm. After the

Pledge for December 18, 2023

On the 25th death anniversary of Comrade VM the CPI(ML) rededicates itself to the revolutionary mission of our great martyrs and departed leaders and pledges to carry forward Comrade VM's revolutionary legacy in today's challenging situation.

Comrade VM had led the reorganisation of the party after the crackdown and setback in the early 1970s. Comrade VM's last words in which he urged keeping the party alive, forging close ties with the masses and upholding their interests as the supreme duty, inspired this process of the party's recovery and reorganisation. The party's living ties with the people, reliance on the people and the party's leading role in courageous mobilisation of the people in multifarious struggles have been the key to the party's growth. We resolve to redouble our efforts to strengthen the mass practice and mass character of the party.

Under Comrade VM's leadership the party developed an effective united front policy of seeking a whole range of allies, from individuals to organisations, while strengthening the independent role, initiative and identity of the party. We need to enhance the party's capacity to further develop and implement this united front policy while strengthening the party's independent strength and role by all means.

The success of the party in developing its plans and policies and advancing on different fronts depends on the party's organisational strength and ideological clarity. Under Comrade VM's leadership the

party held high the banner of revolutionary Marxism even as many communist parties liquidated themselves in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, the party also developed and consolidated its organisational structure, democratic functioning and collective leadership.

As we prepare ourselves for the crucial 2024 elections and a decisive resistance to the growing fascist offensive, we must stand firm on the foundations of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong thought and strengthen our organisational structure and functioning. Following the successful conclusion of the 11th Congress in Patna in February this year, we had resolved to reorganised our branches and local committees in all our areas of work.

Without functional branches and local committees we cannot really maintain an organised existence on the ground and any lack of local organisation is a major weakness especially in a situation of heightened fascist offensive. The emphasis on ensuring a vibrant and dynamic organisational structure on the ground must therefore be kept up and made a defining feature of our party. On this year's Pledge Day (Sankalp Diwas), let us resolve to energise the entire organisation as a firmly united and battle-ready fighting force.

Red Salute to Comrade VM! Red Salute to all our martyrs and departed leaders!

Long live CPI(ML)! Defeat Fascism, Secure People's Rights! Unite to fight! Fight to win! ■



Naxalbari, a young VM, who was studying engineering in Durgapur, decided that that he doesn't want to be an engineer to produce for capitalist class. He resolved that his journey would be to engineer a new society free from exploitation and injustice. At the height of state repression against CPI(ML), Comrades VM, Jauhar, Swadesh Bhattacharya and all other leaders not only fought against the tide to ensure the survival of the party, but also led the CPI(ML) towards a revolutionary path, forging close

ties with the masses and upholding their interests as the supreme duty of the party. "Today, wherever there are struggles of the oppressed – of Dalits, Adivasis, workers, farmers, Minorities, women, etc., CPI(ML) is present there," he said.

"CPI(ML) is the party of the oppressed and those who were outcaste from society and politics. When their party, CPI(ML) decided to contest elections, the people, who were once denied their right to vote and had their votes captured by feudal forces, risked their lives

to cast vote to change the political landscape of Bihar by sending their representative to the Parliament," added Com. Dipankar.

Com. Dipankar said that today when the Parliamentary democracy in India is facing a serious fascist offensive with a growing clamor for a new Constitution, or at any rate, for a complete subversion of the existing Constitution and the institutional architecture of Parliamentary democracy, the ideas and contributions of Comrade VM remain an inspiring guide in India's battle to defeat fascism and secure a robust democratic future.

Noted writer and campaigner for social equality and secular democracy, Kanwal Bharti also addressed the meeting as a guest speaker and said that the BJP and RSS are employing 'divide and rule' policy, which was once used by the British colonialists to create anti-Muslim hatred in the society and to divert people's attention from burning issues like poverty and illiteracy in the country.

During the Sankalp Sabha, a short biography of Comrade VM was released. The Sankalp Sabha adopted the following resolutions: (1) to strengthen the fight against BJP-RSS communal fascism and defeat the fascist BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections; (2) demanding immediate end to Israel's Genocidal War in Gaza, and call for establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with 1967 borders.

Across the country, pledge of December 18 was read in all units of the party with the emphasis on ensuring a vibrant and dynamic organisational structure on the ground and to energise the entire organisation as a firmly united and battle-ready fighting force. ■

Homage to Three of our Beloved Leaders on their 25th Death Anniversaries



1998 was a year of great losses for the CPI(ML). In the beginning of that year we lost Comrade Anil Barua, secretary of Assam State Committee when he was assassinated by a group of Assamese nationalist militants on 11 February while addressing an election meeting in Dibrugarh. Comrade Anil Barua was the CPI(ML) candidate for the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency in the 1998 midterm Lok Sabha poll. On October 9 we lost Comrade Nagbhushan Patnaik in the course of treatment in a Chennai hospital. And just two months later, on December 18, 1998, Comrade Vinod Mishra breathed his last following a massive heart attack on the concluding day of a meeting of the party central committee in Lucknow.

As a mark of our tribute to these great leaders on their twenty-fifth death anniversaries we reproduce a few write-ups from our archives. There are three poems by Comrade Anil Barua (translated from Assamese into English by Dr. Madan Sarma of Tezpur University and published in the February 2006 issue of Liberation), an appeal for unity of communist revolutionaries by Comrade Nagbhushan Patnaik that had first appeared in the 18 October, 1980 issue of the Kolkata-based progressive weekly Frontier and a prompt response to that appeal by Comrade Vinod Mishra published in the 15 November, 1980, issue of the same weekly. Comrade Nagbhushan's appeal was published with the caption "A Few Questions" and Comrade VM's response was titled "Unite We Shall" (reproduced here with slight abridgement).

Comrade Nagbhushan's appeal and Comrade VM's reply in Frontier had marked the beginning of a historic comradeship and collaboration between the two leaders that played a central role in the revival and expansion of the

CPI(ML) in the 1980s and 1990s. Comrade Nagbhushan had high regard for the revolutionary peasant movement on the plains of Bihar, and soon after his release on parole after nearly a decade's incarceration he met Comrade VM and there began a close exchange of ideas. By 1984 Comrade Nagbhushan agreed to take the responsibility of chairing the Indian People's Front and became the moving spirit of the rise of a fighting democratic platform on an all-India plane.

After the coming overground of the CPI(ML) in December 1992 and subsequent dissolution of the Indian People's Front in early 1994, Comrade Nagbhushan continued to play a prominent role as a member of the Polit Bureau of the CPI(ML). As a young member of the Central Committee of the CPI(ML) elected by the First Congress held in May 1970, Comrade Nagbhushan remained a bridge between the undivided CPI(ML) led by Comrade Charu Mazumdar and the revival and reorganisation of the party in the subsequent decades. After the death of Comrade Nagbhushan, Comrade VM led the funeral cavalcade from Chennai to Bhubaneswar via Andhra Pradesh, addressing assemblies of comrades at several points along the route and delivering a rousing speech before the cremation in Bhubaneswar. In the short period that Comrade VM remained alive after Comrade Nagbhushan's death, he encouraged comrades to design a 1999 calendar dedicated to Comrade Nagbhushan and launch a fund collection campaign for the construction of Nagbhushan Bhawan in Bhubaneswar.

On their twenty-fifth death anniversary, Liberation pays respectful homage to these cherished leaders and celebrates their inspiring communist legacy.

Poems by Comrade Anil Barua

SUN-BATHED SHE'LL SHINE AGAIN

(25/2/1997)

[To the rape-victim Jonmoni (the little moon) of Bharalua]

Dark spots on the Moon
Blots, or Embellishments?
Round-faced
Is that the Moon
Or, Sukanta's 'half-burnt roti'
Or, my rebel sister,
A witness to state-repression?
What's the value of ritual purification, O Priest?
The price of ritual purification
Cannot subdue our Moon
Cool, intense heat on the Moon's body
The swallowing Rahu cannot hide
The Moon's bright face
Sun-bathed She'll Shine Again.

MEERUT : 1987

(27/7/1987)

Listen carefully
The bugle sounds,
Striking a note
Unheard before.
Who pours venoms of lead
Into the perfume?
Plucking the pomegranate's red blossoms
The protectors-turned-oppressors
Play the hurling game.
Whose flag flies
Over the graveyard of humanity?
The people have identified them
Have seen through the game
Of the worms of darkness.
Yet long is the night's journey
It'll be a while
Before the morning light
Brightens everything up
But the long night's journey
Will end all right.

YOU ARE A PEASANT

(06/1/1976)

You are a peasant
I am a worker
Two brothers, poverty stricken
Both have the same mother.
You turn this land green
With your toil
You offer golden harvest
To the whole society
Do you get enough
To fill your stomach?
I struggle with machines
Breaking my back
For the comfort of the rich
Creating something new every day.
I lift the iron ore
That came from the womb of the earth
Softening, melting, moulding
I made steel tough.
Buildings, electricity, cement, concrete
All of these I made myself
Shelling my labour
Wasting my life day after day
I've become a proletariat.
The money-lender deprived you of everything
The landlord sucked your blood
How long will you go on tolerating?
Come, let's fight together
When united even the weakest can win.
Let's get united
Making weapons of the plough-shares
Ensuring social justice
Let's wrest our due.

A Few Questions

▲ NAGABHUSAN PATNAIK

(FRONTIER, October 18, 1980)

Where are we today, the CPI(M-L) the party – the groups or the individuals?... Is not the Indian Revolution being delayed by the nefarious groupings, splittism, personality clashes, we-are-all-knowing or we-are-all-correct arrogance/or this-or-that-group-is-the-all-correct / party and the rest-is-all-wrong and such self-conceit?

Are the differences between the CPI(M-L) groups basically ideological, programmatically irreconcilable, tactically planets apart in the pure party sense? Why do not unity efforts take off, and if ever they do, are soon grounded and dishevelled?...

Cannot revolutionary tolerance be put in command and comrades in the field – all or as many as possible while keeping doors open for the like-minded – meet, exchange experiences and begin with joint field work on agreed issues? Much talk about joint work evaporates when it comes to real doing, and the rub appears in the name of basic ideology.

Does all this sound idealistic? Pardon me if it so appears. My heart aches from inside the prison and on my sick bed. I know how some people entertain strange ideas about ideology, programme, tactics even in day-to-day jail life, and how they conduct themselves sans reason, sense, responsibility, and concern for history. I am afraid the, more than objectivity, it is the personal equations and personality conflicts that is the villain of the piece, by and large, and these prevent unity. I appeal to all to bury the personal and personality elements and begin, in earnest, parleys in the true Marxist-Leninist ways.

Are the questions involved – of any serious ideological proportions? Yes, and no. Yes, when the China question is brought in. No, because irrespective of the question of China today, our revolution is based on people's war (protracted), as proven by Marxism-Leninism and Mao-Tsetung thought – our basic ideology. It is to be applied to the concrete conditions of our country. We have our own exclusive cultural ethos, geopolitical identity, socio-political institutions, caste system, panchayats, bourgeois parliamentary democracy (though sham, lock stock and barrel), and so on and so forth.

There should be a genuine feeling by all groups that each has, at one point or other, misconstrued tactical questions- such as – 'boycott of election', 'line of class enemy annihilation', 'only underground organisation' and

'no legal or semi-legal activity', 'no front organisations', 'no political classes' etc, - as strategic questions of basic ideology. It is time they corrected their stands, if they are still persisting in any of these.

