

AUGUST 2024

Rs. 25

Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

STALLING THE FASCISTS



July 28 Call

On the occasion of the 52nd Anniversary of Comrade Charu Mazumdar's Martyrdom, and 50th anniversary of Party Reorganisation, prepare the Party for a New Phase of Growth and expansion. The 11th Party Congress in Patna had directed the party to summon all its strength to intensify the resistance against Indian fascism. The 2024 elections were a major test for the Indian people in this ongoing battle. The people have delivered a major blow to the fascist regime and we are glad to have played our all-out role and won some victories in this big national campaign. Comrades everywhere worked hard and Comrades Vishnudev Yadav, Dinesh Singh and Ashok Singh became martyrs in this struggle. We remember all these comrades with a heavy heart.

The 2024 results have now put us in a position of bigger responsibility. We will have to discharge our role in Parliament and combine it with our increased role outside of Parliament in the wider arena of people's struggles. In Bihar we must make full use of our successive gains in 2020 and 2024 elections to place the party on a stronger footing. In other states too we must make the most of the new situation to take the party forward.

The BJP has lost its independent majority and the government has returned considerably weakened. But the government is trying to pretend as though nothing has happened. Modi is again Prime Minister, Amit Shah is again Home Minister, Om Birla is the Speaker. Left to itself, the Modi government would try to run the third term in much the same way it ran the second term with daily assault on the people's livelihood, the Constitution and the parliamentary democratic system. And the lynch mobs and riot squads of the Sangh brigade are back on the streets, resuming the cycle of violence and complementing the state-led repression with state-backed extra-judicial campaign of privatised street violence.

Looking at the direction and spirit of the 2024 mandate, we of course know that the people have put the Modi government on notice while giving enough strength to INDIA to take on the Modi government on every issue within the Parliament and beyond. We played a key role in articulating the popular urge for formation of a broad-based unity of political and social forces and people's movements against the Sangh brigade's fascist aggression. INDIA has taken shape in this process as an overarching unity of political forces on the all-India level including forces fighting against each other in local contexts. We must now play our role in taking this process to the next level to deliver bigger blows to the BJP and NDA in the next round of Assembly election.

The expansion and consolidation of CPI(ML) holds the key at this juncture to a stronger and more energetic intervention of the Left, and it is a must to ensure a decisive defeat of the fascist regime. This 28 July we are observing not only the 52nd anniversary of the martyrdom of Comrade Charu Mazumdar, but also the 50th anniversary of the reorganisation of the Party Central Committee. The reorganisation and the rectification campaign which followed had enabled the Party not only to withstand the Emergency and overcome the setback of the 1970s, but had also placed the Party on the road to comprehensive growth and all-India expansion. Today the Party needs another such phase of expansion and consolidation to answer the challenges of the day. Let the July campaign prepare the Party for this new phase.





New Series Vol. 30 No. 04
AUGUST 2024

CONTENTS

COMMENTARY

New Criminal Codes	05
Plight of Migrant Workers Abroad	10
By-poll Results and Challenges Ahead	13

COVER STORY

Stalling the Fascist Surge in Europe	14
Labour's Landslide in UK	16
Left Democratic Response in Europe	20

ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL	25
Student Uprising in Bangladesh	29

REPORTS

REPORTS	31
----------------	-----------

OBITUARY

OBITUARY	35
-----------------	-----------

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

36 pages including covers

'Constitution Murder Day': Is the Constitution Dead?

Badly stung by the "Defeat BJP, Save Constitution" campaign in the 2024 elections, the BJP is now desperate to project itself as the 'saviour' and 'champion' of India's Constitution. India already observes 26 November, the day the Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, as Samvidhan Divas or Constitution Day. Now the Modi government has declared 25 June, the day Emergency was proclaimed in 1975, as 'Samvidhan Hatya Divas' or 'Constitution Murder Day' - not attempt to murder, but outright murder. India must be the only country that will henceforth be observing a day to commemorate the murder of its Constitution. And like the names of the recently imposed criminal codes, it seems the Modi regime has now decided to name everything in Hindi written in Roman script.

The declaration of the Samvidhan Hatya Divas came after the President's Address to the 18th Loksabha described the 1975 Emergency as "the biggest and darkest chapter of direct attack on the constitution". The Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha too made similar remarks, the Speaker even getting a resolution adopted by the Lok Sabha. The 50th anniversary of the Emergency will surely be an occasion for defenders of democracy and constitutional rights and liberties of citizens to remember the Emergency-era reign of state repression. Every discussion of 1975 would however invariably lead to a comparison between the Emergency then and now. Yet the Modi government believes it can use the memories of 1975 to silence today's protests against the ongoing Emergency.

Except perhaps the mass vasectomy campaign, every other horror of the 1975 Emergency is being replicated and amplified manifold in the current period. The press censorship has of course been rendered redundant with the near-total transformation of the dominant media into a willing tool of official propaganda. Most of the opposition leaders arrested during the Emergency were released before the 1977 elections, whereas the Modi regime arrested two chief ministers during the 2024 elections and used persecution, intimidation and allurements as tools to secure the loyalty or defection of many leaders. And going by the incarceration of prisoners of conscience and bulldozer demolitions of homes and shops, the declared Emergency of Indira Gandhi was no match to the everyday violence of the permanent Emergency of the Modi era.

The mob lynchings and hate campaigns against Muslims and other marginalised groups, dissenters of various ideological shades and protest movements are of course an exclusive feature of the Modi era. Let us also remember that after playing a role in the pre-Emergency youth movement in Gujarat and Bihar, the RSS was quick to buy its peace with the Emergency regime. The letters written by RSS chief Babasaheb Deoras to Indira Gandhi assuring her of the support of RSS volunteers are all in the public domain. The Emergency was promulgated by invoking

Annual Subscription Rates

India Rs. 300

Abroad US\$ 60

Digital Subscription Rs. 200

Online Payment: liberation.org.in

Pay By Bank transfer:

Account Name: Liberation Publications

Account No.: 90502010091855

IFSC Code: CNRB0019050

MICR Code.: 110015388

Bank: Canara Bank



Article 352 of the Constitution and the suspension of fundamental rights and reversal of the principles of natural justice followed in its wake. Not only has the Modi government never talked of repeal of Article 352, it has normalised the draconian culture of detention without trial through UAPA and the newly enacted criminal codes.

The Constitution had not overnight become an issue in the 2024 elections. The serial attacks on the basic values and core features of the Constitution have not

gone unnoticed since Modi's ascent to power in 2014. The fact that the RSS had rejected the Constitution at the time of its adoption and that at every opportunity it has been espousing the Manusmriti as the ideal code for the Indian people have been common knowledge. The conversion of multicultural multireligious India into a monolithic Hindu Rashtra, the quintessential RSS project since its inception, can never happen without a major subversion of the letter and spirit of the Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar. And it was not just the BJP loudmouths who invoked the cause of a new constitution to explain the 400-plus target in the 2024 elections, the principal economic advisor of the Prime Minister had also openly argued for a new constitution in a newspaper article written on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of India's independence.

Three years ago the Modi government declared August 14 as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day. And now we have this Constitution Murder Day. The very choice of words about these days perhaps speaks volumes about the Sangh brigade's own agenda of re-enacting the horrors of Partition and murdering the Constitution. But whether it is the Shaheen Bagh protests against discriminatory citizenship laws, powerful assertion for social equality and representation of marginalised groups or the determined resistance against corporate takeover of agriculture, 'we, the people of India' have repeatedly rallied around the Constitution to defend their rights and defeat every fascist design. The 2024 elections have told the world that the Constitution is very much alive and kicking in India because the people of India are ready to defend this achievement of the freedom movement with all their might and uphold it as the secure foundation to turn free India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic. ■

LIBERATION DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Get Liberation Magazine PDF version directly to your Email or WhatsApp

Annual Subscription fee: INR 200

For more information email us at liberation@cpiml.org or manager.liberation@gmail.com



Foil the Modi Government's Design to Turn India into a Police State

Political observers have often characterised the first ten years of the Modi government as an undeclared Emergency. With the coming into force of the three new criminal codes, that state of Emergency has now been institutionalised. The three codes replacing the Indian Penal Code 1860, Criminal Procedure Code 1973 and Indian Evidence Act 1872 were passed hurriedly in Parliament without any serious debate or parliamentary scrutiny on 20-21 December 2023 when almost the entire Opposition was suspended by the Speaker. In November 2016 the Modi government had banned Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000 currency notes calling it a necessary measure to end black money and promote digital transactions. Likewise, the new codes are being justified in the name of 'decolonization' and digital modernization of the criminal justice system.

Experience has now taught every Indian that demonetisation has only reinforced the power of black money. A close look will similarly tell us that the new criminal codes are way more draconian than the colonial era laws being replaced. The claim of decolonization is clearly deceptive and misplaced. As we can see the CRPC version being replaced was codified in 1973 after years of consultation and diligence. The other two codes had also undergone scores of amendments as recommended by successive Law Commissions to remove colonial era anomalies and introduce periodic reforms and safeguards. More than ninety percent of the provisions in the new 'decolonised' codes have been lifted verbatim from the so-

called colonial era codes.

The change in name, imposed in Hindi on multilingual India, is also quite pretentious and misleading - the penal code is now named 'Nyay Sanhita' or justice code and the erstwhile criminal procedure code goes by the name of Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita or the code for citizen security. The use of the word justice in the name of the code does not make justice more accessible and guaranteed for the common people, nor does the use of the word citizen make it citizen-centric or citizen-friendly. In fact, a comparative reading of the two versions makes it clear that the new codes will arm the police with much enhanced power and room for arbitrary action. In many cases even the filing of an FIR, the first step in the quest for justice, will now be preceded by primary investigation and consideration by police authorities.

The duration of police custody can now be stretched from the existing limit of 15 days to a period of 60 to 90 days (Amit Shah however says the total duration will not exceed 15 days but it can be spread over two to three months). This will certainly make bail, already a rarity as observed by the Supreme Court itself, much more difficult. The new code also sanctions abject humiliation and outright torture of the accused by allowing practices like handcuffing and solitary confinement. Under the new codes, the balance between a justice-seeking citizen and the state will get more tilted against the former and in favour of the latter. Far from ushering in a citizen-centric dispensation upholding the twin principles of transparency and accountability, the new laws will

turn India into a veritable police state.

It was the disturbingly growing use of the colonial era sedition law which had prompted the Supreme Court to point to the utter incompatibility of the colonial construct of 'sedition' and the idea of a free democratic republic. The Modi government had then agreed to stop slapping sedition cases on dissenters and now it claims to have done away with the colonial era sedition law altogether. What the government has actually done is to replace sedition with treason which is a far more arbitrary charge. Modi supporters routinely brand dissenting voices as 'anti-national' and call for sending dissenters to Pakistan. Now such charges will be backed by the new treason law and opponents of the government and its policies will run the risk of being put in jail on charges of being a threat to India's sovereignty and unity and integrity.

We know how the farmers' movement was sought to be delegitimised as a pro-Khalistan or Khalistani-backed movement. Many members of the Indian diaspora have been stripped of their OCI (overseas citizen of India) status for supporting the anti-CAA movement, farmers' movement or opposing the growing assault on constitutional values and the erosion of democracy in India. The other colonial era law which is routinely invoked to suppress truth and dissent - the defamation law - has been left untouched in the new code. In many ways, the new code will make the 'exceptional' draconian laws like the UAPA and PMLA, which put the onus on the accused to prove himself or herself not guilty, into the new norm. Precision, fairness and clarity - the cornerstones of modern jurisprudence - give way in the new codes to vagueness, ambiguity and arbitrariness.

The common people of India have long suffered acutely from institutionalised injustice. For the poor and oppressed people belonging to diverse marginalised identities and minorities, justice is usually an unthinkable or unaffordable luxury and never a guaranteed right. The Modi regime is exploiting this plight of the people to make laws more unjust and render the system yet more unresponsive and undemocratic. But the victorious struggle of the farmers against the pro-corporate farm laws, and the transport workers' strike, which became the first public protest against the new criminal codes and forced the government to retreat on the issue of harsh penalties against drivers in the case of road accidents, tell us that the people can always fight back once they become aware of the ominous implications of any new law.

The Lok Sabha elections demonstrated the strength of the will of the people to defend the Constitution of India. The new criminal codes are antithetical to justice and liberty, two key and most fundamental commitments contained in the Preamble to the Constitution. We must launch a vigorous and sustained campaign to explain the sinister design behind the new codes and how they undermine the basic values of the Constitution. Let us remember that the RSS-led clamour for changing the Constitution began by calling the Constitution a foreign-inspired colonial document lacking in 'Indianness' much the same way as the criminal code is being replaced today in the name of 'decolonization'. The movement for social and economic justice must be complemented by a powerful campaign for political justice and in this struggle we must harness the full strength of the civil liberties movement of India and of India's long tradition of progressive legal activism. ■

Encoding the Bogey of Urban Naxals into the Law

▲ AJIT PATIL AND CLIFTON D' ROZARIO

In the Lok Sabha elections, the people of Maharashtra gave a decisive verdict against the defection-engineered Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis government, by handing the INDIA bloc 31 seats (including one independent) out of the 48 MP seats. The BJP was reduced to 9 seats from the 23 it won in 2019, whereas Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena won 7 seats, and Ajit Pawar's NCP could manage to win just one victory. Despite this, their political arrogance remains undiminished as they continue with their communal divisive policies and persecution of voices of dissent.

On July 11, the penultimate day of the just-concluded Vidhan Sabha session, the Maharashtra government tabled the "Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024" avowedly to tackle "urban naxals". The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states that this new law is needed to stop the "menace of naxalism" and counter the activities of "naxal organizations or similar organizations through their united front" that "are creating unrest among common masses to propagate their ideology of armed rebellion against the constitutional mandate and disrupts public order in the State".

Reading this Bill, one is reminded of the first legislation sought to be introduced in India. It was the Public Safety Bill which was ushered in by the British imperialism's company raj in 1918. The purpose of the act was to tackle the increasing spread of socialist and communist ideas and organisations in the backdrop of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. It was when the Assembly was considering this and the other proposed enactment, Trade Disputes Bill, that Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt threw grenades and pamphlets shouting slogans of 'Inquilab Zindabad' in the Parliament. The 1918 Public Safety Bill was finally rejected by the Assembly, with Motilal Nehru strongly rejecting it on behalf of the Indian National Congress.

As the Bill became public it was apparent that this proposed legislation was draconian, repressive and unconstitutional, and intended to be weaponised against political opposition and any form of dissent. Unsurprisingly, the draft of the Bill in question today was not made available to be the public, nor was it subject to any form of scrutiny before it was tabled in the State Assembly. Coming as it did, in the last two days of the Winter Session and only a couple of months before the State elections, this reflects the mockery of parliamentary democracy by the Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis government, and exemplifies the practice of ramming through laws without any debate or scrutiny.

Overview of the Maharashtra Public Security Bill

A brief scheme of the Bill is necessary to proceed. The Bill empowers the Government to declare an organisation as "unlawful". The consequences of this are four-fold.

Firstly, persons who are members or not members, but associated with the organisation are liable to be punished.

Secondly, the Deputy Magistrate or Commissioner of Police can thereafter notify any place which was used for the activities of such organisation, following which possession of that place is taken and remain in the possession of the Government for as long as it decides.

Thirdly, the Deputy Magistrate or Commissioner of Police shall take possession of all movable property found within such notified place, including moneys, securities and other assets, which could be forfeited to the Government.

Fourthly, any money, securities and other assets will be forfeited to the Government on its satisfaction that it is being used or is intended to be used for such organisation.

The Bill also provides provisions for aggrieved persons to challenge these orders and actions of the State authorities. This, in sum and substance, is the “Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024.

Besides these draconian consequences, the Bill is problematic at so many levels.

Intentional vagueness in definition at the cost of civil liberties and human rights

There are fundamental tenets and principles which guide the drafting of criminal statutes – principle of maximum certainty, principle of strict construction, principle of broader purposive approach, presumption of innocence, principle of fair labelling, principle of proportionality, principle of prior fault, *nullum crime sine lege* (no crime without law) and *nullum*

poena sine lege (no punishment without law), the principle of non-retroactivity, right of self-incrimination and the specificity of offences. It goes without saying that the formulation of criminal statutes proceed on the basis of these core principles with the crafting of provisions not inconsistent with them. It is shocking that this Bill falls short when gauged through the lens of these basic tenets and principles.

The Bill is marked by vague and broad definitions that are antithetical to criminal statutes. An organisation can be declared an “unlawful organization” if it indulges in or has in pursuance of its objects abets or assists or gives aid, or encourages directly or indirectly through any medium, devices or otherwise, any “unlawful activity”. As such the centrepiece of the proposed legislation is the definition of “unlawful activity”, which is extremely vague, broad and therefore problematic. It brings within its fold any action which “constitutes a danger or menace to public order, peace or tranquillity”; or even “interferes or has a tendency to interfere with the maintenance of public order”; or “interferes or tends to interfere with the administration of law, or its established institutions and personnel”; or “encouraging or preaching disobedience of established law and its institutions”. Another aspect that is deeply problematic is that several of the terms used in this definition – danger, menace, encouraging, preaching, etc. are not defined the Bill. Thus by this broad definition, every act of dissent, including peaceful protests and non-violent civil disobedience, could be criminalised. The proposed Bill has thrown its net wider than any other previous legislations and now encompasses individuals, social organisations, civil society,

human right groups, trade unions, political parties, etc. The intended consequence of this proposed Bill is to render illusory the basic freedom of speech and expression and right to dissent.

This vagueness in definition goes against the basic tenet of criminal jurisprudence, that a criminal act should be well defined and cannot be left for interpretation since that gives way to abuse of the law. The vagueness and ambiguities will foster arbitrary use by the police and administration with greater chances of repression of the masses.

Vagueness also pervades the definition of “organisation” under the Bill. According to the Bill, an organisation is defined as meaning “any combination, body or group of persons, whether known by any distinctive name or not, and whether registered under any relevant law or not, and whether governed by any written constitution or not”. Going by this broad definition, the Government can use this law to target any group of people by claiming that they are part of some “organisation”, even though such organisation may not even exist!

Unbridled powers to the Government and authorities

Having provided vague and broad definitions, which can be used and abused to quell dissent, the Bill bestows unbridled powers on the Government and authorities in the declaration of an organisation as an “unlawful organisation” and the consequences that flow thereon.

The Bill empowers the State Government to declare as an “unlawful organisation” any organisation if the Government is of the “opinion” that the organisation is, or has become, such! All it takes

is for the Government to form such an opinion to altogether end the activities of that organisation. There is no burden of proof whatsoever that is required to be borne by the government in declaring any persons or group and their activities as unlawful. In effect, the Bill empowers the government to pursue any individual or organisation that it considers a threat, to declare all of its activities (including non-violent activity, speech, or communications) illegal, to restrict its activities, and to punish some or all of its members.

To portray an illusion of procedural safeguards, the Bill contemplates an Advisory Board to review the Government's decision of notifying an organisation as unlawful. The farce of due process is engrained in the provisions itself. While it is stated in the Bill that a notification declaring an "unlawful organisation" as such will not take effect until the Advisory Board has confirmed the decision of the Government, it also provides an exception to this "if the State Government is of the opinion that circumstances exist which render it necessary for the Government to declare an organisation to be an unlawful organisation with immediate effect"!

A question also arises at the possibility of the Advisory Board performing its duties in a fair and non-partisan manner. For this, we need to examine the constitution of the Advisory Board, which according to the Bill shall consist of "three persons who are or have been or are qualified to be appointed as Judge of the High Court". Retired High Court judges and advocates qualified to be appointed as an High Court Judge would form this Advisory Board. This Bill comes at a time when we have seen a sitting High Court judge resigned and contested on a

BJP ticket, and a couple of others declare their allegiance to the RSS after retirement. What more needs to be said?

Similar unbridled powers are given to the Deputy Magistrate/Commissioner of Police in regard to notifying "any place" which in their "opinion" was used for the activities of an organisation declared as an "unlawful organisation". Once this is done, any person living in the place stands to be evicted and possession transferred to the Government until such time that the organisation is not an "unlawful organisation" anymore. Such actions are also contemplated in regard to all movable property (including moneys, securities and other assets) found within such notified place, as also any moneys, securities and other assets even otherwise held to be used or intended to be used for such organisation. In all these scenarios, the Bill provides for an appeal by the aggrieved persons to the Government! So the Government that has formed the opinion and caused the declaration of an unlawful organisation would be Appellate Authority against any decision of the Deputy Magistrate or the Commissioner of Police, as the case maybe. Thus, wide discretionary powers have been given to Deputy Magistrate/Commissioner of Police regarding immovable and moveable property (including moneys, security and other assets), without no real procedural safeguard or remedy.

Arbitrary and disproportionate punishments

The penalties laid down in the Bill are grossly arbitrarily.

Any person who is a member of an unlawful organization or takes part offences in meetings or activities of any such organization

or contributes or receives or solicits any contribution for the organization, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term upto three years and fine of upto three lakh rupees.

Any person who is not a member of an unlawful organization, but who contributes/receives/ solicits any contribution or aid for such organization or harbours any member of such organization, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which upto two years and fine upto two lakhs rupees.

Any person who manages/assists in the management of an unlawful organization or promotes or assists in promoting a meeting of any such organization or indulges in any unlawful activity of such organization in any manner, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term upto three years and fine upto three lakhs rupees.

Any person who commits/abets/ attempts to commit/plans to commit any unlawful activity of such unlawful organization, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term upto seven years and fine upto five lakhs rupees.

What is of great concern is that these offences are defined without any element of mens rea i.e., intent. Even a draconian law like the UAPA has the element of mens rea included in the definition of offences, by qualifying acts with the phrase "knowingly and intentionally". The Bill is hence, draconian and grants excessive, arbitrary powers, as it empowers the state to jail anyone who criticises it or stands against its policies.

This Bill was introduced in the Maharashtra Assembly after the new Criminal Codes were brought into force, which themselves have brought in provisions that are detrimental to civil liberties

and human rights. An even more draconian sedition provision has been introduced in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, under a newer nomenclature while “terrorist act” and “organised crimes” are included as general offences. These together with PMLA and UAPA provide the state with a strong arsenal to target its critics.

The Maharashtra Government attempted to further strengthen its hands by throwing this Bill into the mix. However, the introduction of this Bill was opposed by the Opposition parties as well as civil society and human rights organisations, who were unanimous that this was a draconian piece of legislation intended to further suppress dissent and cause alarm amongst the citizenry. Moreover,

since the Bill was introduced just as the Monsoon Session was ending and was not passed, as such it stands lapsed. Even so, it must be demanded that a formal statement be issued by the State Government assuring that the Bill will not be reintroduced and will be scrapped altogether.

It remains to be seen what the efforts to enact such a draconian law stops here or another attempt would be made by the Maharashtra government. Even so, the BJP has made its intentions very clear by weaponizing criminal laws against any dissent and opposition, and has strengthened its arms by pushing through the three repressive Criminal Codes even as 146 MPs were suspended and without any façade of a democracy. Coupled with the PMLA and UAPA, this is

preparation for the unleashing of further repression on the people’s resistance fighting the assault on their living, livelihood, jal, jangal, jameen and environment. Ever since the neo liberal “reforms” have been foisted on the Indian people at the behest of World Bank and IMF since 1991, the Indian state has resorted to more and more repressive laws like TADA to hinder people’s resistance to these reforms and their ill effects, now culminating in these laws by a corporate fascist regime. A repressive legal regimen is sought to be unleashed to tackle a basically deep rooted economic-political-environmental crisis responsible for unparalleled inequality, joblessness, all-round deprivation. This battle does not end here. ■

Countrywide Protests held against Three Draconian Criminal Codes

Protests were held on July 1 at the call of CPIML across the country demanding postponement of implementation of three new criminal laws and that they must be placed in the new Parliament for proper discussion. Many concerns have been raised by prominent lawyers, civil society activists, political parties and the general public regarding draconian provisions inserted in new laws by the Modi government. These laws were passed in a very undemocratic manner last November when the more than 140 opposition MPs were undemocratically expelled by the Lok Sabha Speaker during the previous Lok Sabha.

Protests were held at many state capitals and district levels by CPIML activists and associated organisations. At Delhi’s Jantar Mantar CPIML and lawyers’ organisation AILAJ protested against three new criminal laws, which came into force on July 1, today, and will greatly erode the liberties and rights of citizens. The new code which is being advertised as a historic ‘decolonization

landmark’ is actually more draconian than the colonial era code.

The protest at Jantar Mantar was addressed by CPIML Member of Parliament Sudama Prasad where he said that the changes introduced through three criminal laws equip the government with brute power to hollow out our democracy and transform India into a fascist state, hence they must be withdrawn. These laws will further increase the clampdown on legitimate political dissent and protest against social and economic exploitation in the country.

In a statement CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya has said that the “new criminal laws will turn India into a police state. Using the lens of Emergency we can call it an institutionalised permanent Emergency where the police will have arbitrary powers and dissenting citizens will be at permanent risk of being jailed.”

In Bihar, protest marches were carried out in Patna, Darbhanga, Arrah, Siwan, Bettiah, Fatuha and other places terming

the new criminal codes as anti-people and draconian. In Patna, protest was organised at Budhha Smriti Park, where CPIML state secretary Kunal said that the new criminal laws would transform India into a police state. He likened it to a constitutional emergency where the police would have arbitrary powers, posing a permanent threat of imprisonment for dissenting citizens. These laws are mere tools to erode civil liberties and enhance government repression, more dangerous than even the British era. Protests were also held in Ranchi, Lucknow, Siliguri, Kolkata and dozens of other places in many states.

Earlier on June 27, CPIML Member of Parliaments had written a letter to the President of India along with the various civil society and lawyers’ petitions demanding the delaying the implementation of the new criminal codes. Writing to the President, the MPs noted that the new laws will erode liberties and legal safeguards of citizens by arming the state with more sweeping and draconian powers. The new laws need a thorough review and wider and more informed consensus. Please advise the government against rushing with their implementation.

Quelled Dreams: *Plight of International Migrant Workers*

▲ LEKHA ADAVI



For decades now, Indians have been migrating to parts of Middle East, Europe and America in search of a better future for themselves and their families. The dream of “making it big” has captured the Indian imagination, partly thanks to Bollywood which glorified the “American return” protagonist who falls in love with the desi-girl.

It is this class of educated Indians, who migrated to various parts of the globe, in search of better higher education and thereafter, well-paying jobs, that was termed ‘brain drain’, that was regarded as a bane for our country. A majority of these well-settled Indian-origin Americans, Britains, and others, who are now the flag-bearers of the Indian supremacist hegemony being advocated by Narendra Modi. To a question in the Parliament in mid-2023, the Minister for External Affairs responded that 2,25,620 Indians gave up Indian citizenship

in 2022 and about 87,026 people had renounced their citizenship by June 2023.