Priceless blood has been shed. People have great love for those who sacrifice. But sacrifice alone and, at that, unnecessary sacrifice would only drain off precious blood, but not take us much farther as we stand today in a state of setback.

There is, I am proud to say, no dearth of comrades to plunge into the revolution raging in the countryside. But we must carry conviction with the masses, as without masses we are a spineless bundle of flesh.

Comrades, I am appealing to all your revolutionary fervour, from my sick-bed, to work for revolutionary unity, and match the subjective factors with the objective solutions....

Lastly, as to myself, a word. My life is dedicated to the cause of the country, nation and people. No matter whether I am inside or outside jail, I will rather end than succumb, break or bend. But I am an individual. Mao Tsetung thought has taught us: It is people and people alone who are the motive force in the making of world history, not individuals.



Unite We Shall !

▲ VINOD MISHRA

(FRONTIER, November 15, 1980)

In 'A Few Questions', Comrade Nagabhusan Patnaik has made a very strong appeal for the unity of the communist revolutionaries of India and has outlined a broad framework within which they can take the first steps towards that end.

Nagabhusan Patnaik is the name of an Iron Man, of a brave proletarian fighter and a worthy Party leader. He is perhaps the last living link in person between the united CPI(M-L) of the past and the divided CPI(M-L) of the present, because of the immense respect he enjoys in all the factions of the party. And, therefore, in spite of his serious sickness which has brought him close to death, he remains a constant source of fear to the enemy. In his appeal, he has echoed the present objective need and also the aspirations and desires of the revolutionary ranks and masses, and the time has come for us to pay the matter serious and urgent attention.

There is no denying the fact that the unity of the communist revolutionaries is a very complex question. Though basic formulations of the party programme remain valid to this day, much water has flown down the Ganga and the Godavari, demanding a freshly-drawn party programme. This has invariably given a new dimension to the old problem of unity. Also, any general call for unity cannot lose sight of the fact that, over the years, tendencies in one form or the other amounting to liquidation of the revolution and revolutionary struggles have become consolidated among certain segments of the revolutionary forces. In a multi-national country like India with an uneven economic and political development, there remain all the chances of regional and other such contradictions infiltrating any all-India party of the proletariat. Moreover, as different party factions have been working in isolation from one another for a long time, many factors have multiplied to develop group mentalities to a considerable extent among them. In the groups outside the CPI(M-L), such tendencies have firmly entrenched themselves in the party during the last twelve years or so. In the absence of a united team of influential and capable leaders, personal equations and personality conflicts have contributed a lot

in retarding the process of unity. Therefore, the question of unity in a single party is difficult, very difficult indeed.

However, there is the encouraging side of the picture too. In the on-going debate between different party factions and groups, many fundamental questions related to the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution are being discussed and rediscussed. Though painful, a process of ideological preparation of the impending Indian revolution is thus on. In spite of 'nefarious groupings', the movement is gradually reviving on an all-India scale as the summation of separate efforts of various party factions, groups and individuals. The overwhelming majority of the revolutionary forces have realized the importance of serious mass-work and only a small minority indulges in senseless actions basing on the frustration resulting from the grave economic crisis in certain sections of the masses. By all accounts, this phenomenon is only the last phase of that minority's lengthy political training. The course of political events particularly Indira Gandhi's coming back to power and Russian military advance close to our border – are preparing the common ground and developing the urge for the various party factions and groups to get closer. In the rank and file, the desire for unity is on the increase and it is only a matter of time for this desire to get translated into the force which will overcome the ego of the leaders and bring them together in a single party.

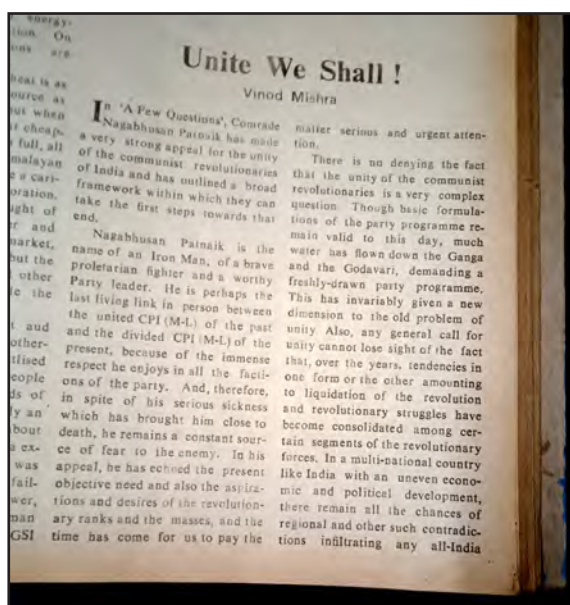
The recent experience of the disintegration of unity which a few party factions had achieved provides important clues

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to decide our next steps. It is not sufficient to unite simply on the basis of a similar approach to the evaluation of the past. Rather, developing a new political basis of unity of the assessment of the present is all the more important – and to an extent sufficient. Certain differences on the evaluation of the past – which it is otherwise necessary to solve – can even be left aside for the time being. The organisational form of unity should essentially be based on the principles of democratic centralism and debates on important issues should be conducted as a process of discussion and not of outright condemnation, in order to maintain the dignity of the Marxist-Leninist movement, to preserve its unity and to develop the correct line.

“Things begin to change into their opposite when they reach the extremes”, Already many of the party factions and groups have come closer. They are holding regular discussions, exchanging opinions and increasingly coordinating their activities in various mass struggles. Development of this coordination in the not-too-distant future will eventually provide the necessary breakthrough in determining the political and organisational basis of unity in a single Party....

And our unity with the massive intermediate forces developing all over the country and skilful utilisation of the contradictions in the enemy camp can give birth to a powerful united front as a new type of “national alternative” against the ruling autocratic clique. The present situation provides us ample opportunity to take initiative in this direction.

And in this context, Comrade Nagabhusan’s call assumes paramount importance. We earnestly hope that all Marxist-Leninist forces will respond to this call both in work and spirit. Finally, we take this opportunity to appeal to all revolutionary comrades to mobilise strong public opinion throughout the country to pressurize the Government for the release of Comrade Nagabhusan Patnaik.

Our Red Salute to you, Comrade Nagabhusan. You can rest assured Unite We Shall!

[The above has been issued on behalf of the Central Committee, CPI(M-L)] ■

Lessons from the **Silkyara Tunnel Collapse: Stop Destruction in the Name of Development**

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Forty-one construction workers who remained trapped in a partially collapsed tunnel in Uttarakhand since 12 November, 2023, were finally rescued on the seventeenth day. After machines broke down it was rathole miners (skilled manual earth diggers) who ultimately came to the rescue at great risk to their own lives. In recent times we have seen organised state-sanctioned violence to expel Muslims from Uttarakhand, yet Muslim rathole miners came to Uttarakhand to join this rescue mission. The media and the state and central governments initially paid little attention to the mishap. It was only after the world cup cricket euphoria anticlimactically ended in India’s shock defeat to Australia in the November 19 final that the Silkyara tunnel collapse started receiving some attention in the media. The least that must be demanded from the rulers is restraint in ‘exhibiting their care and concern’ for the rescued workers. Only the other day we saw how insensitive UP ministers sought to hand over cheques in front of camera to the inconsolable mother of Captain Shubham of Agra who had been killed in Rajouri, prompting her to say ‘pradarshani mat lagao’ (don’t make a spectacle).

The rescue operation had been a thoroughly casual affair from the very beginning. The Hyderabad-based Navyug Engineering Company (reportedly now being owned by the Adani group), which has the tunnel construction contract, had no wherewithals to deal with an emergency like the Silkyara tunnel collapse. It should be noted that the same company was responsible for the death of twenty labourers in August this year in an accident in Nagpur-Mumbai Samridhi expressway and a case of culpable homicide has been registered against the company. Yet there has been no monitoring of the company’s work in Uttarakhand. An auger machine was brought from Delhi to conduct the drilling and when it ran into trouble a second machine was brought from Indore. When the second machine too developed problems, experts were summoned from Delhi. Yet on the 13th day, all attempts had to be given up on getting the machine running. On the 15th day of the tunnel collapse the National Disaster Management Authority eventually deployed army engineers and rathole miners who finally succeeded in rescuing the workers.

When the Silkyara Bend - Barkot tunnel project was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in February 2018, it included a mandatory provision for an escape passage. Whatever happened to that provision? Norms have clearly been violated at every stage of construction. No wonder Uttarakhand has been witnessing

such construction-related accidents increasingly frequently. Five years ago, on 21 December 2018, seven workers had perished in a landslide on the Rudraprayag-Gaurikund stretch of an under-construction road. In July 2020, three sleeping siblings in Khoda village of Narendranagar block of Tehri were crushed to death when the retaining wall of a highway collapsed on their house. On 20 July 2022, two labourers lost their lives and six others sustained critical injuries when an under-construction bridge collapsed in Rudraprayag district.

Such periodic accidents have now become routine features of 'development' in Uttarakhand. Two disastrous campaigns have particularly harmed Uttarakhand since the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in November 2000. The idea of turning Uttarakhand into 'Urja Pradesh' or India's energy hub by building a string of hydel power plants and the fad of linking the four key pilgrimage centres - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri - with faster all-weather road and rail

connectivity have unleashed havoc in this Himalayan state. Known as the Char Dham (four pilgrimage centres) project, this faster road connectivity project has been designed to destroy the delicate and ecologically sensitive and earthquake-prone Himalayan ecosystem. To avoid environmental compliance for projects exceeding 100 km, the close to 900 km Char Dham project has been presented as a cluster of 53 separate projects. Allied with the road connectivity project, there is also a 372 km long Char Dham Railway Project with an estimated cost of 72,000 crore rupees and involving the construction of dozens of tunnels. From massive destruction of Himalayan forests to reckless tampering with the fragile mountain system, the Char Dham Road and Rail projects are a complete design of disaster. From Joshimath to Silkyara, the writing on the wall can be read in big bold letters.

Enough warnings have also been issued by experts and courts. Eminent environmentalist Ravi Chopra who headed the expert panel that

examined the Char Dham project resigned to register his protest against total inaction of the government. To secure the approval of the Supreme Court, the government had invoked the angle of national security and improved mobility of the defence forces in support of the Char Dham project. The Supreme Court endorsed the project only on condition of mandatory compliance with necessary environmental safeguards. But so far there has been no sign of compliance or course correction. In the name of development, the Himalayan ecosystem continues to be subjected to relentless corporate invasion and plunder. Coupled with the growing intensity of climate crisis, this paradigm of development can only be a recipe for unmitigated serial disaster. The success in saving the lives of the forty-one trapped workers in the Silkyara tunnel must not lead to complacency and resumption of business as usual. The Silkyara tunnel collapse only highlights the urgency of saving Uttarakhand and the Himalayan ecosystem from the ongoing campaign of destruction. ■

Silkyara Rescue Miners Felicitated By CPIML

"We Did It for Our Brothers Who Were Trapped, It Could Have Been Us"

Munna Qureshi, Monu Kumar, Feroze Qureshi, Naseem Malik, Nasir Khan, Jatin, Devender Kumar, Saurabh, Wakeel Hassan, Irshad Ansari, Rashid Ansari, Ankur - they are the 12 rescue miners who provided a breath of fresh air to the 41 workers trapped for 17 days inside the collapsed Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi. After repeated failures by the auger machine to reach the trapped workers, the team of 12 workers was called in who after working tirelessly for 26

hours accomplished their successful operation.