On the contrary, in 2021, India ranked first among the OECD-member countries with emigration numbers at 4,00,000 individuals, while excluding students ! This is 7.5% of the total migration flows across the globe! While these are official statistics, it is said that an unprecedented number of undocumented Indian immigrants were also crossing borders by foot. The US Customs and Border Protection data states that between October 2022 and September 2023, about 96,917 Indians were apprehended, expelled or denied entry for having tried to enter the US without papers . The Ministry of External Affairs states that over 2,00,000 illegal Indian immigrants had an encounter with the US authorities in the past five years . It is said that in 2023, more than 1,000 Indians risked their lives by

crossing the English Channel from Europe in inflatable small boats to reach the UK. This disconcerting emigration from India could be attributed to various factors, including unemployment in India, growing oppression of minority communities in India, and an overall growth in global migration since the pandemic, among other reasons.

While lakhs of people are getting out of India in search of better lives and future, incidents like the exploitation of domestic workers by the Hinduja family, loss of lives in the Kuwait fire tragedy, death of an Indian worker in an Italian farm, over 5,000 workers being trapped in a cyberscam in Cambodia, exploitation of Dalit workers in a temple in New Jersey, Indian construction workers being “exported” to a war-torn Israel, death of Indians in war conflicts and other such incidents, snaps you into the world of exploitation that the documented or undocumented Indian emigrants are facing in other countries.

Dalit Workers at Hindu Temple in US

It was in 2021, when reports of workers belonging to the Dalit community being exploited at a temple construction site in New Jersey surfaced, where the workers were deemed to be ‘volunteers’ on R-1 (religious) visas. The Akshardham temple of Robinsville, New Jersey is allegedly the largest Hindu temple outside India. During the construction of this temple which went on for over a decade, Dalit workers were being brought to New Jersey on religious visas and exploited for their labour.

Over 200 Indian workers were forced to work for 87 hours a week, for \$450 a month, and were living

and working in a fenced compound guarded by security guards. They were not allowed to leave the premises unaccompanied, and lived in crowded trailers that were hidden on the 162-acre property of the temple. The workers, who would be summoned to work through a siren at 6.30 AM, would work 13 hours a day, come rain or snow, with one day holiday for every 30 to 40 days. The workers were constantly threatened with pay cuts, if they spoke to any visitor. One of the workers was also reported to have died on the work site.

The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) who was found to be in violation of US labour and human trafficking laws had also confiscated the passports of the workers and kept them under constant surveillance. The sanstha was booked for violation of state labour laws, Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the Fair Labour Standards Act. Ironically, this temple was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in October 2023.

Kafala system in the Gulf

When 49 workers died in a fire tragedy due to a short circuit in a labour accommodation in Mangaf, southern Kuwait, the all-pervasive ‘Kafala system’, which is made up of “complex laws and practices that ensure state and citizens hold all the power, while migrant workers are treated as temporary, even if the dependency on their labour is near-permanent”, was brought forth yet again. Of Kuwait’s population, 70% or 4.3 million of them are foreigners, and whereas other Gulf states, including Saudi, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait, put together houses 35 million migrant workers, i.e., 10% of

all international migrants. Indians constitute the single largest group amongst them.

Labour accommodation of these migrant workers has been a hot topic for years, with concerns of overcrowding, lack of safety and unhygienic environment, thus making its working-class residents vulnerable to all sorts of risks. Prime example was during the outbreak of covid-19, where the countries in the Middle East struggled to contain its spread in these labour accommodations. Kuwait deported thousands of workers at the height of the pandemic in April 2020 due to their highly discriminatory practices. It is not just the construction workers who are vulnerable and exploited in this part of the world, but domestic workers, who constitute 27% of the workforce in Kuwait are not only exploited, but are excluded from protection of any labour laws and are among the most marginalized of the migrant population.

Conviction of the Billionaires

The conviction of four members of the Hinduja family and their business manager for exploiting the domestic workers at their mansion in Geneva is the epitome of the unabashed feudal and casteist oppression. While the Hinduja themselves migrated to Europe to expand their business prospects, their treatment of Indian workers denotes the class contradiction that this article is attempting to highlight.

The Hinduja family was accused of seizing workers’ passports, preventing them from leaving the premises, forcing them to work long hours for minimal pay that was allegedly transferred to Indian bank accounts with no access. Workers

reported a “climate of fear” and said that they were forced to work 18 hours a day, for seven days a week, without statutory holiday, and were made to sleep in the basement on mattresses. The Swiss Court found that they were guilty of providing unauthorized employment, offering minimal health benefits and paying wages which was less than one-tenth of the standard rate for such jobs in Switzerland.

Italy’s Notorious Caporolato System

Satnam Singh, a 31-year-old Indian farm labourer, was the 100th migrant worker to die in Italy this year. He was dumped in front of his house by his employer, after he suffered grievous injuries when he was sucked into a heavy machine on the farm leaving him with a severed arm and crushed legs. Satnam, an illegal migrant worker from Punjab, is one among the 32,000 Indians living in Agro Pontino, which is known as the hub for greenhouse farming of olives and melons, that sees a high labour demand throughout the year. It is said that there were almost 3,62,000 documented migrant workers in agricultural sector in Italy by 2022, which amounts to 32% of their farm workforce. News reports have stated that if undocumented workers were to be taken into consideration, the estimates would go up from 32% to 50%.

Italy’s notorious Caporolato system, where “gangmasters, who act as middlemen in the agricultural sector, recruit immigrant labourers and subject them to poor wages and working conditions”, makes it one of the most exploitative labour markets. With their passports confiscated by these gangmasters, the illegal migrant workers often get caught in debt bondage, as

the workers were provided with loan incentives to migrate to Italy. Once they reach Italy, workers live in crammed rooms or in discarded containers/sheds, which are often without any toilet facilities, and for which they even pay rent! They work about 8 to 12 hours a day for about 3 to 4 Euros, i.e., Rs. 350 an hour.

Satnam had reached Napoli in Italy through the illegal route with help from agents who would've fed stories of a life of plenty in Italy.

Trapped in Cambodia

Over 5,000 Indians were defrauded and sent to Cambodia, where they are now being held against their will and forced to carry out cyber frauds on people back in India! The Mumbai police arrested two persons in connection with defrauding Indians by offering high paying jobs in Thailand. However, these workers were instead taken to Laos and forced to commit cyber crimes. The fraudulent companies took away their passports and made them work 12 hours a day. When anyone refused to work, they were assaulted, treated to electric shocks and solitary confinement. The Ministry is working to bring back these migrants, and three people from Bengaluru have already been rescued and brought back. The

government has estimated that the trapped migrants were forced to dupe people back in India of at least Rs. 500 crores in the past six months.

Indians Workers in War Zones

About 35 Indian migrants who were promised jobs in Russia, ended up being sent to fight against Ukraine after being trained for combat. The Indians who were recruited as “army helpers” by agents soon had their passports confiscated and forced to fight on behalf of Russia. Their calls for help through the Indian embassy fell on deaf ears. In 2014, 40 Indian construction workers went missing in war-torn Iraq and were suspected to have been taken away by ISIS, and whose calls for help had gone unheard by the authorities. In March 2018, 38 of their bodies were found in a mass grave.

The Israel-Indian bilateral ties has yet again pushed thousands of workers to go to Israel for construction jobs. The Indian government proudly proclaimed that it was “exporting” 42,000 workers to Israel, who would actually replace Palestinian workers. Indian workers who are eager to take up a job, despite the war, are attracted by the high salaries offered which is 10 times

more than what they can earn in India, i.e., about Rs. 1.5 lakh per month! But at the same time, it is also true that many workers are spending their entire savings to get such employment through brokers and agents. Upon arrival in Israel, they have realized that the working conditions and the political climate has endangered their lives.

Fend for Yourselves: A Message by the BJP Govt

While a staggering number of Indians are renouncing their citizenship and claiming permanent residency or citizenry of other countries for better economic prospects, education, quality of life, among other reasons, the working-class international migrant workers are having to choose between the frying pan and the fire.

The workers in the country are facing a complete assault on their rights and livelihoods due to the anti-working-class policies of the BJP-led Union Government – be it the anti-worker labour codes, the unprecedented levels of unemployment or the communal-casteist-misogynistic assault on Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, women and other oppressed sections. On the other hand, there is no respite from the exploitation and fraud they have to face when they migrate to other countries in search of a better life, or to escape the oppression within the country. This is despite being equipped with the knowledge of severe exploitation and precarious living & working conditions. The BJP Government has resolved to turn the workers of this country into slaves, whether within or outside India.



A group of seven Indians duped and forced to work in Russian Army released two videos in March 2024 seeking the government's help to return to India.

The article was first published in Workers Resistance July 2024 Issue ■

By-poll Results and Challenges Ahead

When thirteen Assembly seats go for by-polls just a few weeks after the Lok Sabha elections and the BJP manages only a couple of narrow wins, the by-poll results can surely be seen as a reconfirmation of the 2024 mandate. The results acquire added significance in view of the Modi regime's arrogant rejection of the spirit of the mandate as reflected in the attitude and announcements of the government and the renewed spate of moblynchings and bulldozer demolitions aimed at intimidating the people.

Six of these thirteen seats witnessed a direct contest between the Congress and the BJP and it is noteworthy that the Congress managed to win four of those direct contests. The BJP also had considerable stake in the Assembly by-polls in West Bengal where it lost all four seats to the ruling TMC. Three of these seats were held by the BJP in the 2021 elections and even in the 2024 parliamentary elections the party had won the respective Lok Sabha seats.

The most significant by-election results came from Uttarakhand. In Badrinath, one of the iconic centres of Hindu pilgrimage and probably the most cogent symbol of corporate-driven precariousness and destruction of the Himalayan environment, the by-election was necessitated by the defection of the local Congress MLA to BJP. Fighting on a BJP ticket, the defector got a resounding rebuff from the electorate. In another Assembly segment in Haridwar, it was reassuring to see a Muslim candidate of the Congress win in

the face of brazen harassment of Muslim voters by an openly partisan administration.

This growing electoral support for INDIA actually reflects a strong popular desire for change. The ten years of Modi government have meant unprecedented corporate plunder, communal hate and cruel, repressive governance, an economic and social disaster that has been taking a huge toll on every front of life. Manipur has been burning for a year; corruption in the education-examination system has become so rampant that every examination today runs the risk of being cancelled or deferred; railway travel has become nightmarish and increasingly unsafe for common passengers in spite of continuing hike in fares, and bridges are collapsing like nine pins in a 'double-engine-driven' state like Bihar. Chaos is fast becoming the order of the day.

Just as he has been garnishing this chaos with his frequent foreign trips as a self-styled 'global leader' during the first two terms, Modi began his third term with a trip to Italy in June and another to Russia and Austria in July. Modi landed in Russia just hours after massive Russian bombing killing at least 41 people in Ukraine including several in a children's hospital in Kyiv. While the Modi propaganda machine lauds the PM for 'halting' Russia's war on Ukraine, India has actually been funding the war by importing crude oil from Russia. And while the benefits of the discounted oil imports have not been passed on to common Indian consumers, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance has

been minting money exporting the refined petro products back to Europe!

If Modi's foreign policy mocks the global cry for peace by prioritising friendship with Israel and Russia, two of the world's most warmongering regimes at present, over everything else, his domestic policies continue to promote the interests of crony capitalists at the cost of any concern for people's livelihood and environmental protection. The most vulgar display of corporate power in India came in the form of the extended wedding celebration of the youngest scion of the Ambani dynasty. Earlier this year the government turned Jamnagar into an international airport to facilitate the pre-wedding celebration and now in July the Maharashtra government blocked some Mumbai roads for the wedding celebration.

In one of his 2024 election rally speeches, Narendra Modi famously talked about tempo loads of sacks filled with black money being moved from Adani and Ambani headquarters to the Congress office. It was however, apart from the Left, only the Congress leadership - President Mallikarjun Kharge and the Gandhi-Nehru family - that honourably stayed away from this obscene celebration of opulence. It was shocking that at a time when farmers are fighting against corporate takeover of agriculture and India is reeling under historic levels of economic inequality, a private wedding celebration of the richest Indian family was inflicted on the people as an event of highest national significance and several parties of the opposition INDIA bloc too endorsed this obscene exhibition of corporate power by the presence of their leadership.

Ambedkar had identified economic

and social inequality as the biggest enemy of political equality in our parliamentary democracy. Currently the level of economic inequality in India is worse than the colonial era. In terms of distribution of wealth and income, the richest 1% today accounts for 40.1% wealth and 22.6% income. The regressive tax system only reinforces this extreme inequality. Nearly two-thirds of the total GST comes from the bottom half of the population, one-third from the middle 40% and only 3-4% from the top 10%. Yet the issue of wealth and inheritance tax was distorted and twisted by Narendra Modi himself in the 2024 elections to generate a false scare that any such idea is a conspiracy against the poor.

As we prepare for the forthcoming round of Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand, it is important to grasp the battle for social equality and justice and the concern and struggle for economic equality and justice as an integral whole. In his own political evolution Ambedkar always combined the two aspects of equality and justice in his ideas and struggles and this unity is also reflected in the Preamble to India's Constitution. The electoral successes of INDIA coalition should inspire more and more forces to uphold the holistic politics of equality and justice and resist the trident of fascist aggression on all fronts - corporate loot and assault on people's livelihood and welfare, communal hate and assault on India's diversity and composite culture, and erosion of political liberty and assault on the basic spirit and values of the Constitution. ■

A Tale of Two Elections: *Kudos to the People of France for Stalling the Fascist Surge*

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

In April and May 2024 it was testing time for India and the world was watching us. On 4 June as the BJP juggernaut was stopped at 240, democracy lovers across the world heaved a mild sigh of relief. But just when India seemed to have succeeded in pushing the fascist forces back at least partially, elections to the European Parliament recorded a major surge of the xenophobic far-right in country after country. The AfD in Germany, RN in France and the ruling 'Brothers of Italy' and similar far-right parties across Europe made major gains in the early June European elections. The centrist Emmanuel Macron regime of France took note of this ultra-nationalist far-right surge and ordered snap parliamentary elections on June 30 and July 7. Meanwhile, UK elections were already scheduled on July 4 and the whole world is now busy decoding the tale of two elections.

In the French system, a win is not validated till the winner secures more than 50 percent of the votes in a constituency and hence elections are held in two rounds. The first round of elections held on 30 June placed the fascist RN as the emerging pole winning 38 of the 76 declared seats (the remaining 501 of the 577 seats went for the second round). The Left, fighting unitedly under the banner of the New Popular Front (NFP), finished second and the ruling centrist alliance Ensemble was pushed down to the third position. Showing great alertness, tactical flexibility and political maturity, the NFP arrived at an electoral understanding with Ensemble to avoid any split in the anti-fascist vote in the second round. As many as 130 NFP candidates and 82 Ensemble candidates dropped out to facilitate this anti-fascist electoral consolidation.

The result is before all of us. In a hung parliament, the NFP has emerged as the biggest bloc with 188 seats followed by the centrist Ensemble alliance with 161 seats while the fascist RN got stuck in the third position with 142 seats. This is however only a temporary respite from the threat of an outright fascist takeover in France. For the young RN leadership (party president Jordan Bardella is not yet 30 while the party's presidential nominee Marine Le Pen is also in her fifties), it is merely a case of their victory being deferred. France also does not have much history of durable centre-left coalitions and it remains to be seen how the NFP and Ensemble tackle the hung parliament situation. In contrast to France, the UK elections have predictably brought the Labour Party back to power after a prolonged disastrous reign of Conservative rule that lasted for fourteen years. But a closer look will suggest that like France, neighbouring Britain is also dogged by the challenge of far-right resurgence.

In terms of votes, the Labour Party polled less votes this time than in the last two elections in 2017 and 2019 and yet its tally of seats went past 400 in a house of 650. A major reason is a massive drop in Conservative



vote share and almost a matching rise in the vote share of the far right Reform party. But under the current leadership of Keir Starmer, the Labour Party itself has taken a pronounced rightward turn, not just in economic policy direction but more crucially by competing with the Conservatives in adopting anti-migrant rhetoric and by expressing support for Israel's war on Gaza and refusing to back the global call for a permanent ceasefire. Leftwing erstwhile Labour voters therefore voted for independent left and pro-Palestine candidates and Green Party candidates in many places. In contrast, the NFP in France upheld the Left agenda in terms of both economic and social policies as well as an internationalist foreign policy, especially in the context of Israel's war on Gaza and Palestine.

The interlude between the two world wars and the second world war saw the ravages of war and the destruction wrought by the venomous violence of fascism created unprecedented trauma and devastation in Europe. Europe and the whole world had to pay an incalculable human cost to end this

fascist devastation. The trauma of the holocaust which claimed six million lives and threatened to exterminate Jews as a community made the whole world wake up to the danger of anti-semitism and fascism. But the renewed surge of neo-fascism in Europe shows that the current phase of acute crisis of capitalism, accentuated by the ravages of the Covid pandemic, the war on Ukraine, the climate crisis and escalating cost of living, is once again giving rise to an upswing of fascist politics, this time built on the acute racism, Islamophobia and anti-migrant hate which has been encouraged and promoted by mainstream right wing parties.

In a quirk of history Israel is now invoking anti-semitism as an alibi to suppress the Palestinian quest for freedom and to try to silence the global solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Western military support for Israel's brutal occupation of Palestine as a bulwark for imperialist plunder in the Middle East and beyond, and the West's clampdown on solidarity with Palestine is legitimized both by the shared ideology of

Islamophobia and by an attempt to appropriate the popular revulsion against antisemitism to shield Israel's ongoing fascist expedition.

It is quite similar to the Modi regime's attempt to use decolonization as a shield to justify its assault on democracy and its constitutional foundation and hurl the accusation of 'Hinduphobia' and treason at every criticism of the regime's fascist agenda and aggression. Just as we in India are resisting this fascist offensive by upholding the Constitution and democracy and the anti-colonialist anti-imperialist legacy of India's freedom movement and advancing the people's quest for an egalitarian socio-economic order, the Left in Europe is also renewing its historic role as the core force against fascism. France, the land which had issued the clarion call of liberty, equality and fraternity way back in 1789 and which had also produced the first glimpse of socialism through the historic Paris Commune of 1871, is once again emerging as a key theatre of anti-fascist resistance with the Left as the leading player. ■

UK Elections: Labour's 'Loveless Landslide' Amid Far-right Growth

▲ LONDON CORRESPONDENT

The 4th of July saw the end of 14 years of increasingly chaotic Conservative Party rule in Britain. The Tories presided over an unprecedented rise in inequality and poverty, with an estimated 4 million children going to school hungry, growing numbers of households dependent on foodbanks to survive, and the return of malnutrition-related diseases in one of the richest countries in the world, where the spoils of colonialism continue to be augmented by ongoing imperialism. The horrors of Tory incompetence, callousness, lies and blatant corruption during the Covid-19 pandemic were still fresh in voters' minds and the cost of living crisis showed no sign of abating. But the clearly-signposted victory of Keir Starmer's Labour Party has been nothing to celebrate.

Labour's campaign was mainly about two things – proving to those still in doubt that, from Gaza policy to workers' rights, Starmer is indeed the polar opposite of his progressive predecessor as Party leader, the veteran leftist Jeremy Corbyn, and showing that the Party is now as happy as the Tories to openly embrace dog-whistle racist and Islamophobic politics in its corporate-backed quest for power. Yet all these efforts actually won Labour a smaller number of votes than Corbyn-led Labour had won in 2017 or even in the 'disastrous' 2019 elections held in the wake of the massive smear campaign which

branded Corbyn antisemitic for his steadfast support for Palestine.

In an election with the second-lowest turnout since 1918 and the smallest combined vote share for the two main parties since 1945, the real shift which delivered Labour its majority of 411 out of 650 seats in 2024 was the splitting of the right-wing vote. A substantial chunk of disillusioned Conservative voters turned to the far-right Reform party – the latest project of Nigel Farage who first rose to notoriety with his anti-migrant venom during the Brexit campaign – a development which mirrors the rise of the far-right across Europe, although an alarming vote share of nearly 15% resulted in only five MPs for Farage's party.

Keir Starmer's repeated assertions that there 'is no money' (for public spending) and the relieved exclamation by some mainstream media commentators that 'the adults are back in charge' reflect the reality that the new government is very much a regime of what Tariq Ali called the 'extreme centre'. It will bring a veneer of efficiency and order to the ongoing facilitation of the ruthless pursuit of profits

by corporate capital, including the stripping and sale of what remains of the public sector and the flagship National Health Service in particular, and further attacks on working class livelihoods in the name of 'sensible' fiscal policy. Close alliance with Israel and the US, an unshakeable commitment to NATO imperialism, and plans to further reinforce the border apparatus against refugees and migrants are some of the hallmarks of the new government.

Days after assuming office Starmer has already announced plans to increase defence spending to meet the threat posed by a "deadly quartet" of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. None of this is surprising when Keir Starmer himself has been a member, alongside two former heads of the CIA, of the Trilateral Commission, an organization linked to US intelligence and dedicated to promoting corporate power, and Starmer and no less than 12 out of his 24 cabinet members have taken donations from pro-Israel lobbyists.

A glimmer of hope however comes from the victories of independent candidates, Greens and other progressives, who along with a handful of Labour left MPs who have survived Starmer's purges, can potentially form a counterweight to the inexorable rightward pull in Parliament. Jeremy Corbyn finally stood as an Independent, after he was blocked from standing for



Labour, and won a sweeping victory in Islington North from the people he has represented since 1983, with 24,120 votes to 16,873 for Labour's candidate, the private health care entrepreneur Praful Nargund. The leading role played by Corbyn, a lifelong supporter of the Palestinian people, in the movement against Israel's war on Gaza has further increased his popularity, but the genocide and the huge and broad-based grassroots movement against it also threw up several new independent candidates who drew support from voters appalled by Labour's loyalty to Israel.

Starmer initially insisted that cutting off water and electricity to Gaza was consistent with 'Israel's right to defend itself' and later refused to engage with the ICJ ruling on genocide, and calculatedly sabotaged a Parliamentary motion calling for a ceasefire. Pro-Palestinian independent candidates succeeded in defeating sitting Labour MPs in Leicester South, Blackburn, Birmingham Perry Bar, and Dewsbury and Batley, all of which are constituencies with significant Muslim communities. Starmer himself put the nail in the coffin of the Labour candidates with an overtly racist speech on the eve of the election in which he specifically targeted people from Bangladesh as 'illegal' migrants who would be 'sent back' by his government, while Jon Ashworth, MP for Leicester South went a step further, referring to 'people from the Indian sub-continent' as targets for deportation. Ashworth, a shadow cabinet minister, was roundly defeated by Shockat Adam, an independent candidate of Indian origin, who along with other Independent MPs is already challenging the new government not only on Palestine but also on domestic issues such as the new

government's refusal to scrap the cap on welfare benefits for families with more than two children, a major driver of child poverty.

Elsewhere, Starmer's health secretary Wes Streeting, a notorious advocate for privatization in the NHS as well as a committed Zionist, found his majority slashed to a mere 500 by a 23-year old Palestinian candidate, Leanne Mohamed, and even Keir Starmer's own constituency witnessed an 18% swing away from the PM-in-waiting to left-wing, pro-Palestinian independent candidate Andrew Feinstein, a South African who served in Mandela's cabinet and is the son of a Holocaust survivor.

While Starmer arrogantly dismissed the significance of the loss of votes in Muslim communities which have traditionally voted Labour – pointedly ignoring journalists' questions about it, he has now tried to exert damage control by backing a ceasefire while refusing to do the one thing which would make this meaningful – stop Britain arming Israel - or even to recognize the Palestinian state. His pointed silence on Israel's bombings of five separate schools and multiple massacres in Gaza in the days following the election, even as he condemned Russia's attack on a children's hospital in Ukraine underlines that there will be no change in the starkly unequal valuation of racialized lives under a new government. Instead, in time-honoured fashion, he is busy setting up alternative Muslim bodies which will toe the Party line.

Meanwhile there is no sign that the Gujarati Hindu communities which are the main base for Hindutva in the UK are shifting back to Labour en masse, despite Keir Starmer's overtures to Hindutva organisations and Hindutva-

affiliated temples and the Labour Party's abandonment of a mildly critical stance on Kashmir and ditching of its commitment to anti-caste discrimination legislation. Hindutva organisations like Insight UK are still mourning the loss of their darling Rishi and eulogizing his 'graceful' demeanour on the Opposition benches. But they are also clearly gearing up to get the fabricated notion of 'Hinduphobia' more extensively recognized under the new government, with pro-Hindutva Labour figures like MPs Barry Gardiner (the recipient of a Padma Shri in 2020 along with rabidly rightwing Tory MP Bob Blackman) and Navendu Mishra, as well as Manoj Ladwa who served in Modi's PR team in 2014, at their service. Ever alive to the links between Zionism and Hindutva, they no doubt see the Starmer government's committed pro-Israel stance as an encouraging sign in this regard.

Despite the change of guard in the UK, as the genocidal war on the Palestinian people continues unabated, there is no let-up in the massive solidarity movement for a Free Palestine which has gripped Britain, from student encampments to small-town rallies, direct action at arms factories supplying Israel to Jewish anti-Zionist-led occupations of railway stations, and of course ongoing national demonstrations of hundreds of thousands surrounding Parliament. This movement not only continues to hold the powerful to account, it has also, perhaps for the first time, made it inescapable that you cannot be on the left in Britain without being a committed anti-imperialist. The multiple connections which are being made in the context of this new kind of politics are, one can hope, pointing to the possibility of genuine transformative change. ■

French Elections : Antifascist Victory and Deep Political Crisis

▲ JOHN MULLEN



Many thousands of antifascists celebrated all night in rallies around the country on Sunday evening, as the news came through of the second round election results in France.

It had been widely feared that the far-right National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella,

would be forming a government this week. Instead they were beaten back into third place, with 143 MPs (including their close allies). The left electoral alliance, named the New Popular Front, came first with 182 MPs (and they can count on the 13 “other Lefts” to vote with them). Macron’s group got 168. A parliamentary majority is 289.

Millions of people are feeling tremendous relief. It is not only the results which are important, but how they were won – through the most dynamic left campaign in many decades, involving tens of thousands of new activists, large sections of civil society, widespread door to door work, hundreds of rallies and marches, and a dizzying variety of events, initiatives and appeals to vote for radical change and against fascism. The whole country has heard the arguments about how it is possible to tax the rich, rebuild our hospitals and schools, and fight against sexist violence and against racism, antisemitism and islamophobia.