CPIML organised a felicitation ceremony 'Shramik Samman Samaroh' of these rescue miners at party's Central Office Charu Bhawan in Delhi on 15 December. CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya and other AICCTU-CPIML leaders felicitated the brave workers. Comrade Dipankar said, "Listening to the team of miners who rescued the 41 trapped workers last month from the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand is listening to unsung heroes of the Indian working

class - full of courage, compassion, determination and solidarity. The disastrous model named development model in India's Himalayas are being carried on the soldiers of our workers. CPIML demands that the central government must ensure regularised government jobs for all the rescue miners and an official recognition of their bravery.

The rescue workers at the felicitation said that today when we are getting a chance to speak, we want to talk about the situation of workers in the country. Workers like us cannot afford to have a house of our own in our lifetime. It is indeed a matter of great shame that workers who build critical infrastructure in different parts of the country involving great risk of accidents and injury are paid

such a paltry amount. They are denied legal rights such as ESI or PF. When they work in massive development projects sometimes the employer contributes to their PF. They have been involved in this work without any formal training and they had to start doing this job when they were as young as 16 years in order to support their families. They have known about several accidents that have either injured or killed workers engaged in manual gig pushing.

They mentioned about two accidents that took lives of workers involved in laying pipelines in Delhi's Begumpura as well as UP's Etah. Despite the risk involved in the job and the meagre level of wages, they continue with this job as no other avenues of employment are available.

Workers like the 41 trapped construction workers as well as the 12 rescue miners are the ones on whose shoulders the burden of the disastrous model of destruction of the fragile ecology and geology of the Himalayas, paraphrased as development, are being borne. This is the cost people are paying for the unabated construction in the fragile Himalayan geology.

The twelve rescue miners are from Delhi's Khazuri and UP's Bulandshahar and Kasganj. Just like the rest of the country, these workers were also watching the attempts to rescue the 41 trapped workers. Monu Kumar, one of them, told us that while watching the helplessness of fellow workers who were trapped, they were feeling restless for not being able to do anything as they were confident that if given the job, their team can successfully rescue the trapped workers. They feel extremely fortunate for being recruited for the job and being able to rescue the trapped workers. Nasir Khan, another team member of the rescue miners told us that they could feel the helplessness of the trapped workers as they



themselves work in deep trenches and are aware that such accidents can happen to anyone of them anytime.

The workers told that while the media has termed them as rathole miners, they describe their jobs as manual gig pushing. Their job is to lay water or sewer pipelines at 15-35 feet depth from the ground. While the nature of their job appears similar to that of the rathole miners, their occupation does not fall under the banned category of work. While machines are involved in horizontal digging for laying pipelines, an extensive amount of manual work is also needed to back up the machines. The description of their job defines their work as hazardous work.

The workers who hail from Bulandshahar told us that most of those who are engaged in this kind of work come from landless or small farmer families. Agrarian crisis in countryside is forcing majority of the youth to move out from farming and adopt non-farm manual work. The rescue miners said they chose this difficult job as other construction workers get Rs 300-400 per day, while they earn Rs 500-600 a day. On an average they manage to earn around Rs 15,000 per month.

Munna Qureshi, another member of the team mentioned how difficult it is for them to ensure a secure future for their children despite working hard for 9 to 10 hours a day as every right of citizens from health to education

is being handed over to private companies.

Nasir Khan raised a very important question as to why projects under the government are being handed over to private companies. Wakeel Hassan, the team leader of the rescue miners said that it is not religion or caste of the trapped workers that inspired them to go for the rescue work, but the suffering of fellow workers that led them to the work.

Till that day, the rescue workers were neither paid by the Navyug company that recruited them, nor given any honorary felicitation amount by either the central or Uttarakhand State Government.

The CPI(M) has demanded regularised government jobs for all 12 rescue miners, Rs 10 lakhs as recognition of their service to the nation and an official recognition of their bravery. The disastrous Chardham National Highway Project must be disbanded and a proper Environmental Impact Assessment of the area must be done before proceeding with any further construction. People of the country shall no more bear the cost of disastrous projects aimed at amassing profits for the greedy corporates.

Everyone present at the felicitation ceremony was inspired by the clear manifestation of working class consciousness by these rescue miners. ■

Supreme Court's Gender Handbook

One Step Forward and Many a Mile to Go

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

On August 16, 2023, the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud released the Supreme Court's "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes", addressed to members of the legal fraternity including Judges, that acknowledges and seeks to address the harmful stereotypical language in legal proceedings. The Handbook is premised on the understanding that the perpetuation of such stereotypes by the judiciary is harmful, discriminatory and violative of constitutional morality.

The Handbook endeavours to combat gender stereotypes particularly the harmful stereotypes relied on by judges in their utterances in Court and their judgments, that lead to a "distortion of the objective and impartial application of the law, and perpetuate discrimination and exclusion". The Handbook aims to "actively challenge and dispel harmful stereotypes", by helping judges identify and avoid stereotypes through three means:

1. First, the identifying of language that promotes gender stereotypes. While doing so, it provides a list of stereotype promoting language and the preferred alternative language to be used. For instance phrases such as "chaste woman" "career woman" "woman of easy virtue" "woman of easy virtue".
2. Second, it identifies common reasoning patterns that are based on gender stereotypes (particularly about women) and the incorrectness of the same. For instance, it looks at the judgment of the Kerala High Court in Hadiya's case, which set aside the marriage of a Hindu woman to a Muslim man, on the ground that a woman of 24 years was weak and vulnerable, and the Supreme Court's judgment setting aside the same, upholding the autonomy of the woman.
3. Third, it highlights binding decisions of the Supreme Court that have rejected stereotypes and can be utilised by judges to dispel gender stereotypes, for instance justices that reject the pre vaginam test (or "two finger test") and the irrelevance of sexual history in cases of sexual violence.

The Handbook is an important beginning in addressing the sensitization of judges in matters of gender justice.

Observations by judges in open court, and ever so often their judgments, are replete with harmful gender stereotypes. Just this month, the Supreme Court took objection to remarks in a Calcutta High Court judgment advising adolescent girls to "control sexual urges", as being an affront to the rights of dignity and privacy of adolescents, with the Court adding that judges are not expected to preach or express personal views. This observation reminds one of the judgment of the Division Bench of the Karnataka High Court about a decade ago which held that girls suffer from "hormonal imbalance" and hence easily fall prey to boys, love, marry and then repent at leisure. Another gem from the Karnataka High Court was a couple of years ago. In observations, which were subsequently expunged, the Karnataka High Court in an application for bail filed in a case of rape, observed that it was unbecoming of an Indian woman to have slept after she was "ravished".

These are just a few of many such shocking and prejudicial observations that have been made by Courts, including the higher judiciary, over the years, resulting in the judiciary being complicit in propagating stereotypes, the casualty being the Constitutional promise of equality to women.

These confirm the need for the Supreme Court's Handbook, which ought to be relied upon as a guide for judges in their everyday dispensation of justice. That the judges of the Calcutta High Court failed to restrain themselves from the brazenly their prejudices about young women, confirms that ridding the judiciary of stereotypes and prejudices is going to be a long road.

That said, the Handbook in itself represents a start. An aspect that was required to have been further highlighted is in understanding intersectionality and diversity among women, and the various other forms of oppression that women face. The Handbook notes the case of Bhanwari Devi, where the Trial Court acquitted the accused, on the ground that members of

a dominant caste would not rape a woman from an oppressed caste. It notes that this is a stereotype, with the reality being that rape and sexual violence have long been used as a tool of social control and dominant caste men have historically used sexual violence as a tool to reinforce and maintain caste hierarchies. It is important to remember that while she herself has been denied justice, it was the struggle of Bhanwari Devi, which resulted in the coming of the Vishaka Guidelines against sexual harassment at the workplace and the subsequent law in that regard.

Along with this, it would have been appropriate to look into the manner in which class and caste vulnerabilities result in additional forms of oppression, which not only make Dalit and working class women more vulnerable to sexual violence, but also makes access to justice that much more difficult.

A clear case in point is the recent judgment in the gang rape of the Dalit woman from Hathras. The institutional failures from the failure to ensure the registration of an FIR to the hasty cremation of her body without the consent of her family resulted in the acquittal of the 4 accused in the case of gang rape, with only one of the accused being convicted for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, and offences under the Prevention of Atrocities against Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe Act. The judgment acquitting the accused of gang rape in fact refused to rely on the statement of the victim and held that she could have been tutored to change her statement to allege gangrape by four persons. This is reminiscent of an observation made by the Justice Verma Committee Report in the context of trafficking, where it notes how "Administrative apathy, authoritarian excesses and judicial connivance has led to a most shocking state of affairs negating the very basis of the existence of human life and democratic safeguards enshrined in the Constitution of India".

Few months after the handbook was released, in December, 2023, a woman judge in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh has

written an open letter asked for permission from the Chief Justice of India to end her life, due to the sexual harassment faced by her by a district judge. She writes that the enquiry is "a farce and a sham" and that the petition she had filed before the Supreme Court seeking for the transfer of the district judge was dismissed. This highlights the manner in which cases of sexual violence and gender discrimination within the judiciary are handled, best exemplified by the manner in which the complaint filed against the then Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi was dealt with.

To ensure gender justice, it is imperative that the judiciary look at systemic inequities that plague it – right from dealing with cases of discrimination and violence, to the representation of women within - As of June 2023, only 107 of 788 sitting High Court Judges are women, and women from marginalized communities are even fewer.

In a judgment in 1984, then Gujarat High Court judge, Justice A.P. Ravani notes how judges "Psychologically [they] represent only the class interest to which they belonged". This applies equally to all the privileges and prejudices that judges bear as part of, and reflecting, society. As such sensitization and the breaking of stereotypes may be seen as one step towards dealing with discrimination. For the Courts to, in fact, become guardians of the legal and constitutional system, institutional and systemic changes are necessary. This includes addressing inherent inequities within the judiciary, implementing systemic changes, and ensuring reservations in the higher judiciary. Without such measures, efforts to combat discrimination would be likely to be more symbolic than effectual. ■

The Confrontational Governor **Another Front of BJP's War on the Constitution**

▲ CLIFTON D'ROZARIO

Far from the constitutional formality, is the growing politicisation of the post of the Governor and the contestation over its powers. Since coming to power, the BJP, has effectively enhanced the power of the executive by weaponizing the Governor's office to frustrate the functioning of non-BJP State governments in what is a veritable undermining of federalism. In the Constitutional scheme of affairs, the office of the Governor, being the nominal head of the State, has select executive powers and acts only on the advice of state governments.

The entrenchment of the BJP in the office of the Governor is complete. A confrontational and belligerent Governor is a daily affair in the non-BJP government states, be it Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Punjab, West Bengal or any of the other states. Some egregious examples include the Tamil Nadu Governor R. N. Ravi unilaterally dismissing a Minister of the State Government, a decision he withdrew 5 hours later. In Punjab, Governor Banwarilal Puri organised an unprecedented meeting with district-level officials on the implementation of various government schemes. In fact, the Governor's post has even become a post-retirement political carrot for Supreme Court judges, which weds the assault on the independence of the judiciary with the politicisation of the post of the Governor. This is in stark contrast to Governors in BJP-ruled States where there is not a squeak. Has anyone heard the Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey talk about the breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the state?