And the radical section of the NPF – the France Insoumise (France in Revolt) – obtained very high scores in multiethnic working class areas, resulting in the election of many fine MPs: class fighters who are light years away from some of the grey apparatchiks we are used to. These include Raphaël Arnault, co-founder of The Young Guard, a dynamic antifascist organization that was set up a few years ago. There is also Sebastien Delogu, a taxi driver who led the campaign against the uberisation of the profession as well as Aly Diouara, originally from The Gambia, who is very active as a town councillor in the working class suburbs of Paris and a local leader of the campaign against the genocide in Gaza. Alma Dufour is also worth mentioning, who is known as a leader of direct action campaigns against Amazon.

Deep crisis

But with this election, France has been plunged into a deep political crisis which will last for some time. The situation contains many dangers, but also many opportunities. Every political configuration is fragile and every

tactic and strategy contested. There will be swings and turns and turncoats (motivated by panic or worse) and some will act better politically than we thought they would. We must concentrate on the key elements, not on details of tactics, in order to understand what is new and what is possible.

The electoral alliance, the New Popular Front, encouraged by huge pressure from below, has brilliantly succeeded in stopping a fascist government. This was done through unity and through the inspiration provided by a radical programme. This result justifies the alliance, and the compromises it required, however fragile the NPF may be in the future.

The Rassemblement national activists are demoralized and depressed this week, as they gained only half the MPs they were hoping for. But they still have fifty five more than at the last parliamentary elections. The present relative setback for the far right must be used as a jumping off point to push the fascists back. The hundreds of thousands involved these last three weeks must remain mobilized.

What happens now?

No grouping has a majority in parliament, and the Constitution forbids new parliamentary elections for 12 months. There appear to be three possibilities: a minority left government, a right-left coalition or a government of appointed experts.

Left leaders have declared their desire to form a minority government. This might have difficulty passing laws, but some NPF policies, such as reining in police violence, increasing the minimum wage, and price freezes on basic necessities do not require new legislation. Of course, the

pressure from bosses and the media will be unprecedented and the mobilization of workers to ensure our interests are defended is essential. Many NPF supporters understand that a left government must not be given carte blanche. There are, this week, attempts to establish networks of local Popular Front committees to maintain radical engagement of large numbers of people.

Most of the right, aided by a strong media campaign, would prefer a coalition “national union” government, including parts of left and right: including everyone, indeed, except for the France Insoumise and the Rassemblement national. Fear of chaos and disorganization is being used to try to persuade people that this is a reasonable project.

Several leading Macronists are pushing for this idea, and some leaders from the Socialist Party, Communist Party and Greens are saying it should be considered. They may be joined by a small number of France Insoumise MPs led by François Ruffin who are breaking away from the FI, looking for a more “moderate” less left wing option. “We need to calm things down” said Ruffin. This group are pretending that the problem is Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s personality and are joining in the vast smear campaigns against him.

A left-right coalition government would be a disaster for working people. Abandoning the radical measures which people need to reduce misery and improve our schools, hospitals and working conditions, such a government would bring rapid and deep disappointment, and practically guarantee a far-right government in a few years’ time. The France Insoumise has refused this option,

and all honest sections of the Left must do so, too. For the moment, Olivier Faure, leader of the Socialist Party, has ruled out such a coalition. Marine Tondelier, head of the Greens, is less clear.

Other commentators are speaking of the nomination of a government of bourgeois “experts” (in Italy at one point they appointed the director of the national bank). This will be presented as a common-sense decision, justified since “foolish politicians” cannot reach a consensus, and because not having a government is “unimaginable”. But how can we imagine that such a government would be on the side of working people?

The crisis is only just beginning. We need to remain mobilized and create structures of vigilance to involve as many as possible of those very large numbers of activists who campaigned for the New Popular Front. These structures must aim at pushing the far right back through mass education, and through mass harassment of all RN events and initiatives.

Do some people have illusions as to what a NPF government can quickly change? Of course they do, this is inevitable. But the way forward is to mobilize against neoliberalism and support a Left government, if one is formed, every time it introduces reforms in our interests, but oppose it immediately if it gives in to the pressure of the dictatorship of profit.

John Mullen is a Marxist activist in the Paris region and a supporter of the France Insoumise. His website is randombolshevik.org.

*The article was first published in **The Left Berlin** (theleftberlin.com)* ■

Far-Right Challenge and the Left-Democratic Response in Europe

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

A Protracted Battle

In April and May 2024, as the Indian people mounted a strong fightback against Hindutva/corporate rule of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the political battle between the far-Right and democratic forces entered a new phase in Europe.

In the elections to the European parliament held between 6 and 9 June, far-Right parties made massive gains. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the National Rally (RN) in France and the ruling “Brothers of Italy” were standout performers. In France, the French President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist grouping received only 14.6% of the votes, finishing nearly 17 points behind Marine Le Pen’s RN. In response, Macron dissolved the National Assembly and called for snap polls.

The first round of elections to the National Assembly held on 30 June placed the fascist RN as the emerging pole, as it won 38 of the 76 declared seats (the remaining 501 of the 577 seats went for the second round). The Left, fighting unitedly under the banner of the New Popular Front (NFP), finished second and the ruling centrist alliance Ensemble was pushed down to the third position.

Showing great alertness, tactical flexibility and political maturity, the NFP arrived at an electoral understanding with Ensemble to avoid any split in the anti-fascist vote in the second round. As a result, the NFP emerged as the biggest bloc with 188 seats followed by the

centrist Ensemble alliance with 161 seats while the fascist RN got stuck in the third position with 142 seats. The fascist advance was temporarily stalled but with 125 seats the RN emerged as the single largest party in the National Assembly.

Elections were due in Britain as part of the usual 4-year cycle. The elections brought the Labour Party back to power after a prolonged Conservative Party rule that lasted for fourteen years. But a closer look will suggest that like France, neighbouring Britain is also dogged by the challenge of far-Right resurgence. Although the Labour Party’s tally of seats went past 400 in a house of 650, in terms of votes, the Labour Party polled less votes this time than in the last two elections in 2017 and 2019.

A major reason is a massive drop in Conservative vote share and almost a matching rise in the vote share of the far-Right Reform party. Reform won five seats in the House of Commons, with a 14.3% share of the vote and its leader Nigel Farage, who had promised to send all immigrants back across the English Channel from their last point of departure, entered Parliament.

Crucially, under the current leadership of Keir Starmer, the Labour Party itself has taken a pronounced rightward turn, not just in economic policy but more crucially by competing with the Conservatives in adopting anti-migrant rhetoric, by expressing support for Israel’s war on Gaza and by refusing to back the global call for a permanent ceasefire.

Many Leftwing erstwhile Labour voters voted for independent Left and pro-Palestine candidates and Green Party candidates in many places. In contrast, the NFP in France upheld the Left agenda in terms of both economic and social policies as well as an internationalist foreign policy, especially in the context of Israel’s war on Gaza and Palestine.

Thus, while the far-Right has made important inroads – both electoral and ideological – it has also been challenged by a resurgent Left within mainstream parties/alliances as well as outside them as independent democratic voices. These developments carry important messages for the Indian Left, due to the structural similarities between Right-wing parties in Europe and India, and because of the necessity of global Left-democratic solidarities in thwarting fascism’s global designs.

Immigration, Neo-Liberalism and Right-Wing Populism in Europe

The question of immigration, more than any other issue, unites the far-Right parties in Europe. Much like the Hindu nationalists in India, these parties stoke the fear of small numbers among the majority non-immigrant white population, and draw upon racist sentiments that date back to the heyday of colonialism to create an atmosphere of xenophobia and racism.

Rampant Islamophobia, and a clear identification with Western imperialism and Zionism, are other

key ideological strands that far-Right parties tend to share. They are resolutely together in defending Israel; ready to dismiss any criticism of Zionism as antisemitism. These parties consistently portrayed pro-Palestine NFP leader Jean-Luc Melenchon as antisemitic, much like what the Right-wing elements in Britain did to Jeremy Corbyn in the lead up to the 2019 general election.

The rise of the far-Right in Europe is in tune with increasing authoritarian and non-democratic trends throughout the world. And the Right has been building toward this moment over the past 15 years: Right-wing parties have been steadily gaining influence in Europe since the AfD started in 2013, and Marine Le Pen of France took over leadership of the National Rally (formerly National Front) in 2011.

For decades after World War II, though right-wing parties existed they were quite fringe and were deeply associated with fascism and Nazism. Over the past decade, as the memories of the world war became more remote and Europe has faced multiple overlapping crises including the increasing rates of immigration, the economic crisis of 2008-09, and the Covid-19 pandemic, Right-wing parties have steadily increased their presence. They have cleverly used these crises to normalize themselves and strengthen their hold over their societies.

The adoption of neo-liberal policies by centrist parties under the garb of a post-ideological politics in the 1990s played a major role in enabling the rise of the far-Right. Let's take the example of Germany. Areas with higher unemployment and lower education inhabited primarily by non-immigrant white communities have emerged as core support bases for the far-Right.

Increasing inequality and lack of trust in the government, coupled with the systematic delegitimization of Left-wing critical discourse on neoliberalism, have obscured the reasons behind peoples' miseries. Anti-establishment sentiments against the centrist forces have led to growing electoral support for the far-Right.

In France, the National Rally has adopted a populist rhetoric on the economy to convert the discontent against Macron's neoliberal policies into votes for themselves. Rhetorically, sometimes they sound even Leftist, but in real terms they oppose indiscriminate globalization only so far as French corporates need protection. The RN promises to end the job crisis, not by strengthening the public sector but by throwing immigrants out of work and out of the country. Macron's policies have led to job cuts, decrease in public spending, and reduction in social security especially pensions. In the midst of state-created artificial scarcity, and the resultant sharp competition for resources, the RN claims to protect the right of the ethnic French to the national resources over the rights of immigrants.

Macron not only adopted neoliberal policies but also used authoritarian measures such as banning protests, using state violence against dissenters and using constitutional tricks to push ahead with unpopular policies. At the same time, Macron and his allies went to great lengths to demonize the Left. Thus, in multiple ways the centrists have enabled the shift towards the far-Right.

While the centrist parties lean on the Left and expect the Left to do their best to hold off the far-Right, they seem unwilling to let the Left govern, or to even share power with the Left. Even now, Macron is doing his level best to thwart the NFP

leader Melancon from becoming the Prime Minister despite the fact that he is the acknowledged leader of the largest parliamentary block.

Emerging Possibilities and Challenges

The developments in Europe are of great significance to India. Indian fascism's lineage intersects with that of the far-Right in Europe. The early Hindu supremacists drew ideological inspiration from Italian fascism and German Nazism. Fast forward to the 21st century: a manufactured sense of "historical wound" inflicted on Hindus by Muslims, and a fear of loss of social and political power of the upper castes to the Dalit Bahujan Adivasi peoples are driving Hindu nationalism forward.

Despite its historical and geographical distinctiveness, Indian fascists and the European Right-wing have a lot in common: majoritarian mindset, xenophobia, hatred, Islamophobia, authoritarian governance, and a violent and exclusionary cultural nationalism. Different degrees of cooperation with big corporations, and enmity with ideologies espousing socio-economic equality – especially Leftist ideologies – also unite the Indian and European Right.

These intersections are well-understood by the fascist forces. They have left no stone unturned to side with each other. The burgeoning friendship between Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni and the Indian Prime Minister is a case in point. Since Meloni's visit to India in 2023, the bilateral relationship has been elevated to the level of strategic partnership in business and defense.

The Indo-Italian friendship is part of a global pattern of far-Right/fascist cooperation based on business and defense at the cost of working-class interests. The Indo-Israeli

friendship, for example, is evidently for the benefit of Indian corporations such as Adani, Ambani, Mahindra and Tata, who are set to profit from India's economic tie-ups within the West Asia Quad consisting of America, Israel, India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This friendship puts the working classes at a great disadvantage, since the Indian government has offered Israel cheap labor in exchange for Israel's participation in defense and economic partnerships.

Right-wing allies all over the world now consider Israel as the frontier zone of conflict between their majoritarian, authoritarian, and corporate models of nation-building on the one hand and pro-people anti-imperialist democratic currents on the other. They have all united in defending Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Under these circumstances, the fight against fascism in India cannot be won on the national plane alone. Indian fascism's European, American and Zionist friends need to be exposed and fought, both in India and abroad. The myth of the Indian Prime Minister being a world leader needs to be destroyed. Indian democratic sections must find friends in other societies that are battling against Right-wing politics. Fortunately, the current developments in Europe are likely to enable new solidarities between Left-democratic ideologies.

The NFP's rise to prominence in France not only as a core constituent of the democratic section but as its leader is a great sign. As are the victories of independent Left candidates in Britain. These victories are incomplete, given a hugely compromised Labour Party's rise to power in Britain, and the NFP shortfall of around 100 seats from the outright majority mark. Yet these victories indicate that ideologically powerful Left-democratic forces can push back the right and also help reorient democracy towards justice, equality and pluralism. These victories tell us that grassroots mobilization and mass movements, and above all uncompromising Leftist resistance, can win. ■

Hardened Battle-Lines in France

Noted Indo-French Leftist documentary film-maker, trade-union activist, and an organizer of Indian Alliance Paris (IAP) Joy Bannerjee speaks to Akash Bhattacharya.

Liberation: We are relieved to see the far-Right electorally thwarted, at least for now, in France. How did the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) come together in such quick time?

Joy Bannerjee: It is indeed amazing to see the major Left parties come together so quickly. But this did not happen in a day. The most important party within the NFP, La France Insoumise (LFI) has been building its strength for a while. It's leader Jean-Luc Melenchon did very well in the last Presidential election.