The tussle between political parties playing themselves out as stand-offs between the state government and the governor is not new. The country has witnessed many a misadventure in this front at the hands of the Congress, but the present situation is unprecedented. There is a complete takeover of the office of the Governors by the BJP today accompanied by the apparent erosion of constitutional morality and propriety. Governors are launching daily attacks on non-BJP governments making a mockery of the democratic norms and constitutional limitations on the role of the Governor.

Perhaps it is useful to recall the role envisaged for Governors by the framers of the Constitution. The Constituent Assembly debates makes it unambiguously clear the office of the Governor was meant to be ceremonial so as to ensure that there was no duality and duplicity of power centres in the states. The Governors were envisaged to be impartial constitutional heads who would "throw oil over troubled waters", who would be "a harmonious element in the constitution", a link between the State and the Union governments.

Interestingly, there was a proposal for the Governor to be elected by direct votes, but this was shot down. G. Durgabai while speaking at the Constituent Assembly, succinctly stated the rationale behind the rejection of the proposal of an elected Governor. She said: "We wanted to introduce the Governor in our Constitution because we thought that an element of harmony would be there and that institution would bring about some sort of understanding and harmony between the conflicting groups of people, if really the Governor is conscious of his duties and he functions well. It is only for this purpose this is proposed, the governing idea is to place the Governor above party politics, above factions and not to subject him to the party affairs".

The fear that governors would interfere with the governance of the states was not lost on the framers of the Constitution. K. Sen said, "The question is whether by interfering, the Governor would be upholding the democratic idea or subverting it. It would really be a surrender of democracy. We have decided that the Governor should be a constitutional head. He would be the person really to lubricate the machinery and to see to it that all the wheels are going well by reason not of his interference, but his friendly intervention."

Ambedkar while speaking in the Constituent Assembly clarified that the powers conferred on the Governor would be "limited, so nominal" and "his position so ornamental" that "... the Governor is not to have any kind of functions-to use a familiar phraseology, "no functions which he is

required to discharge either in his discretion or in his individual judgment." Ambedkar continued, "According to the principles of the new Constitution he is required to follow the advice of his Ministry in all matters". Ambedkar was emphatic that the Governor is not a representative of any party but ought to be the representative of the people as a whole of the State.

Yet today Governors display allegiance to the BJP and the Sangh Parivar and its ideology rather than to the Constitution. One common tool that these Governors have employed is withholding assent to Bills duly passed by the State Legislatures thereby scuttling governance and policy initiatives of the non-BJP governments. This demonstration of extreme partisanship by the Governors have finally led to Opposition-led State governments of Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and even Delhi (against the Lieutenant Governor) approaching the Supreme Court for relief.

Recently in November, the Supreme Court has passed a judgement in case filed by the Punjab government. In this case filed by the AAP-led Punjab State government (State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab and Another – W. P. No. 1224/2023), against the actions of the incumbent Governor Banwarilal Purohit of withholding assent to four Bills which were passed by the Vidhan Sabha, the Supreme Court has essentially declared

that Governors do not have the power to hold onto a Bill passed by the Legislature, and if the Governor decides to withdraw assent to the Bill, then he ought to return the Bill to the Legislature for reconsideration. In arriving at this conclusion, the Supreme Court observed that the Governor cannot exercise its powers to thwart the normal course of law-making by the State Legislatures. It is also observed that if the Governor is allowed to withhold bills passed by the State Legislatures without returning them for reconsideration, then that would allow the Governor "as the unelected Head of State" to be in a position to "virtually veto the functioning of the legislative domain by a duly elected legislature by simply declaring that assent is withheld without any further recourse", and this would be contrary to fundamental principles of a constitutional democracy based on a Parliamentary pattern of governance.

Of course, these are not the first cases alleging interference by the Governors that have reached the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court in its judgment by a nine-judge Bench in S. R. Bommai Vs Union of India had dealt with the arbitrary dismissal of State governments, on the reports of pliable Governors under Article 356, by hostile Union government. The Supreme Court, took strong exception to dismissal of duly elected State governments on the basis of subjective reports by the Governors, which failed to discharge their actions in

keeping with the posts of high constitutional functionaries that they held. The Supreme Court noted that the founding fathers deliberately avoided election to the office of the Governor to insulate the office from politicisation, and the office of the Governor, therefore, is intended to ensure protection and sustenance of the constitutional process of the working of the Constitution by the elected executive.

As such despite the November judgment of the Supreme Court being a rap on the knuckles of the Modi government, it remains to be seen if there is any toning down of the attacks by the Governors. The Supreme Court, except for an occasional exception, has failed to hold the Modi government accountable and its December judgment on the abrogation of Article 370 is a stark reminder of this failure of the Supreme Court. Given this failure, we will have to wait for the outcome of several pending cases by non-BJP State Governments against the illegal actions of the Governors to see whether the Supreme Court opts to change course. In the meanwhile, Governors in Opposition-led States, on a daily basis, keep proving right these words of G. Kher in the Constituent Assembly: "a Governor can do a great deal of good if he is a good Governor and he can do a great deal of mischief, if he is a bad Governor, in spite of the very little power given to him under the Constitution". ■

Indian Economy: Tall Growth Claims Vs. Ground Reality

▲ SAURABH NARUKA

"There are three kinds of lies: Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics" – Mark Twain

The Modi government is howling about the triumph of the Indian economy as the fastest growing major economy of the world. This claim is based on the result of this financial year's (FY) (2023-24) second quarter. This may be true apparently, but the harsh reality is that economic numbers can be deceptive if seen in isolation and devoid of context or perspective. Selective use of numbers by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during a Parliamentary debate on the economic

situation is deceitful for the common Indian who is forced to buy daily essentials like garlic and onion at exorbitant prices with stagnant income from an unsecured employment.

It is no secret that the Indian economy has shrunk more than the other major economies of the world, due to the unplanned and ill-executed lockdown during the Covid pandemic and the impact of low base continues in GDP numbers. The best way of comparing economic performance is to take pre-Covid numbers to see the actual growth in all these years, rather than relying on usual year on year method. Then we will know the

reality behind the ruling party's narrative that Prime Minister Narendra Modi isn't a leader who magically pulled out Indian economy from slumber, despite the pandemic and global distress.

Deceptive GDP Numbers

The annual effective growth rate under the BJP government in the last five years (2019-24, current year best estimate included) can best be pegged at 4.4% to 4.6% at constant prices (2011-12)! Let's understand how.

As per the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the absolute annual GDP number for FY 2019-20 at

constant prices (2011-12) stands at Rs. 1,45,34,641 crore. During 2020-21, the number shrank to Rs. 1,36,87,118 crore due to Covid. From 2021-22 recovery started, but at a snail's pace, despite the tall claims of the government. The GDP for last FY year, i.e., 2022-23, stands at Rs. 1,60,06,425 crore. If 7% growth rate is assumed for current FY based on performance in the first two quarters and other available estimates, the projected GDP for FY 2023-24 can be put at around Rs. 1,71,26,875 crore at constant prices. Thus, the average growth rate in the last five years (2019-24) comes at around 4.48%. It doesn't look as good as it made to be, does it?

If one extends this analysis further to 10 years of Modi rule, even then the government has failed miserably short of the trend of doubling the GDP in ten years. The GDP in 2013-14 at constant prices stood at Rs. 98,01,370 crore, which is now projected to grow to Rs. 1,71,26,875 crore in 2023-24, which is clearly short of the number required to double the GDP in ten years.

Crass Inequality

Besides the absolute growth in GDP, it is important to look at whether growth is inclusive in nature or not. Who are the actual beneficiaries of this growth? The wealth and assets of PM Modi's cronies – Adani and Ambani – has grown exponentially in this period. As per reports, the wealth of Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani has increased three to four-fold in just ten years. It has been achieved with the obvious assistance of government policies willing to offer public sector enterprises and national assets at paltry prices to these two corporates. The share of income of the richest strata of society has also gone up. As per Oxfam Report, 2023, the top 1% in India now owns more than 40.5% of the total wealth in 2021, while the bottom 50% of the population has around only 3% of the total wealth. The richest 21 Indians have more wealth than bottom 70 Crore of the population.

The working class in India has been badly affected by the economic policies of the Modi government, which can be illustrated by the promise he made to double farm income, when he came to power. But, what has happened to the promise now? The government has backtracked from its promise of granting MSP and farm loan waivers. What is at offer is merely Rs. 6,000 annual income support under Kisan Nidhi Scheme, while farming input costs

rise exorbitantly. This is especially at a time when a farmer is not getting just prices for their produce, which, for most crops, are less than 1/3rd of the prevailing market prices. Farmers are unable to recover even input costs on crops production.

Majority of the people are being pushed to pauperization and are becoming dependent on precarious jobs euphemized as 'self-employed' for survival. This is reflected in India's position on the Global Hunger Index where the country stands at 111th position amongst 125 countries and 141st on per capita income of countries of world. The number of hungry Indians increased to 35 crore in 2022 from 19 crore in 2018.

Regressive taxation

Economic inequality has increased rapidly and has been facilitated by regressive taxation. The government has reduced tax rates for corporates from 30% to 22%, while levying increased taxation on the poor through GST on items of mass consumption and taxing fuel making transportation which has severe cascading effect. Out of the total taxes collected from GST, 64.3% comes from bottom 50%. Those poor who are at the bottom of the pyramid tend to pay as much as 10 times the higher percentage of their income through taxes, as compared to those on the top. The share of direct taxes in total tax collection has come down by 5% after the inception of GST.

As per data of Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, the BJP government has collected a whopping Rs. 28.30 lakh crore as taxes from petroleum sector since 2014. Besides this, the Central Government has collected more than Rs. 5 lakh crore in the form of dividend and tax on income from the petroleum sector. One can add to this, Rs. 21.40 lakh crore collected by the state governments in the form of VAT on fuels which has become the main independent source of revenue for state governments after the GST regime. This gives a pictures to understand the composite burden on the common people.

Food Inflation and Unemployment Hitting People Hard

To a question on inflation, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman responded with "Congress ke samay mahangai nahi tha kya" (whether inflation was not there at the time of the Congress Government) – which is a

clear attempt to sidetrack the issue.

The BJP Government is arguing that Whole Sale Price Index (WPI) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) is under control and within the tolerance band set by RBI 4+2%. But this is half-truth. While its true that CPI has eased in the last two months (Oct and Nov, 2023), it has crossed the tolerance limit only as late as July and August, 2023 where it was pegged at 7.54 and 6.91 percent, respectively. After Covid pandemic, food price inflation has dominated aggregate inflation. The contribution of commodities other than food and beverages, and fuel and light, to aggregate consumer price inflation fell from 78% in 2020-21 to only 12% over four months which ended in July 2023. This means that the pain of inflation is now borne more by the bottom half of the population who spends major part of their limited income on these essential necessities for survival.

It can be argued that, of late, relieving a little stress on inflation number may be due to relative falling of incomes of large sections of society post pandemic, which has in turn hit the aggregate demand. This doesn't have anything to do with improvement in supply side factors due to sustained recovery, nor better inflation management of the government. This shows tendencies towards stagnation in growth due to cyclical trap at play in the medium term. This brings us to the question of whether the growth that is taking place is giving incomes and employment to the ordinary people?

Job Loss growth

As per CMIE data reported in The Wire, the unemployment rate for the month of October 2023 was a record two year high at 10.09%. Even the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of the government which gives better picture when it comes to unemployment rate tells that Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is just 42.4% in 2022-23 on usual status. That means out of the working age population, only 42.4% are looking for employment. It has touched a low of 36.9 % in 2017-18 under Modi Government. To put this in perspective, the LFPR was 52.5 % in 2013-14, that is last year of UPA Govt. It means almost 10% of the working age population has simply lost hope in finding employment in the last nine years under the Modi government and has withdrawn themselves from the labour market. Things seems to be moving from bad to worse.

If we probe even deeper, it is revealed that the quality of employment is also dwindling. In

the absence of dignified employment, the forced 'self-employed' mode has to be adopted to meet the crisis, which amounts to as high as 57.3% of all labour force. The corresponding number in 2013-14 was 49.5%. About 8% of the labour force has been pushed under self-employed category in the BJP rule. Though it is conceded that difference in regular employment figures in 2013-14 and 2022-23 is not significant and hovers around 20%, it is worth noting that casual labour percentage has fallen from 30.9% in 2013-14 to 21.8% in 2022-23. The fragile nature of classification between the two makes it difficult for any concrete observation to be made. But, what can be safely said is that the hope of finding employment is falling under Modi's rule as noted through the falling LFPR. Those in regular wage employment don't have job and social security. As much as 58.6% of those who are regular wage employees don't have any written contract, 47.9% don't have any paid leaves and 53.8% do not have any form of social security as per the PLFS survey for 2022-23.

Way Out from Economic Injustice

The response of the Finance Minister in the Parliament on the economic situation failed to address the underlying structural issues determining economic growth and its distribution. However, it hovers around highlighting cash transfers and free ration schemes of the BJP government. The response is based on selective and dishonest quoting of data. It is apparent that in the present term of Modi, the economic growth was only 4.4% per annum. Employment situation was worrisome as reflected in the falling LFPR, food inflation continues to hit hard the bottom half of the population, inequality is rising while the economic policies of the government continue to favour the rich and corporates. There is a need to galvanize public opinion in favour of an inclusive political narrative that stands for economic justice for the workers, farmers, youth and the toiling people. ■

Not Nehru's Blunders; India's Disregard for Federalism Has Devastated Kashmir

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

The War of 1947-48

On 6 December 2023, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah blamed Nehru's "two blunders" during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947-48 for the subsequent suffering of Kashmiris: calling for a ceasefire when India was winning, and referring the dispute to the United Nations. Both claims are based on willful distortions of history at multiple levels.

A close look at the events of 1947-1949 reveals that the ceasefire was not called when India was winning, but when Indian found it difficult to drive the invaders out of what later became Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). The ceasefire was hardly Nehru's call, it was the Union Cabinet's call – no other cabinet member including Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and the avowedly Hindu supremacist Shyama Prasad Mookherjee objected to it. Besides, the much-maligned United Nations' (UN) intervention, far from putting India at disadvantage, gave India a chance to facilitate the integration of Kashmir.

The 1947-48 war began with the invasion of Kashmir by a Pakistan backed tribal army on 22 October 1947. The Indian Army, still extremely new and lacking the necessary training and equipment to fight a high-altitude war, struggled during the winter of 1947. Most of what is now Jammu and Kashmir was captured during the spring offensive of 1948. It was under the dire circumstances of the 1947-48 winter that the Indian government formally referred the dispute to the United Nations. On 30 December 1947, India made a formal reference to the UN Security Council to build international pressure on Pakistan to withdraw its ad-hoc army from Kashmir.

Contrary to the lies that have been told about the UN intervention, the ceasefire and the de-facto partition of Kashmir did not take place on UN orders. The UN's Resolution 47, adopted on 21 April, 1948, indeed called for an immediate ceasefire and a plebiscite to decide the future of Kashmir. But subsequently, the UN also set up the United Nations Committee on India and Pakistan (UNCIP) which visited Kashmir and submitted a report. The ensuing Security Council resolution S/995, adopted on 13 September 1948, tilted the scales heavily in India's favor.

S/995 called for complete Pakistani withdrawal from all of Kashmir and, importantly, did not

call for a plebiscite. Instead, it merely said that the final decision about Kashmir's future should be made according to the "will of the people", leaving the procedure open-ended. It opened the door for India to drive out the Pakistani army and initiate a process of democratic integration of Kashmir.

The harsh winter of 1948-49 however put paid to India's military plans. India's position in Gilgit-Baltistan continued to be precarious. Key British generals stationed in Kashmir, like the Scottish Major William Brown who headed the Gilgit Scouts, had sided with Pakistan. Most of the Indian army were soldiers from the plains. They had been flown in through Dakota aircrafts due to the lack of an adequate air force. These aircrafts had to land in torchlight in some places, as Pakistan had cut off the electricity.

Understandably, no one in the Union Cabinet objected to a cessation of hostilities under these circumstances. The ceasefire was finally agreed upon as late as 1 January 1949. Sardar Patel, whom the BJP props up as the voice of patriotism vis-à-vis Nehru, had in fact expressed reservations about India's capability to wage a long war in the mountains of Kashmir as early as June 1947. The BJP also conveniently overlooks the role of Maharaja Hari Singh in creating the crisis during 1947-48. His prevarication about acceding to India and his sheer ineptness had allowed Pakistan to consolidate its position in Gilgit-Baltistan, through the help of Major Brown, whom Pakistan posthumously rewarded with its third-highest civilian honor (Sitara-e-Imtiaz, 1993).

Integrating Kashmir

In the wake of the ceasefire, India was faced with the challenge of integrating the part of Jammu and Kashmir which lay on the Indian side of what later became the Line of Control (LoC). National Conference leader Sheikh Abdullah was eager to integrate with India but not at the cost of Kashmir's autonomy. Powerful Kashmiri nationalist sentiments, coupled with the peculiar circumstances of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India, led to the insertion of Article 370 in the Indian constitution which granted Kashmir a range of legislative exceptions.

Article 370 did not make Jammu and Kashmir sovereign; in fact, it was instrumental in its accession to the Indian Union. It was agreed

that it would be temporary but its possible abrogation was dependent on the creation of a consensual roadmap by the Indian state in coordination with the Kashmiri leadership.

Kashmir's demand for autonomy was hardly exceptional. Tribal communities in the North-east demanded the same. The 6th schedule of the constitution was created in response to this demand. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in fact called for a separate sovereign state for Tamilians; a demand which they held on to as late as 1962, till they were assured of regional autonomy. However, in the case of Kashmir, no consensual roadmap evolved.

The Indian state, even prior to its Hindu majoritarian turn, had been insecure about demands for autonomy in a Muslim majority state bordering Pakistan. The Kashmir Conspiracy Case, in which Sheikh Abdullah was arrested, marked the first major step in India's efforts to coerce Kashmir into integration solely on its terms. It was this attitude of the Indian state, rather than Article 370, that reeked of "asymmetric federalism." Eventually India's relations with Kashmir broke down completely, leading to the 1989 insurgency, the massive increase in state repression and militarization, and the unfortunate exodus of a large number of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley.

The Indian Constitution had urged the nation builders of the future to strengthen federalism. Questions remain as to why India evolved into a quasi-federal state rather than a substantively federal state in the decades following independence. Punjab, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura have all witnessed insurgencies due to the Indian state's failures to meet popular aspirations in these regions

coupled with persistent regional inequalities. The one-size fits all model of nation-building, with a North Indian Hindu template, has consistently alienated Indians elsewhere. The gradual replacement of the Congress by the BJP as the premier national party has worsened the thrust towards uniformity in the name of national integration.

A False Solution

Amit Shah's remark about Nehru's "errors" came in the wake of the judicial approval of the abrogation of Article 370. With the abrogation, BJP claims to have "solved" the Kashmir "problem", integrating the region with India without any "concessions" in the form of legislative exceptions. The abrogation of Article 370 is part of the BJP's uniformity-as-integration model of nation-building. Its "success" is a myth.

Kashmir is being held at gunpoint. There is an unprecedented military presence in the state, which is witnessing large-scale disappearances, media censorship, arrests of journalists and human rights activists, regular internet shutdowns and frequent house arrest of even those politicians perceived to be pro-India. Kashmir's statehood has been abrogated in complete violation of Article 3 of the Indian Constitution which prohibits such reorganization without the consent of the state legislature. Kashmiri Muslims in India are facing regular discrimination and harassment on account of their regional and religious identities. Notably, the abrogation has hardly improved the situation of exiled Kashmiri pandits, a community whose voice the BJP has eagerly appropriated.

Far from resolving the crisis in Kashmir in accordance with democratic and federal

principles, the BJP has consistently manipulated facts related to the issue in order to stoke hatred and division, and to render its negative role invisible. In fact, the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits took place during the tenure of the V.P. Singh government which had the backing of the BJP. Jagmohan, who later became a BJP legislator and a union minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's cabinet, was the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir during those days. What did he do to stop the exodus?

A 1990 letter addressed to Muslims of Kashmir by 23 prominent Kashmiri Pandits, published in the *Alsafa* newspaper on 19 March 1990, states that the Indian government "had drawn plans to massacre a large section of Kashmiri Muslims particularly those in the age group of 14 to 25". The letter emphasized in particular the role played behind the scenes by "Hindu communal organizations like the BJP, RSS" and their leaders like "Advani, Vajpayee, and Jagmohan". The letter appealed to the UN to intervene to restore peace in the valley.

CN Annadurai, the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), told the Rajya Sabha in 1962 that the DMK had given up its demand for a separate Tamil nation-state and agreed to integrate with India, after being assured that India would win over the Tamils by love and not by force. This was a warning: integration at gun-point was not a "solution".

The Home Minister may score as many brownie points as he wishes to through his stale Nehru-bashing rhetoric. The fact is that his integration-at-gunpoint model, far from solving the "Kashmir problem", has in fact imperiled both the futures of Kashmiri people and the security and stability of India. ■

A Disastrous Friendship

The Dangerous Political Economy of India's Support for Israel

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

On 21 November 2023, the BRICS-Plus grouping, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and six newly inducted countries – Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – held an "Extraordinary Joint Meeting" on the Palestine situation. In the meeting, Brazil, South Africa, China and Russia unambiguously declared

that Israel must be held accountable for the ongoing conflict and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. So did the newly inducted countries. The chair of the meeting, South Africa, accused Israel of war crimes and "genocide". Despite the overwhelming Western imperialist backing for Israel, and only muted protests from the Arab countries, global protests had steadily turned the tide of popular opinion

against Israel, forcing many governments particularly those in the Global South to speak out against the genocide.

The powerful pro-Palestine sentiment within BRICS-Plus however left one country isolated: India, the self-styled voice of the Global South, and a one-time committed ally of the Palestinian liberation struggle. The Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar declared

that there was “a need for restraint and immediate humanitarian support”, as well as “peaceful resolution through dialogue and diplomacy”, but stopped short of holding Israel accountable or calling Israel’s actions war crimes or genocide. A few days earlier, on 27 October, India had even abstained in a United Nations (UN) General Assembly vote on a resolution drafted by 22 Arab countries that called for an immediate humanitarian truce.