But just a year ago, all these parties were engaged in bitter debates about ideologies and programs. However, with the far-Right gaining in strength in the European elections, these parties quickly decided that it was time to unite around some core issues such as Emmanuel Macron's unpopular pension reforms, increase of the retirement age from 62 to 64, inflation and price rise. 80% of the French people were opposed to the pension bill and people hated Macron's constitutional tricks to get the bill passed without the approval of the National Assembly.

Not only the LFI, but also the Socialists and the Green Party have been doing well in recent elections. The Communist Party used to be very strong earlier, but have now grown much weaker. The partner trade unions of these parties also played a key part in crystallizing the alliance.

Having said that, there is some disunity within the NFP about the LFI's leadership. The LFI has the maximum seats within the NFP and claims that its leader should be the Prime Minister but President Macron is reluctant to work with the LFI and with Melenchon. Melenchon has openly supported the Palestinian cause and the LFI has taken quite an uncompromising stance in opposing neoliberal policies.

The LFI has been dubbed as the "far-Left" by sections of the mainstream media and by centrist parties, and declared as unfit to govern as the far-Right. Much like Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, charges of antisemitism have been levelled against Melenchon. Under these circumstances, other constituents of the NFP, especially the Socialist Party has urged the NFP to look towards alternative leadership. Raphael Glucksmann of Place Publique is being viewed by many as a more acceptable alternative to Melenchon. That's where things stand as of now.

Is there a longer history of popular movements and solidarities that made this coalition possible?

Yes, there is a longer history. Ever since the so-called Socialist

President Francois Hollande came to power, France has embraced neoliberalism like never before. Hollande and his successor Macron seemed more enthusiastic about market policies than hardened neoliberals. Macron claimed that the age of the Left and the Right was over, and sought to make politics technocratic and post-ideological. This was a garb. Hollande significantly weakened trade unions and workers' rights, while Macron attacked pensions and cut public spending. All these measures were countered with mass mobilizations but these were not very effective in stalling the reforms.

Students, youth, feminists, and activists of various hues played key roles in these movements. The Yellow Jackets movement emerged in November 2018, motivated by rising fuel prices, a high cost of living, and economic inequality. The movement pointed out that a disproportionate burden of the government's tax reforms was falling on the working and middle classes, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. It was a popular grassroots movement, and not led by the Left parties or by trade-unions.

The Left parties and trade unions played a big role in the mobilizations against the increase in retirement age and the pension bill in 2023. That was a Left mobilization in a true sense and it raised a whole range of issues: public education, price rise, rising costs of living, social justice and others. These mobilizations generated a great deal of political momentum and sparked off conversations regarding the necessity of a new kind of politics. Not only the unjust nature of Macron's policies but also the ways in which these



@Le Pictorium

were pushed through a weak parliamentary system generated a lot of anger.

How big a victory is this for the French Left? Is it more a result of clever electioneering or is there mass support for the Left?

The core constituents of the Left coalition – the LFI and the Socialists in particular – have consistently performed well electorally in the recent past. The Communist Party's vote share has declined from 15-16% two decades ago to a meagre 2% now. However, the performance of the LFI and the Socialists indicates the rising popularity of the Left. The LFI has steadfastly refused to compromise on its program – raising the minimum wages, stopping inflation, bringing the retirement age back to 62, reconsidering the pension bill, and others. This has helped them win more votes. So yes, part of the vote is a positive vote for the Left, but much of it is also a negative vote against the far-Right. The understanding between the centrists and the Left after the first round of polls certainly helped transfer votes.

Sticking to its principles, the LFI is dedicated to implementing

its program despite the fact that NFP is short of an absolute majority. However, some other constituents of the NFP are open to collaborations and compromises with centrist parties in order to take power.

Does the NFP have a common program?

Oh yes. There is a very precise 150-point program on which the parties have come together, which includes the program that I just mentioned: minimum wages, inflation, retirement, pension bill, education, social justice and others. And there is a popular pressure on the Left parties to stick together.

I remember back in 2002, when Marine Le Pen reached the second round of the Presidential election, there was a million-strong demonstration against the far-Right but in last week's rally after the Left victory there were only 30-40 thousand people. Something has changed. The National Rally (RN) has managed to make a big impact on civil society and hence a lot of people feel that unless something is done, nothing can stop the far-Right.

Up to last year there was massive animosity within the Left parties,

and some of them made horrible statements about Melenchon. Now this time, common people are telling the Left: don't betray us, stick together.

Which sections does the Left draw its support from?

The trade union support base has unfortunately dwindled. That's partly because both factories as well as the public sector – the two core bases of trade unions have declined. But whatever remains of that base still counts for much; these played a crucial part in the mass demonstrations against the pension reforms. Besides, the LFI launched vigorous campaigns in suburbs and migrant workers' colonies talking about their rights. This has had a great impact on the Algerian, Moroccan and African immigrants in particular. The LFI has also given lots of good speeches in favour of the Palestinian cause. Students, youth, feminists, LGBTQI groups have drawn close to the Left. Thus, the Left has found new takers.

The immigrants are an important section. They live in dire conditions. Their colonies are characterized by poverty, low wages, unemployment and violence. Last year, a 17-year-old school boy, Nahel Merzouk, was shot dead by a police officer during a traffic stop in Nanterre, a suburb of Paris. The incident occurred on June 27, 2023, and sparked widespread protests and riots across France. The LFI launched some good campaigns against police violence and racism. It was clear that the boy was shot solely because he was an Arab, and such attacks are not uncommon.

Immigration is clearly a major issue for the far-Right RN. But what are the other issues they are trying to exploit?

You see, around 20 years ago, the Communist Party was very strong. They had a lot of support among industrial workers but there are very few industries left in France now. The dwindling of the traditional Left support base enabled the rise of the far-Right. In fact, many traditional Left voters shifted allegiances, as the RN began to pose as a protector of working-class interests. Populist rhetoric has played a major role in their rise. They can say anything, and they say it in a way that captures the imagination of the uneducated people.

Above all, it's the anti-immigration sentiment. They blame every problem on the immigrants. Unemployment, poor wages, it's all because immigrants are taking jobs away. France has a good social welfare system implemented by the Popular Front government of 1936 but they say that the immigrants are cornering all the benefits. They say that they will finance their social welfare program by cutting all welfare benefits currently given to migrants. And they are not only against those who are coming now. They are saying that they will pass a bill to determine who is French and who is not, double citizenship will not be allowed, so on and so forth. There are some real fascists in there.

There is also the ongoing debate about secularism. There was a debate on headscarves, and the Right-wing peddled a lot of Islamophobia and stoked anti-Arab, anti-African sentiments. Of course, for them your background does not matter beyond a point; whether you are Arabic, or Indian, or Muslim or Sikh is immaterial, if you are not part of white France. They were hardly supported by the mainstream media but just like

Narendra Modi has used Adani and Ambani to capture media spaces, they have roped in 2-3 major business tycoons and used them to have more influence over the media.

How do you see the far-Right react to this result?

Very important question. They are dissatisfied with the results and quite disappointed. But the fact is 10-11 million out of a population of around 60 million have voted for them. While the NFP may be single-largest block, as a party RN is quite ahead of the rest. They are saying that the election was stolen from them by the "anti-coalition", as not only the Left but also the centrists joined hands to keep the RN and its allies out. The problem now is that Macron is more uncomfortable with the LFI than with the RN and may try to break the Left coalition. This will lead to such a mess that the RN will claim that they are the only party that can govern. That could give them enough support to capture power in the near future.

What next for the NFP?

The NFP has insisted that it should be given a chance to govern and that it will implement its program. However, Macron is stalling Mechelon's appointment; he is more comfortable with the far-Right than with an ideologically committed Left. The centrists and the mainstream media have really vilified Mechelon as antisemite and what not. I really hope that the NFP sticks by Mechelon. He is a great speaker, very well read and articulate. If the non-LFI parties within the NFP dither and the NFP splits that will be a disaster. The NFP must not allow Macron to succeed in destabilizing the coalition. ■

The Big Fat Ambani Wedding and Many Funerals

▲ SATYA SAGAR

The Indian elite has once again proven that when it comes to choosing between saving lives and throwing lavish parties, there's no contest. As the country grapples with heatwaves, floods, collapsing infrastructure, and an ever-widening wealth gap, its billionaires have shown the world what really matters to them: jaw-dropping, bank-breaking weddings.

Yes, I am talking about the recent nuptials of Anant Ambani, son of India's richest man Mukesh Ambani costing an estimated Rs 5,000 crores. The event, surpassed in expense and grandeur, even iconic weddings like Princess Diana and Prince Charles's at Rs 1,361 crore or that of Sheikha Hind Bint bin Maktoum and the ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's at Rs 1,144 crore.

So, while millions of Indians struggle to afford basic necessities, the Ambanis invited guests to witness a spectacle that could have fed a small nation for a year. The guest list at the Ambani wedding read like a Who's Who of global celebrities, business tycoons, and political heavyweights. Nothing, it seems, says "I do" quite like having Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Tony Blair in attendance.

The wedding venue - Jio World Convention Center - with a capacity of 16000 was transformed into a fairy tale wonderland. Flowers were flown in from every corner of the globe, because apparently, India's own flora wouldn't suffice. The carbon footprint of this floral arrangement alone could have powered a small city for a month.

The Ambanis thoughtfully included a "rural Indian village" theme in one of their 51 wedding events - as if the thousands of Indian farmers, who have been staging protests over crop failures and mounting debts for the last several years, existed on some other planet. Obviously, for the Indian uber rich, capturing the essence of rural India requires millionaires dressed in designer "peasant" outfits, sipping champagne from crystal flutes. On the side lines, as if to mock India's shirtless masses, there was also an underwear-clad Justin Bieber, paid a mere Rs. 83 crores, to perform at the wedding's 'sangeet' ceremony.

The details only get worse. It seems the bride Radhika Merchant's trousseau required its own security detail and insurance policy. The value of her jewellery alone could have funded disaster relief efforts for an entire state. The

groom arrived at the venue on a golden chariot pulled by elephants - the medieval transportation method inspired no doubt by how India's ruling party rode to power two decades ago on a DCM Toyota decked up as an ancient chariot.

The wedding feast was a gastronomic extravaganza. Michelin-starred chefs from around the world were flown in to create culinary masterpieces that most guests were too busy networking to actually eat. The leftovers could have fed the poor in all of India's BIMARU states for a month.

And indicating the bankruptcy of the current political and social ethos in the country there were politicians across the ideological spectrum - led by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself - shamelessly queuing up for the golden *dhoklas* and silver *theplas*. To his immense credit Rahul Gandhi did not attend - a statement of hope perhaps that all is not yet lost in the country's opposition space.

In a very touching nod to sustainability, guests were encouraged to offset their carbon emissions by planting a tree. What better way to say "I care about the environment" than flying halfway across the world in a private jet to plant a sapling.

As preparations were underway for this big fat wedding (or was it the big fatso's wedding?) the rest of the nation was at the undertakers, having seen a rash of funerals. Not just the routine, daily deaths of pedestrians and motorcyclists crushed under luxury cars driven by modern



India's 'princelings' – children of rich politicians – there was also the gory hundred plus deaths of rural women killed in a stampede at the feet of 'Bhole Baba' in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh.

Undoubtedly, if it were not for the controversy over the incident this evil Baba too would have made it to the guest list of the Ambanis, who share so much with such spiritual entrepreneurs in their ability to make gullible citizens part with hard-earned money using mumbo-jumbo.

No, there is nothing particularly surprising or shocking about all that I have recounted so far. All this is perfectly normal in the 'New India' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, where most citizens struggle on empty stomachs, while a miniscule few walk with their heads held high, intoxicated by tall tales of reviving ancient cultural glory or avenging imagined insults or defeats from medieval history.

Of course, some might argue that such ostentatious displays of wealth are in poor taste given the stark realities faced by millions of Indians. To them, the cheerleaders of India's foremost crony capitalist in the *godi media* would say: how dare you piss on this billion-dollar parade?

Don't you know that these weddings are a vital part of India's growth story? The Ambanis, after all, are simply doing their part to stimulate the economy. Think of all the jobs created: the army of wedding planners, security personnel, paparazzi, and therapists who'll be counselling the bride's father for years to come. It's trickle-down economics at its finest!

And let's not forget the invaluable soft power such events generate for India on the world stage. Who needs diplomacy when you can simply dazzle world leaders with shiny

objects and free food? It's a master class in international relations. Forget yoga and Bollywood; India's true cultural export is now the art of the over-the-top wedding. As one fawning Indian pink press report put it the Ambanis have proven to be 'pioneers of opulence in the global spotlight'.

After all, what would the common people do without these grand spectacles to distract them from their mundane lives of poverty, hunger, and lack of basic healthcare? These weddings provide hope, inspiration, and endless fodder for gossip columns and social media.

And let's not forget the trickle-down effect of these weddings on the meme economy. The countless jokes, parodies, and satirical articles generated by these events provide much-needed laughter in these trying times. Laughter is the best medicine, especially when you can't afford actual medicine.

Of course, some might claim that if the ultra-rich paid their fair share of taxes, there might be more funds available for public services and disaster relief. But why bother with such 'urban naxal' thoughts when you can create your own private paradise?

And have not the Ambanis, in a stunning display of generosity, announced that they would be donating 0.001% of the wedding cost to charity? That's right, a whole lakh of rupees out of Rs 5000 crores will be going to help those in need. At this rate, India's problems will be solved in no time... give or take a few millennia.