Though the Arab countries had made their peace with Israel over the years, the brutal attack on Palestine was clearly beyond their threshold of acceptance. And India’s economic connection with the Arab world is too deep to completely ignore its sentiments. The total bilateral trade between India and Arab countries amounted to \$177.5b in the financial year 2020-21. This is a much larger volume compared to the Indo-Israeli trade which stood at \$10.02b in financial year 2022-23. The Arab region is also a source of remittance inflows to India and provides employment to millions of Indian citizens. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE are integral to the newly launched connectivity project which seeks to connect India to Europe through West Asia. Hence, soon after the UN abstention on 27 October, India was mindful enough to cast a tokenistic vote in favor of a UN resolution against Israeli settlement activities in Palestine.

Tokenisms aside, India deep friendship with Israel has been evident during the ongoing Israeli genocide of Palestinians. It’s strong pro-Israeli stance in international forums has found its domestic counterpart in the heavy policing of pro-Palestine voices at home. This unfortunate friendship has been in the making since the early 1990s. India’s thrust towards neo-liberal globalization coincided with the recognition of Israel by the Arab world and, most importantly, by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). These developments were coterminous with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of a militant movement for freedom in Kashmir. India’s love affair with Israel was a product of those times and has only intensified since then.

Having defined the “Kashmir problem” as one of “Islamic terrorism” rather than of suppressed national aspirations, much like the way Israel had defined the question of Palestine, India saw in Israel a country that dealt with similar security problems and could be a useful partner in the defense sector. The partnership fit well

with liberalizing and globalizing India’s desire to align with the United States economically and politically in the post-Cold War world. The subsequent intensification of neoliberal policies in India and the ascendancy of Hindutva which identified “Islamic terrorism” as one of India’s key national challenges, steadily cemented the Indo-Israeli alliance. Indian voices desiring to hold Israel accountable have stressed India’s non-aligned and anti-colonial traditions and invoked humanitarian and pacifist principles. The government and its acolytes have countered these viewpoints by emphasizing on the Indo-Israeli business and defense partnerships. A close look at these partnerships reveals how intimately connected these are to the remaking of India as a majoritarian, authoritarian, and corporate state.

Partnering and Emulating Israel

Diplomatic ties were established between the two countries in 1992. India’s economic exchanges with Israel have increased by leaps and bounds since then. Indian exports, made up of cotton, handicrafts, and manmade yarn, amounted to \$90m in 1992-93 and \$130m in 1993-94. Imports from Israel, made up of fertilizers, pearls, semi-precious stones, machinery, and the like, were worth \$140m in 1992-3 and \$300m in 1993-4. But by the new millennium, bilateral trade hovered around \$1.5bn. By 2008-9 it had grown to \$3.5bn and to \$6.6bn by 2011-12. In 2014, trade was worth \$4.52bn, driven in large part by the upsurge in arms sales.

Defense has indeed been the bedrock of the economic partnership. Following the birth of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, Israel invested heavily in its defense sector. Between 1966–72, the local defense industry created 20,000 new jobs, and purchases from local industries increased by 86%. The arms industry became a driver of economic wealth, with the ability to wield influence and policy. Azad Essa, journalist and author of *Hostile Homelands* – a landmark book on the political economy of the Indo-Israeli friendship – points out that this phase of expansion of the defense sector also sowed the seeds for the privatization of Israeli security. This precipitated the creation of a revolving door for ex-military officers who move between the army and private arms manufacturers, and who help reinforce the Israeli economy’s dependence on the military industrial complex to survive and thrive.

India became an integral part of the Israeli military industrial complex in the 1990s.

Between 1997–2000, 15% of Israel’s exports made their way to India. Over the next five years, weapon deliveries ballooned to 27%. In 2006, Israel’s arms exports were worth \$4.2bn of which India accounted for \$1.5bn worth of imports on its own. Between 2003 and 2013, India became the single largest purchaser of Israeli arms, accounting for upwards of one-third of all arms exported out of the Zionist state.

Israel exports not only military equipment but also military expertise. By the early 1970s, Israel had already built up “technical programs” across parts of Africa and South America including para-military training in African countries as well as in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Costa Rica. It sent military advisors to dictators like Zaire’s leader Mobutu Sese Seko (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Uganda’s Idi Amin (until the relationship soured in 1972). Those governments that accepted Israeli military and police training programs subsequently looked towards Israel when they had to shop for weapons. Essa writes, “Israeli weapon manufacturers promoted Israel’s ascent as a ‘sub-imperialist’ power—one that penetrated the markets of Third World nations while remaining heavily dependent upon American and European capital.”

Since the days of the Vajpayee government (1998-2004), India has increasingly used Israeli expertise to build a surveillance state. The use of Pegasus software to target democratic activists is merely a tip of the iceberg. Indian authorities began working with the Israeli company Nice Systems following the attacks on India’s parliament in 2001. Nice Systems had already built up a reputation for handling surveillance at the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, as well as at several high-profile airports around the world. After the attacks of 26/11 in Mumbai, the Indian government authorized, with the help of Nice Systems, the implementation of a Central Monitoring System (CMS) that would have the ability and capacity to intercept phone calls and text messages.

In 2010, Indian authorities began deploying Israeli drones to search for Adivasi alleged Maoist guerrillas in the forests of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Indian armed forces were already using Israeli-made Tavor and Galil rifles since 2009 against Adivasis in these states. Indo-Israeli defense exchanges picked up pace following the ascendancy of Narendra Modi in 2014. That year, the Punjab Police traveled to Israel for training on “security and anti-terror operations.” A year

later, the Indian Police Service (IPS) began an annual program in which recent graduates would spend one week studying “best practices in counterinsurgency, managing low intensity warfare and use of technology in policing and countering terror” with the Israel National Police Academy. In 2015, the Indian government began the implementation of a “smart border” along the Line of Control through Israeli assistance.

Under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi, India has in fact emulated a whole range of Israeli domestic policies. Discriminatory citizenship laws, attempts to track and manipulate the Hindu-Muslim population ratio, bulldozer justice, all have illustrious precedents in Israel, as outlined in detail in an Amnesty International Report published in 2022. In whose interest are these policies being adopted? The all-engulfing stench of lynched bodies, dust from bulldozed homes, and sighs of imprisoned dissenters suggest some answers. The worst instance of the Israeli security template comes from Kashmir; whose political autonomy has been annihilated – much like Gaza. Kashmir is being held at gunpoint, its children have been ravaged with pellet guns, its voices have been stifled, while the Home Minister is busy giving himself plaudits for “resolving” the Kashmir problem. Might the government of India adopt the Gaza genocide template in Kashmir as well, if the Kashmiri people were to rebel against the government's false solutions?

Indian Corporates and the Military Industrial Complex

The Modi government, right from its inception, was keen to create fresh institutional spaces to further India's economic integration with Western markets and to gain political legitimacy. The government's efforts bore fruit in 2022, with the launch of the “I2U2” grouping (India, Israel, the United States, and UAE) or the “West Asia Quad”: an opportunistic alliance of countries to further the “national interests” of each. The Abraham Accords, initiated by the US to further its imperialist interest in the region at the expense of Palestine, prepared the ground for the I2U2's emergence. On August 13, 2020, then U.S. President Donald Trump – a racist authoritarian populist in the image of Modi and Netanyahu – announced that the governments of the UAE and Israel had agreed to the full normalization of relations and also to initiate a new era of bilateral agreements that would transform the region.

With the Abraham Accords, the UAE became

the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan, to sign normalization agreements with the Zionist state. In September and December, Bahrain and Morocco followed suit. The fate of Palestine was not even discussed during this process. The accords carried several consequences. First, they consolidated and normalized the Israeli occupation and apartheid system, signaling a departure from a long-held consensus in the Arab world that normalizing ties with Israel would only arrive after a just settlement to the conflict. The accords also expanded the market for Israeli hi-tech and U.S. military technology and weapons systems in West Asia.

India welcomed the tripartite Accords and became the fourth country in the Quad. India's importance to the US lies in its large market, cheap labor, and its geo-political ambitions vis-a-vis China's economic clout. As for India, besides cementing valuable alliances against China, the I2U2 gave it a necessary ecosystem to facilitate its economic plans. It granted India easier access to the US and UAE's capital and to Israel's expertise – all of which are key ingredients of Modi's flagship Make in India, Skill India, and other associated projects. I2U2 has also given the Modi government a chance to gain legitimacy in the Arab world.

Unsurprisingly, the I2U2, and Israel in particular, has become a vessel through which Indian corporations have launched themselves in the West Asian region. Within hours of its launch, it was reported that Haifa Port had been sold to the Indian company Adani Ports, operating on a joint-bid with Israeli company Gadot. Within days, the Indian flag was hoisted alongside the Israeli flag above the port. Besides the takeover of the Port of Haifa – Israel's second largest port – the Adani Group also vowed to transform the skyline of the Mediterranean city as part of its decision to invest more in the country, including opening an artificial intelligence lab in Tel Aviv. Adani is merely one of the many corporations that have quickly developed a stake in defending Israeli apartheid for its own profit-motive.

The Ambani group has of course not been left behind. In anticipation of the Quad, Reliance Defense Ltd, a unit of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd (R-Infra), and Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd agreed to set up a joint venture (JV) in the specialized areas of air-to-air missiles, air defense systems and large aerostats, in 2016. The strategic tie-up with Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, a world leader in defense technologies, marks the entry of Reliance Defense in the field of air-

to-air and air defense systems manufacturing in India. Reliance Defense owns 51% in the joint venture and the rest is held by Rafael. Reliance has been entering into others JVs with Israeli firms as well. In June 2017, Reliance invested 20% in an “innovation technology incubator” partially owned by OurCrowd (60%), a crowdfunding platform in Jerusalem, and Motorola Solutions (20%).

Nuvama Institutional Equities – a leading domestic Indian brokerage house, in its latest report, noted that several Indian companies have tie-ups with Israel including Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems (JV of Bharat Forge and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems), Adani-Elbit JV, DCX Systems Ltd, L&T, HBL Power Systems Ltd, Tech Mahindra Ltd, Astra Microwave Ltd and Tata Advanced Systems. The report also mentioned that any escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict may create opportunities for Indian players such as Bharat Forge Ltd, Larsen & Toubro Ltd (L&T), Tata Advanced Systems and Adani Group in the near-to-medium term, as Israel is likely to reach out to its allies such as India to ensure ample stockpiles for the war.

Threats to Democracy, Sovereignty, Peace and Unity

Corporate investments through the I2U2 do not serve the Indian people's interests one bit. The current government has consistently promoted corporate interests as national interests and in the process further entrenched caste-class-gender inequalities in India. It has reneged on its promises of job creation in the process. Unemployment is at a 45-year high, and the unemployment crisis is pushing entire sections of workers, particularly those from marginalized and oppressed sections, into poverty, debt-traps, hunger, and further marginalization. Today a vast unorganized sector that comprises 93 percent of the total workforce and contributes 65 percent of the GDP are forced to work without any job security, wage security or social security.

Unwilling to create jobs at home, the government is keen to use the Indo-Israeli partnership to export workers in their thousands. During Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen's visit to India on May 9, 2023, the “Framework Agreement on Facilitating Temporary Employment of Workers in Specific Labor Market Sectors in Israel” was signed. This agreement initially allowed the employment of 42,000 Indian workers in Israel. According to this, 34,000 workers will be engaged in the construction field and

another 8,000 for nursing needs. Numerous human rights organizations have, for decades, reported the brutal and inhumane treatment of foreign workers in Israel. The purported job opportunities for Indian workers are thus recipes for their brutal exploitation, and a way out for the government to hide its economic failures at home.

More recently, in the context of the genocidal war on Gaza, Israel is seeking to replace the low paid Palestinian workers who have till recently been working in Israel under highly oppressive conditions. The Israel Builders' Association has urged the Netanyahu government to consider hiring around 1,00,000 Indian workers as a replacement. The Indian government has reportedly agreed to the request, despite strong protests from Indian trade unions. The labor swap is not only immoral but also exposes Indian workers to grave security threats in the war zone.

The burgeoning military Indian industrial complex (MIC), in which multinational corporations are playing key roles, poses a

threat to Indian sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of countries which import arms from these corporations. It also endangers the people of India as well of countries of the Global South which will be importing arms. Data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 2021 shows that roughly 50 per cent of India's defense exports from 2017 to 2021 were to its immediate neighbor Myanmar, followed by Sri Lanka at 25 per cent and Armenia at 11 per cent. The governments of each of these countries have track-records of committing atrocities on their own people. The Ministry of Defense also refers to "countries" in the Middle East, South East Asia and Africa, without clarifying which countries these are. One wonders which peace loving peoples of the Global South are falling victims to armaments supplied by their self-proclaimed leader.

While private arms manufacturers and suppliers prominently feature in conversations on MICs, private military contractors (PMCs) are emerging as a key part of these networks. PMCs get their arms from private suppliers

and their personnel from national military forces. The recently launched Agnipath Scheme is set to create a pool of trained, young job-seeking soldiers and provide a fertile ground for PMCs, as opined by Indian defense experts. Imagine what havoc this can cause in a society rife with state-sponsored hatred and Hindu nationalist militias.

Globally, India may feel that it is on the right side of the big powers who are all standing with Israel at the moment. But large-scale peoples' protests against the Israeli genocide are slowly eroding the pro-Israel ground from below even in Western imperialist countries. In the Global South, country after country has risen in protest against the genocide. Corporate greed, Modi's quest for political legitimacy, and the Hindu nationalist project of molding India into an Israel-like majoritarian, authoritarian, and Islamophobic state, are leading Indian into murky alliances which may turn out to be quagmires in the times to come. ■

COP28: Another Climate Conference Fails to Stand Up for Justice & Equity

▲ MADHURIMA BAKSHI

The 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) hosted by the United Arab Emirates was held during November 30 to December 12, 2023 in Dubai with high anticipation for concrete actions to address the global climate crisis. This annual convention brings together nations that are signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Sultan Al Jaber, the CEO of the UAE's state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, served as the COP28 President raising concerns among citizens and activists about potential conflicts of interest. The Presidency emphasized the need for limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5C above the preindustrial average, a goal they described as the "North Star." After two weeks of deliberations, it concluded with 11 pledges and declarations covering issues like mitigation efforts, adaptation strategies, financing mechanisms, and the roles of developed and developing nations in addressing climate change.

Transition away from fossil fuel

Initially, the conference draft text included a call for a 'phase out' of fossil fuels. However, due to lack of consensus, in the final text, the language shifted to advocate for a 'transition away' from fossil fuels. Delegates from nearly 200 countries agreed on "The UAE consensus," which urges the global community to move "away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly, and equitable manner." Activists with concerns view it as a compromise under pressure from oil and gas-producing nations. According to the International Energy Agency, the commitments made at COP28 are projected to result in a reduction of energy induced greenhouse gas emissions by only 30% of the required amount by 2030.

The agreement also acknowledges the need to accelerate efforts towards phase down "unabated" coal burning and transition towards energy systems consistent with net zero emissions by 2050, while accelerating action in "the critical decade" of the 2020s. Those

countries advocating for the ongoing use of fossil fuels diligently sought to incorporate the term "unabated" whenever discussions about phasing down or phasing out fossil fuels were raised during negotiations.

Moreover, the declaration also made reference to unproven and potentially risky technologies such as Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and carbon removal while calling for an accelerated approach to climate mitigation. The declaration singles out coal by urging the hastening of efforts to phase down unabated coal power. However, it omits restriction on permitting new, unabated coal power generation mentioned in the earlier draft. Oil and gas are not categorically addressed anywhere.

"Abatement" typically is used in the context of using CCS technology to stop CO₂ emissions from burning of coal, oil and gas reaching the atmosphere by capturing emissions and storing them underground, which itself raises many pertinent questions among climate experts.

While companies and nations involved in oil and gas production view carbon capture as a crucial element in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, climate

activists and experts caution that its effectiveness is limited and carbon capture technologies should not be considered a substitute for a substantial reduction in the use of fossil fuels and should not be overly relied upon.

When it comes to fossil fuels, "unabated" means those "without interventions that substantially reduce" greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, "abated" refers to the attempts to decrease the release of polluting substances to an acceptable level. Nevertheless, the text lacks a universally accepted definition or distinction between "abated" and "unabated" fossil fuels. This lack of clarity opens the door to a broad and potentially misused interpretation of what qualifies as "abated" use of fossil fuels. Such ambiguity may lead to an extended reliance on fossil fuels, labeled as "abated" usage. This uncertainty poses a significant risk to the transition, as it permits ongoing investments in fossil fuel infrastructure, such as the construction of new coal plants, as long as a portion of the carbon they emit is captured (abated).

In terms of reduction in methane, a significant greenhouse gas, the agreement discusses about reducing global non-carbon-dioxide emissions, with a focus on methane by 2030. Mandatory methane reduction would pose severe challenges to agriculture and livestock based developing countries like India. While a voluntary commitment was made by approximately 100 countries in 2021 in Glasgow to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, the recent agreement refrains from specifying methane reduction targets for 2030.

The issues of carbon credit and trading have been a major concern, though it was not specifically mentioned in the COP28 agreement. Numerous scientific studies have consistently demonstrated that claims of emission reductions within carbon trading schemes are frequently exaggerated or entirely unsubstantiated. Considering Modi government's declaration in last October, that Indian carbon credits would be allowed to be sold in both domestic and overseas markets and Narendra Modi's pitch for "holistic" Green Credit, we must be vigilant towards any such greenwashing tactics aiming profit and private fund generation in the name of climate action and seek strict

transparency and accountability from such organizations.

Global Stocktake

The first Global Stocktake (GST) was also conducted during the Summit to track the progress towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. The GST text now titled as 'UAE Consensus' recognized the need for deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to keep parity with 1.5 degrees Celsius limit. Along with transitioning away from fossil fuels in their energy systems, GST urges countries to triple their global renewable energy capacity. It's important to highlight that the shift away from fossil fuels is confined to energy systems exclusively, and they can still be utilized in the plastics, transportation, and agriculture sectors.

At COP28, over 130 countries signed the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, committing to triple global renewable energy generation by 2030 and doubling the annual rate of energy efficiency improvements. This discussion for renewable energy initially emerged in September during the G20 Summit in Delhi. Nevertheless, India opted out of the commitment during COP28, citing its objection to the proposal that called for discontinuing investments in coal—a significant energy source for the country.

More than 20 countries led by the US also pledged to triple their nuclear energy capacity by 2050. Pushing for nuclear energy is not just technologically dubious; it also possesses health and environmental consequences. Even the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is mandated with the task of increasing nuclear energy production in the world, admits, "Nuclear power is not a near-term solution to the challenge of climate change...The need to immediately and dramatically reduce carbon emissions calls for approaches that can be implemented more quickly than building nuclear reactors".

The GST leaves an open role of "transitional fuels" in the pursuit of energy security, a reference to natural gas which the oil and gas-producing nations can exploit to increase producing nations production and utilization.

The Conference failed to address some challenges and differences between developed and developing countries in

terms of differentiated timeline for fossil fuel phase out, fossil-fuel subsidies and impact on economic growth. The text fails to make developed countries accountable for their historical emissions and uphold the principle of common and differentiated responsibilities. The document has downplayed the emphasis on the immediate financial support obligation of developed nations to aid developing countries in their transitioning away from fossil fuels and in undertaking mitigation and adaptation actions. It seems to dilute the responsibilities of developed countries to phase out their fossil fuel use in this critical decade of 2020. In essence, the document weakens the principle of equity by imposing an equal burden for mitigation on all countries.

Global Goal on Adaptation

The text on Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) is also adapted which was set up under the Paris Agreement to provide direction on how countries could increase their capacity to deal with the effects of climate change. The absence of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and no mention of an equitable process is contradictory to this goal. African countries, leading the charge for developing countries, stressed the crucial role of "means of implementation" like finance and technology in climate adaptation which is also missing. Despite the scientific imperative for affluent nations to adopt more ambitious goals, they are opting for less ambitious commitments and trying to persuade developing countries to do the same. This approach risks shifting the responsibility onto poorer nations, enabling wealthy countries to retain less challenging targets.

A September report by Oil Change International identified the US, Australia, Canada, Norway, and the UK (who alone plan to develop 51% of the projected oil and gas fields by 2050) as the "richest planet wreckers responsible for oil and gas exploration."

On one hand, the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) got new additions of more than 10 new members including the US and the UAE. On the other hand, despite advocating for a phase-out of fossil fuels at COP28, the US maintains its position as the world's leading producer and consumer

of crude oil, accounting for 20% of the global total. The cumulative emissions from their oil and gas sector between 2023 to 2050 are estimated to be equivalent to the emissions produced by 454 new coal plants. This year, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak made a commitment to "max out" the country's oil and gas reserves, concurrently announcing new drilling permits for the North Sea. While Australia committed to ending overseas fossil fuel funding, it has approved numerous domestic projects, including coal developments. Overall, the summit appears to be influenced by the considerable impact of oil and gas powers.

Loss and damage Fund

COP28 operationalized and capitalized "loss and damage" fund which was agreed upon by the Parties in COP27 to help vulnerable countries cope with the increasingly costly and damaging impacts of climate disasters. The fund reached only around \$792 million dollars committed by a few nations, falling significantly short of the annual target requiring \$100 billion to more than \$400 billion a year as estimated

to deal with loss and damage from natural disasters and rising seas. Although the UN Convention urged developed countries to spearhead funding for climate initiatives, they consistently refrained from specifying precise financial commitments. Noteworthy is the fact that the U.S., the largest historical emitter, pledged only \$17.5 million, while both the UAE and Germany committed \$100 million each. While the fund was established, deliberations on its structure, scope, and nature were deferred to be addressed in Dubai. Even adding this up with the pledged Least Developed Countries Fund and Special Climate Change Fund (\$174 million) and the Adaptation Fund (\$188 million), its nowhere close to the required quantity. There are serious concerns especially for the developing nations and the communities affected by climate-related disasters, regarding the role of the World Bank as the agency for managing the Loss & Damage fund. Clarity about questions on limited access to the fund, legal autonomy, flexibility, decision-making authority, and the need

to be able to directly access funding, preferably in the form of grants instead of loans are lacking.

It also encourages to forge partnerships between the public and private sectors to mobilise investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and infrastructure raising questions on market mechanisms, financial resource allocation, and private sector engagement in climate action minimizing peoples access and increasing corporate profit-making.