And what about the valuable lessons these weddings teach the common people? They serve as a shining example of what's possible if you just work hard enough, inherit a multi-billion dollar company, exploit natural resources at whim, and have

the right political connections. It's the Indian dream, crystallized in a week-long, multi-million dollar extravaganza!

And as for the regular tragedies that visit the Indian population, they are in fact an 'opportunity' for some creative event planners to set up "disaster-themed" wedding events. Imagine the photo opportunities: the bride and groom posing heroically against a backdrop of simulated flood waters, or exchanging vows in a mock earthquake-ravaged village. It's a great way to raise awareness while still keeping the focus where it belongs - on the happy couple and their bottomless bank accounts.

After all, in a world full of problems, isn't it nice to know that some people have their priorities straight? Here's to the billionaires of India, bravely carrying the torch of conspicuous consumption in a world that desperately needs more gold-plated elephants and fewer boring things like hospitals and schools.

And who knows? Maybe one day, if you work hard enough, sell your soul to the right corporate overlord, and are born into the right family, you too could have a wedding that makes the rest of the world question their life choices. Until then, keep dreaming, keep aspiring, and most importantly, keep watching those wedding videos on loop.

Unless of course, you have the guts and energy to do to these Indian versions of Louis XVI, what the French did to theirs a couple of centuries ago. Make their heads roll on the streets of Mumbai by subjecting them to the cutting edge of social revolution.

Satya Sagar is a journalist and public health worker who can be reached at sagarnama@gmail.com ■

A Minor Hiccup or A Blow to the Hindutva Project in Karnataka?

The Lok Sabha elections has seen an undeniable assertion of the people against the Modi regime resulting in an electoral setback for the BJP, which failed to secure even a simple majority to form the government independently, and having to rely on its NDA allies. A far cry from the clamour for 400+ seats, the reduced victories, diminished margins of victories and a blunted vote share convey an all-India message against the Modi regime. It is in this context that the people's verdict in Karnataka ought to be seen.

In Karnataka, the Lok Sabha elections were being held within one year of the May 2023 Assembly elections, in which the Congress swept aside the incumbent BJP government by winning 135 of the 224 seats. The BJP had won 66 seats and the JD(S) 19 seats. This victory of the Congress was attributed to the dismal performance of the incumbent BJP government as much to its five poll guarantees, which the Congress, on coming to power, has implemented.

Just prior to the battle for the 28 Karnataka seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP tied up with Deve Gowda's JD(S), and allocated 3 seats to the JD(S) in addition to the Bangalore Rural seat which Devegowda's son-in-law, Dr. C. N. Manjunath, fought on a BJP ticket.

The general buzz around the eve of the elections, which were reflected in surveys, was that the Congress would get more seats than the BJP, a prediction that was attributed mostly to the popularity of the guarantee scheme. In 2019, the BJP had swept the polls winning 25 seats, while the Congress and JDS won 1 each, and the remaining seat went to Sumalatha

Ambarish (popular Kannada film star Late Ambarish's wife).

However, the Congress ended up with 9 seats, while the BJP-JDS alliance got 19 seats. In terms of vote share, the BJP-JDS alliance secured more than 51% while Congress got 45.43%. In terms of the various regions in the State, BJP comprehensively won in its traditional strong-holds, the Lingayat-dominated Mumbai-Karnataka region, Bengaluru and the coastal Karnataka, while the BJP-JDS alliance paid effective electoral dividends in the southern part of Karnataka where it won most seats (other than Hassan and the Chamarajanagar seats). Congress, on the other hand swept its stronghold, the backward and impoverished Hyderabad Karnataka region, while picking up a couple of seats in southern Karnataka and one seat in Mumbai-Karnataka. One notable victory for the Congress was Hassan, the family borough of Deve Gowda, where the JDS candidate, Prajwal Revanna accused of sexual assaults of women, was defeated. A significant loss for the Congress was in the Bengaluru Rural seat, which was the only seat the Congress won in 2019. Here state Congress president DK Shivakumar's brother and sitting MP DK Suresh, was swept aside by Dr CN Manjunath by a huge margin of 2.69 lakh votes.

In addition to an increased seat count, the Congress also increased its vote share as well. One would remember that in 2019 the Congress and JDS tied up for the parliamentary elections. In the 2019 elections, Congress (32.11%) and JDS (9.74%) got 41.85% of the vote share. In the 2024 elections, however the Congress increased its vote share to 45.43%. Incidentally this is the highest vote share secured by the Congress since 1989. In fact, Congress's voting share percentage

has increased every parliamentary elections since 2004 (36.8%).

The BJP, which contested 3 seats lesser than in 2019, saw its vote share reduce from 51.75% in 2019 to 46.06% while the JDS, which contested only three seats in 2024, registered 5.6% of the votes compared to the 9.74% votes in 2019 when it contested seven seats.

The vote share numbers for the Congress in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was also a 3% from the 42.88% it got in the May 2023 Assembly elections, while the BJP improved its vote share by 10% from the assembly poll number of 36%.

The question that naturally arises is the social basis of this vote share for the three parties. Congress's victory predominantly in the Hyderabad-Karnataka suggests a consolidation of its vote base among the backward castes, Dalits and minorities and a swing vote from women cutting across communities due to the guarantee schemes of the state government. The BJP, meanwhile prevailed in the Lingayat-dominated Mumbai Karnataka region and in Bengaluru and coastal Karnataka where it has consolidated backward classes and some Dalit vote under the communal agenda of Hindu Rashtra. The victories of the BJP-JDS in the old Mysuru and South Karnataka regions indicate the consolidation of votes of the local Vokkaliga community in favour of the new alliance. According to the CSDS-Lokniti surveys, the rich and the upper middle class continue to back the BJP, while the lower middle class backed the Congress with the poor equally divided between the two.

Having said that, we need to understand the underlying reasons for the failure of the Congress to win more than 9 out of the 28 seats, and the success of the BJP-JDS combine, warrants an understanding as well. Suggestions are that this is a consequence of the consolidation behind the BJP-JDS alliance of the

two dominant castes – Vokkaligas and Lingayats, alongside Brahmins and certain sections of other backward classes (except the Kurubas who remain firmly behind Siddaramaiah and the Congress). Another suggests that the much-lauded guarantees have not delivered votes. The real possibility, however, lies somewhere in between.

It is hardly surprising that guarantees worked for Congress to an extent, particularly in the most backward Hyderabad – Karnataka region for instance, while it also succeeded in securing votes from women cutting across communities. Alongside this is the disgruntled voter base of the JDS that has moved away due to its alliance with the BJP.

On the other hand, these electoral results have confirmed that the BJP and JDS have formed a natural alliance, which will prove dangerous for Karnataka in the long run. The high percentage of vote transfer between the JDS and the BJP only confirms this natural alliance, which is particularly challenging for the electoral prospects of the Congress since in a majority of the Assembly constituencies, the contest is between the Congress and either BJP or JDS, with the JDS and BJP fighting each other in hardly a couple of constituencies. Moreover what the BJP-JDs combine has achieved is a social alliance between the Brahmins and Lingayats who favour the BJP and the Vokkaligas who prefer the JDS, united under the communal agenda of Hindu Rashtra.

From a purely electoral point of view, these election results indicate an imminent danger for the Congress. The BJP, incidentally, has never come to power in Karnataka with a full majority, the reason being that BJP has failed to draw other communities under its ideological influence. The exceptions are the Mumbai-Karnataka, Bengaluru and Karavalli regions, where the backward classes

have been communalised by decades of RSS work, and are instrumental for BJP's political dominance in these parts. The BJP-JDS combine powered by caste and communal polarisation is going to be formidable in the coming days, going by the fact that this alliance has led in 142 out of the 224 Assembly constituencies in these Lok Sabha elections. Given that the BJP dominates where it successfully merges communal polarisation with caste polarisation, the future holds grave challenges to the secular and social fabric of Karnataka.

A couple of peculiarities about Karnataka, however, indicate that caste and communal ideology are not the sole factor determining voting preferences. Since the 1970s, Karnataka has had a State government different from the party at power at the Centre. Irrespective of whether this is considered political culture, the other peculiarity is that since 1985, Karnataka has never re-elected the incumbent, changing the government every 5 years, and in particular handing out compelling defeats to non-performing governments. This indicates a section of the populace that has still not yet bought into either caste or communal polarisation, and which is not bound to any Party.

Karnataka is crucial to the concerted southern focus of the RSS, which has reaped electoral gains for the BJP. Indeed, in Andhra Pradesh, the BJP had secured lesser votes than NOTA in 2019, but, this time around, has won three seats in alliance with TDP and Jana Sena. In Telangana, BJP has increased its tally from 4 to 8 seats (out of the 17 Lok Sabha seats); this too coming on the heels of a massive Congress victory in the Legislative Assembly elections just a few months ago. BJP had not won a single seat in Kerala till these elections but has now opened its account by winning the Thrissur seat, and securing 16% vote share overall in Kerala. Meanwhile, in Tamil Nadu, the BJP has failed to win any seats, but its vote share has

increased from 3% in 2019, to 11% in these elections.

Having said that, it is undeniable that the gains for the Congress in these elections by increasing its tally from 1 seat to 9 seats, reflects a growing anti-RSS/BJP sentiment in Karnataka. Indeed, large number of individuals and organisations representing Dalits, farmers, and workers came together to articulate their resistance to the BJP's divisive agenda. Civil society organisations and networks ran their own election campaign against price rise, unemployment and the spread of communalism. A key factor that was also highlighted was the step-motherly treatment that Karnataka (and other southern states) are receiving, especially in allocations of central funds.

As such, the mixed mandate in Karnataka while indicating a retreat from the saffron agenda and the rise of voices advocating for federalism, communal harmony and development, also reveals the challenges in ousting the right-wing from the state. The results also serve as a warning to the Congress not to take the populace for granted. Decades of saffronisation in the state has consolidated the acceptance and support for the RSS/BJP particularly in coastal Karnataka, Mumbai-Karnataka and the urban pockets of Bengaluru, Mysuru, and the Dharwad-Hubballi. The BJP-JDS combine presents a new socio-political alliance and programme, which cannot be challenged with guarantees and good governance. On the contrary what is required is a concerted struggles to overcome the economic and social inequality, anti-caste and anti-communal struggles, consolidation of democratic struggles to protect the Constitution and the rights and freedoms of the toiling masses. It is absolutely necessary to take forward this mandate of the people in the necessary battle to deliver a decisive and conclusive blow to fascism. ■

Student Uprising in Bangladesh

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



Bangladesh is witnessing a historic student upheaval. What triggered the unrest was a High Court verdict restoring the old quota system in government jobs, but what has evidently led to the intensification of the movement and its spread like a wild fire across university campuses and district towns of Bangladesh is the government's attempt to suppress the movement by unleashing state terror and extra-judicial violence. Evidently the movement is striking wider chords beyond the student community and the issue of quota and fuelling the deeper urge for democracy and change.

Bangladesh had 56% quota in government jobs - 1% for candidates with disability, 5% for ethnic minorities, 10% for districts, 10% for women and 30% for descendants of liberation war fighters. In 2018 there was a popular movement against this quota framework, especially the 30% reservation for liberation war families which is widely perceived as a partisan political privilege for the ruling Awami League. In the face of this agitation, the Hasina government had drastically changed the quota

system, cancelling all the categories except the 1% quota for people with disabilities and 5% for candidates from ethnic minorities. A legal battle ensued and on June 5 came the High Court order restoring the old system. While the students started protesting, the government too has appealed against the High Court order at the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court verdict is awaited.

Why did the government choose to suppress the students by violent means when the government seems to be in substantive agreement with the students on the quota issue? The number of students killed in state repression and violence perpetrated by state-patronised goons of the ruling party and its student-youth organisations is believed to run into dozens. The video of 25-year-old Abu Sayeed of Begum Rokeya University of Rangpur being shot down by the police has gone viral. To justify this repression the Hasina government has also branded the protesting students as Rajakars, the collaborators who had joined hands with Pakistan during the liberation war of Bangladesh, a label akin to the anti-national tag

routinely invoked by the Sangh brigade against dissenters in India.

The anti-quota discourse in India has a distinct elitist overtone of caste privilege. Merit is invoked as a customary cultural capital of the privileged and increasingly as a commodity meant for appropriation by the rich. In Bangladesh the popular discontent seems to be against partisan misuse of the quota system, nepotism and the ruling party's use of the liberation war as an exclusive political legacy. The main opposition is against quotas for second and third generation descendants of freedom fighters rather than other quotas. And it is not just about the quotas, students in Bangladesh are facing the same kind of corruption in the system of education, examination and recruitment just as Indian students are having to grapple with scam-ridden NEET and UPSC system. And unemployment in Bangladesh is also as severe as in India.

As we go to press the situation seems to be deteriorating rapidly in Bangladesh. The death toll is rising alarmingly, curfew has been clamped down coupled with internet shutdown and talks of military deployment. Given the shrinking democratic space and lack of credibility of recent electoral exercises, the anger of the people is understandably quite explosive. Various forces and tendencies, including diverse fundamentalist streams, are bound to be present in such a broad popular upheaval. Students and secular democratic forces in India of course stand in solidarity with the protesting students of Bangladesh, condemn the state-sponsored violence and wish Bangladesh to find a democratic solution to the current crisis. ■

AISA Condemns the Violence against Students in Bangladesh, issues International Solidarity Call



Protest organised by AISA in Delhi on July 20, 2024 against the state crackdown on students' protests in Bangladesh.