With many ambitious promises on emission, health, farming and biodiversity goals, COP28 does not stand up enough for climate justice and equity and fails to respond to the issues on Loss & Damage metrics, fund management and disbursement, risky technologies, access to technology and finance, continued use of fossil fuels in many sectors and natural gas being a transitional fuel, nuclear energy promotion and challenges of developing countries. ■

'SAVE DEMOCRACY' Protests by INDIA Bloc Against Suspension of Opposition MPs held across the Country

The united opposition under the banner of INDIA Bloc held protests on 22 December across the country in all states against the suspension of opposition members of parliament in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. In Delhi, thousands gathered at Parliament Street in the protest which was addressed by leaders of all INDIA parties.

Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary CPIML said at Jantar Mantar that people of the country are protesting against the attack by the Modi government on the country's Parliamentary democratic system guaranteed by our Constitution. The suspension spree which started with the expulsion of Mahua Moitra has now reached to the suspension of 146 parliamentarians. It is required of the government to be accountable before the parliament in a parliamentary democratic system, but it wants an opposition free Parliament. The Home Minister must have made a statement on the security breach in the Parliament but

this has now become a habit of BJP leaders to escape from the accountability inside the parliament. They hadn't spoken on Manipur too. Even Prime Minister doesn't take parliamentary sittings seriously, whenever he speaks it is as if he was addressing an election meeting! The BJP and its leaders are neglecting and disrespecting the Parliament, they are also attacking people's right of voicing their concerns on the streets. The eviction of MPs is one aspect of the same phenomenon which is being expressed in the framing of undemocratic Laws like the one that concerns with the selection of the Chief Election Commissioner. The Modi government countered the SC ruling that suggested making a committee by including the leader of the opposition, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Prime Minister. The three law amendments pertaining to criminal codes are nothing but bringing back the old British colonial legacy.

The government wants an Opposition-free

Parliament, protest-free streets and no space in the republic for any dissent. It is not about the suspension of MPs but more about imposing a permanent dictatorship by killing democracy. This is our responsibility to build a nationwide united movement just like the freedom movement to protect our democracy and our Constitution. Whenever the people come on the street it is impossible for the Hitler's followers and fascists to survive. The democracy and the Constitution will always be here for us.

The opposition parties held a demonstration in Bhubaneswar demanding the revocation of the suspensions. The Mahagathbandhan parties marched on the streets of Patna in Bihar. The CPIML independently and along with other left parties also held districts and block level demonstrations at many places. A big protest demonstration was organised at Gurdaspur and a joint protest was held Mansa in Punjab. In Dehradun, leaders of CPIML, CPI, CPIM, Congress and other parties were arrested and taken to the police lines when they were holding a march to the Raj Bhawan. Protest demonstrations were also held in Tripura, in Giridih in Jharkhand, Diphu in Karbi Anglong, Udaipur and Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan and many other places. ■

Three Day Mazdoor-Kisan Mahapadav Witnesses Spirited Participation Across The Country

The three-day 'Mazdoor-Kisan Mahapadav' (workers and farmers' grand assembly) witnessed the spirited participation of tens of thousands of activists across the country. On the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of the historic farmers' movement of 2020, the workers and farmers' unions had jointly given a call for a three-day sit-in protest, i.e., between November 26th and 28th, 2023, to be held before all the Raj Bhavan at state capitals.

The joint action call of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and Central Trade Unions (CTUs) condemning the Modi-BJP government-led state repression against NewsClick and other journalists, called for renewed resistance against the RSS/BJP-corporate plan to deprive the people of India of food security, pauperising the farmers, and dismantling of labour laws and working class rights. The Mahapadav also remembered the valiant sacrifice of hundreds of martyrs of farmers movement who laid down their lives resisting the brutal repression by a fascist government serving interests of Imperialist exploiters. The Mahapadav gave a clarion call to 'Oust the Corporate-Communal Nexus in

Governance from Power to Save the People and Save the Nation'.

In Bihar, the Mahapadav call was observed across the state with hundreds gathering in Patna to pay their homage to the martyrs of the farmers movement and calling upon the Modi regime to stop its anti-people policies. Alongside AICCTU, AIKM and AIARLA, other farmers and workers organisations gathered at GAIT Public Library. Addressing the gathering, AIKM National General Secretary Rajaram Singh said that this Mahapadav is a warning to the Modi government – that the time of its rule of corporate loot and oppression of toiling masses is over and that the next general elections will be fought on the agenda of farmers and workers. "Our call is clear – those who stand with farmers-workers will only be allowed to rule in the country. We are gearing up to intensify the united action of the workers and farmers," added Comrade Rajaram.

Shashi Yadav, National Secretary of AICCTU, congratulated the workers and farmers for their massive participation and making the three-day Mahapadav a grand success. She

said that all the promises made by the Modi government in the past nine years have not been implemented. Instead, in these 9 years, we see that all the rights and livelihood of workers and farmers are being sacrificed at the altar of corporate loot. "When people of this country question and resist these anti-people policies of the BJP regime, ED-CBI-IT and police agencies are unleashed against them to suppress their voices. We have seen this recently when NewsClick journalists who covered the historic farmers movement were raided and charged with draconian anti-terror law and other fabricated charges. The workers and farmers of this country have resolved to throw such an anti-people government into the dustbin of history," added Shashi Yadav.

In Delhi, the initial two days of Mahapadav was organised at Delhi Civil Lines with the final day culminating as a massive gathering at Jantar Mantar. Comrade Rajiv Dimri, General Secretary of AICCTU, who addressed the protest at Jantar Mantar, said that the BJP-led Union Government has failed on all counts making people's lives miserable, working mainly against the interest of nation to the advantage of corporates of Indian and foreign brands. "The forces of communal divide and hatred are given tacit support from the ruling circles which vitiates the peace and harmony in the society," he said. ■

Memorial Meeting of Comrade Meena Rai held in Allahabad

On 17 December, a memorial meeting for Comrade Meena Rai, Managing Editor of Janmat, was organized at Anjuman-e-Rooh-e-Adab, Allahabad. The event showcased the vibrant life of Comrade Meena Rai, who was a friend, mentor and comrade to many young activists. On one side of the venue there was a book stall and on the other side, excerpts from her incomplete autobiography 'Samar na jite koi' along with various photographs of her. The memorial event cherished her life and work that continues to be an inspiration and strength for all.

Speaking at the memorial meeting, Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of CPI(ML) said that Comrade Meena had dedicated her life and work to connect to the people and building a collective. In politics, we talk about socialisation of capital, but there can be socialisation of life also, the example of

which has been set by Meena ji.

She was steadfast in ensuring continuous publishing and distribution of Samkaleen Janmat magazine, and making it available to the people. She was the backbone of

the whole process. The sudden demise of Comrade Meenaji has left a vacuum, but as she envisioned the power of collective efforts we as a group will have to try to carry forward her work and legacy. The period



when Meena ji joined the party was the time of re-organisation of CPIML. In that difficult period, she showed how socialism is not only a goal but also a journey. Her solace was in collective work.

Fighting today's fascism is not just a matter of one or two elections, it requires change in consciousness and a strong organisation and movement. Perhaps it was at this very moment we needed Meena ji the most. Therefore, it is our responsibility to remember her and to be dedicated in our effort to connect people in a creative way. This will be a perfect tribute to her life and legacy.

Devi Prasad Mishra, prominent Hindi poet, remembered her memory as revolutionary in both her work and life. Poet Rupam Mishra, while remembering Meenaji said that she was a vital link that connected the old world and the new generation. Professor Awadhesh Pradhan shared the memories how Meena Rai, a girl from a farming family, became Comrade Meena Rai, recounting her memoir and excerpts from her autobiography. Professor Ashutosh Kumar remembered her as the one who carries party in her heart, Jan Sanskriti Manch in her conscience and respected opinions of comrades. He described her autobiography as an unique documentation of the struggles an

Indian woman goes through. Writer Neelam Shankar remembered the many hats that Comrade Meena Rai wore. Comrade Shashi Yadav spoke about multiple roles and responsibilities that Meena Rai was carrying. Her dedication is a source of inspiration.

Dr. Padma Singh, Preeti Sinha, Secretary of the Progressive Writers Association, Poet Sandhya Navodat, school teachers Ruchi, Sneha or young teacher and chorus partner Ruchi Dixit or Shivani, Parveen of the locality- for all of them Comrade Meena Rai was always a friend, mentor and comrade who was always there when needed. Professor Gopal Pradhan said she played a crucial role in nurturing generations of students in Allahabad with the vision to change the world and build an egalitarian future.

In the second session of the memorial event, an Audio-Visual story about Comrade Meena Rai, prepared together by Sanjay Joshi and Ankur was shown in which she talked about her dreams, importance of collective and desire to create a better world. The event ended with a resolve to collectively carry forward her ideas, work and legacy. ■

Adieu Com. Kanti Prashad Chandola

Senior party leader of Uttarakhand, Comrade Kanti Prasad Chandola passed away at the age of 70 years, on the night of December 15th, 2023. He was suffering from a prolonged lung infection to which he succumbed. Comrade Chandola was a state committee member of Uttarakhand CPIML and the state vice-president of AICCTU. After joining the party, he took upon the responsibility of organizing the party work among teachers and other employees.

He was earlier associated with CPI(M) and joined CPI(ML) about 15 years ago. Comrade Chandola, who came under the influence of the communist movement at an early age, was a teacher in the Higher Secondary Education Department of Uttarakhand. In the early 90s, he worked as a Mathematics lecturer at Chauras Inter-College in Srinagar Garhwal. Those were the days of stormy struggles of the Uttarakhand statehood movement. There was never a day when there were no protests, demonstrations, rallies or clashes with the police. He was at the forefront of every protest and struggle. He also helped in supporting the financial needs of the youth who were joining the movement. Even after retirement, he continued to play an active role in organizing struggles of teachers and employees.

He used to write regularly in Karmachari Shikshak Darpan, the mouthpiece of Uttaranchal Mountain Employees' and Teachers' Organisation. While being the principal of the Inter-College in Tehri district, he played a vital role in stopping a cheating racket run by local goons. After retirement around 2012, he started living in Dehradun. It was here that he breathed his last.

Red Salute to Comrade Kanti Prasad Chandola! ■



Adieu Com. Govind Uniyal

Comrade Govind Uniyal breathed his last on December 11th. He died of a cardiac arrest at the age of 75 years. He was associated with the communist movement for over four decades and served as a member of the Delhi State Committee, and the in-charge of CPI(ML) Delhi state office for a long time.

He was associated with the Sharaf faction of ML, where his home served as an important centre during underground days of activism. Influenced by mass orientation and organisational work of CPIML, he joined the party in 1986.

He played a leading role in organising the workers in Ghaziabad and nearby areas. Due to his close association with the workers and intense activism, many activists from CPI joined the party in Ghaziabad, which mainly comprised of Muslim youth.

Red salute to Comrade Govind Uniyal! ■



*If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up
above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.*



On December 7, prominent **Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer was killed in an Israeli airstrike** on Gaza City alongside six members of his family. Few days before he was killed by Israeli Occupation forcers, Alareer re-shared a 2011 poem anticipating that he might be killed, titled **“If I Must Die.”**

As of December 21, Alareer and more than **20,000 fellow Palestinians, mostly women and children have been massacred by Israeli forces** as part of the Israel's Genocidal War on Gaza.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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EDITOR : Arindam Sen

liberation@cpiml.org

www.liberation.org.in

PH.: 91-11-42785864



@cpimlliberation