All India Students' Association (AISA) has strongly condemned the brutal violence against students and youth in Bangladesh that took place on July 16, in which six students were killed. AISA national president Nilasis Bose said that "when thousands of students hit their universities and their streets demanding a complete strike down of the discriminatory quota system in government jobs, they were met with violent State repression, not just by the police, but also the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the ruling party Awami League, who have attacked students with rods, sticks and rocks."

The students and youth are protesting against a job quota system that allows for 30% reservation in government jobs,

for the children of freedom fighters of the 1971 war of independence. While there are reservations for women, indigenous communities, people with disabilities and others, the students are specifically opposing the quota for children of war veterans, terming it to be discriminatory and not based on merit. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrogantly labelled those opposing the quota as "razakar" – a term used for those who allegedly collaborated with the Pakistani army during the 1971 war – which prompted more widespread protests.

Bangladesh, which has failed to generate more secure and dignified government jobs, pushed its youth to the brink when it introduced this policy in 2018, which was met with protests at the time and came to be challenged before court. The

Bangladesh High Court recently upheld this discriminatory policy, which triggered the protests.

AISA noted that the lack of dignified jobs and unemployment resonates with the students and youth of India, who too are facing unprecedented challenges such as unemployment, lack of recruitment, paper leaks, massive privatization, contractualisation of jobs, sale of PSUs, among others.

AISA along with several student-youth organisations like Socialist Students' Union and Socialist Youth Union from Sri Lanka, Socialist Alliance from Australia, Young Communist League and SOAS Liberated Zone for Gaza from Britain, Democratic Student Federation from Pakistan, All Nepal National Free Students Union from Nepal, and Socialist Students' Front and Bangladesh Students' Union from Bangladesh have issued a joint statement expressing their solidarity with the fighting students and youth of Bangladesh, who are being hounded and arrested, in their just demand to strike down discriminatory employment policy, in ensuring dignified and secure employment. ■



Protest in Kolkata organised on July 19 in solidarity with Bangladesh student's protest.

CPIML Launches 'Haq Do, Vaada Nibhaao' Campaign in Bihar

CPI(ML) Liberation launched the 'Haq Do, Vaada Nibhaao' (Give us Our Rights, Fulfil Your Promises) campaign at a convention in Patna on July 16th, 2024. The campaign seeks a grant of Rs. 2 lakh to every poor family, land for the landless, pucca houses for all, 200 units of free electricity, MSP for farmers, demands of scheme workers, employment for youth, concerns of migrant workers, rural development, to uphold Indian Constitution and democracy, among other demands that affects the working class people in Bihar.

CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar, who addressed the convention, said that development without employment for all is no development at all. He said, "After the socio-economic survey, the Bihar government announced a financial assistance of Rs. 2 lakh for 95 lakh poor families. There has been no initiative by the government to fulfil this promise. The local administration is not issuing income certificates to those below Rs. 72,000 per annum. This has resulted in a lot of families to be deprived of the benefits of this promise. In August, a movement will be organized all over Bihar in regard to seeking income certificates."

The convention adopted following political resolutions –

1. After the caste-based survey, about 95 lakh poor families in Bihar was to derive benefits of Rs. 2 lakh under the 'Laghu Udyam Yojana'. However, the government's move to reduce the amount to Rs. 72,000, non-issuance of the income certificates of below Rs. 72,000 income and seeking applications online has become a cruel joke. Moreover, important livelihood

activities like animal husbandry is not included in the list of small enterprises issued by the government. Therefore, the convention calls for a state-wide movement on unconditional issuance of income certificates for less than Rs. 72,000 to poor families, collecting applications offline, inclusion of animal husbandry in the list of small enterprises, housing, land and pucca houses for the poor.

2. According to the Niti Ayog report, Bihar is among the last few states in sustainable development. The report has only re-affirmed the socio-economic survey, which exposed the truth of poverty, migration and homelessness, as also the vicious cycle of under-development in Bihar. This is despite Bihar being ruled by the 'double engine' government for a long time. Therefore, a comprehensive policy and special status for Bihar is essential. The convention calls upon the people to demand a special status for Bihar from the Central and State Governments.
3. The collapse of more than 19 bridges in the span of one month amidst the deafening noise of "development" has exposed the criminal negligence and institutional corruption of the government. The State Government cannot escape liability by taking action against a few officials. The convention calls for a high-level probe into the institutionalized corruption.
4. The convention appeals for larger support in the protests being organized between July 22nd and 26th, during which time Bihar Legislative Assembly elections will take place. On July 23rd, AISA will be holding a demonstration against the NEET scam, on July 24th, the Bihar Rajya Vidyalay Rasoiya Sangh will organize a protest and on July 25th, AIARLA will be holding a protest against the bulldozer raj. The convention calls for support to the movement against privatization of railways, for recruitment to vacant posts, increasing number of passenger trains and coaches, etc., being organized by RYA. The convention also expressed its support to the strike called by nursing staff, ambulance workers and sanitation workers.
5. The convention demanded that an SIT be constituted in the Muzaffarpur DBR case in regard to fraud and sexual harassment, arrest of main accused Manish Sinha, high-level judicial probe into the political and administrative protection being extended, refund of money to the youth, and compensation to the victims.
6. The murder of VIP chief Mukesh Sahni's father was condemned. Post the election results, attacks on Dalits and the poor have only increased in Gaya, Nawada, Siwan, Muzaffarpur and other districts.
7. The New Criminal Laws erode civil liberties and were introduced without any debate and at a time when 146 opposition MPs were suspended in the Parliament. This convention calls for the repeal of the draconian laws like UAPA and the provisions in the new laws that equip police with arbitrary powers.
8. The 2024 elections has shown that the Constitution has been upheld by the people of India. The convention is committed to a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic India. ■

No to Eviction of Hawkers and Street Vendors in Kolkata



In the last week of June, an administrative review meeting by the Chief Minister of West Bengal mentioned the issues of Urban Development and 'beautification', encroachments throughout the city landscape, especially in Kolkata and in the adjacent suburbs. The day after the announcements, the police, administration and local authorities began organized crackdown on the street vendors and hawkers in different parts of the state. In Kolkata, places like Esplanade, Hathi Bagan and Gariahat which are conventional market places for the commoners and is constituted mostly by street vendors and small businesses, incurred most damage. Eventually after protest and resistance erupted in many parts of Bengal against the eviction drive, the Chief Minister had publicly announced to grant a period of one month to review the situation and

take action accordingly.

In this time of distress, the left parties and trade unions are standing tall against the bulldozers policies that is wreaking havoc on the lives and livelihood of poor. Be it in Kolkata or in other places, AICCTU and its affiliated Hawkers' federations are vehemently opposing this eviction drive. Calcutta Street Hawker's Federation (an affiliated body of AICCTU) initiated a city-wide campaign and organized marches and protest demonstrations and submitted deputations to the local Police stations in many parts of the city, condemning forced eviction by police and local authority. Trade unions affiliated under AICCTU like Birsulhat Leather Hawker's Union are in the forefront of this struggle.

On 11th July, a joint platform of TUs and Hawker Federations 'Hawker Joutho Mancha' organized

a march to Kolkata Corporation Headquarters and submitted deputation to the Mayor demanding immediate implementation of the central Street Vendors Act, 2014 and an end to illegal evictions drives without proper rehabilitation.

AICCTU State Secretary Dibakar Bhattacharya said, it is observed with deep concern that formation of town vending committee, preparation of survey report, issuance of license for smooth running of businesses and planned rehabilitation policy has not been adopted as per the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. The policy of no eviction without resettlement could not be ensured by the state government even in the last 10 years. In the name of urban beautification bulldozers are being used to evict poor people like Yogi Raj does in Uttar Pradesh.

The major demands in the meeting include:

- Immediate implementation of central Street Vendors Act, 2014
- Hawkers must be provided with license and identity card.
- To rehabilitate hawkers, a hawker market instead of shopping mall may be constructed in each ward.
- The Town Vending Committee should have representatives of Hawker Unions including Central Trade Unions.
- Stop harassing the poor and marginalized in the name of development.

CITU State Secretary Anadi Sau, AITUC's Leena Chatterjee, UTUC's Manu Mallick, TUCC's Ganesh Ram and others also addressed the meeting. ■

RYA Holds Country-Wide Protests Against Privatisation of Railways

Railways is the lifeline of the Indian people, and is the means of livelihood for lakhs of people, but also carries the dreams of crores of citizens. Railways enables thousands of workers go in search of jobs, for students to avail education and appear for exams, for patients to avail healthcare, etc.

However, the Modi Government has stopped many trains during the covid lockdown. When trains resumed their service, the number of ac coaches were increased, whereas general and non-ac sleeper coaches were reduced, and at the same time the passenger fare was also increased. This policy of the Central Government wreaked havoc on the lives of common citizens.

Indian Railways is the largest rail network in the world, and apart from providing travel service, it provides employment to lakhs of youth. Every year about 30,000 to 40,000 recruitments would take place in railways. However, for the past decade, the Modi Government has

been sitting on these appointments. The government is recklessly making contractual appointments and keeping permanent posts vacant. In the past few years, many major railway accidents have taken place with hundreds of passengers losing their lives. This is due to the acute shortage of staff in signal/security related work. The staff are overburdened with work and are working 14 hours a day. The government should stop playing with the lives of citizens and immediately fill all vacant posts in railways.

RYA held nation-wide protest and made the following demands:

1. Railways provides connectivity for villages and small towns to big cities, where migrant workers, students and patients utilize the services the most. The government's move to increase the passenger fares, increase the number of ac coaches and reduce the general compartment and non-ac coaches has affected common citizens considerably.

Overcrowding in trains, travelling by standing, lack of access to toilets is inhuman and a violation of right to live with dignity granted by our Constitution. Therefore, the number of general coaches should be increased, minimum seats should be guaranteed for long distance travel, and passenger fares should be reduced.

2. Increasing accidents have endangered lives of the people. Safety standards should be restored, all vacant posts must be filled immediately.
3. Modi government has put up railways for sale, including railway stations, routes, trains, stadiums, etc. It is seen that wherever privatization has taken place, everything from platform tickets to passenger fares has been increased. Such sale of railways must be stopped.
4. The reduced public facilities in railways must be restored, along with the discount in tickets for senior citizens and people with disabilities. ■



Immediate SIT Formation Demanded in Muzaffarpur DBR Case



In a press conference held on June 30, AIPWA's National General Secretary Meena Tiwari along with survivors of Muzaffarpur DBR company job racket case the called for the immediate formation of a high level Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the case, alleging that the administration is shielding the criminals involved. The main accused, Manish Sinha, remains at large, and the administration is reportedly under pressure from the BJP, hindering his arrest.

On June 29, 2024, a fact-finding team led by Meena Tiwari visited Muzaffarpur and met with four girls who are survivors of the DBR scandal, where women were duped in pretext of jobs and were cheated, illegally detained and sexually harassed. The survivors had gone to Ahiyapur police station to provide their statements. In a press conference held in Patna, the survivors also detailed their experiences of sexual exploitation, fraud, and assault by DBR Company, a Surat-headquartered networking company with branches across Bihar. The investigation team

included Suraj Singh, Fahad Jama, Vijay Gupta, Rajkishore Prasad, and AIPWA State Secretary Anita Sinha.

Comrade Meena Tiwari highlighted that DBR Company operates a massive fraud network under the guise of providing employment. Despite being caught several times, the company changes its name to continue deceiving young men and women aged 18 to 22. They demand an advance of Rs. 20,500 and then pressure these youths to recruit others into the company. Those who refuse face physical assault, and some girls have been sexually assaulted. Most victims come from very poor backgrounds, with many girls borrowing money to pay the company.

She added that the local administration turned a blind eye to horrific incident and refused to take strict action. Only one victim has managed to file a case through the court. The administration should have proactively filed FIRs for other victims, but it appears intent on suppressing the matter. The victim who filed the case stated that company employee Tilak Singh forcibly assaulted her. Initially, the

administration tried to downplay the case by labelling it a love affair. Now, the administration is questioning the girls who testified for the survivor.

The main accused and CMD Manish Sinha, remains at large, reportedly intimidating the victim in various ways. Sinha is said to have close ties with the BJP, with threats being made to the girls about his connections with high-ranking government ministers, urging them to withdraw the case. The administration is aware of these threats but continues to protect the criminals.

In light of these developments, CPI-ML and AIPWA have put forward the following demands: immediate formation of an high level SIT due to the highly suspicious role of the district administration, a high-level judicial inquiry into the case given the political protection and administrative collusion, immediate arrest of the main accused Manish Sinha, proactive registration of cases for other victimized girls by the government and administration, immediate cancellation and banning of DBR Company's registration, and refund of all money taken from the youths and appropriate compensation for the victimized girls.

CPIML Legislative group leader and MLA Mahboob Alam said that the party will strongly raise this issue in the Bihar assembly and the culprits will not be allowed to escape. He added that action should be taken against erring police and district officials for criminal negligence. He also condemned Nitish-BJP government's lack of seriousness in ensuring justice in the case. ■

Comrade Kabita Roy Chowdhury

Comrade Kabita Roy Chowdhury from Kolkata passed away on July 1 at the age of 66. Comrade Kabita was associated with left movement since her student life and was initially a member with SFI and CPIM. Due to ideological differences she left CPIM in the late eighties. Later she joined CPIML Liberation in 2005 and was a dedicated active member of the Party till the end of her life. She played a crucial role in reviving party organization in Banshdrohi area of Kolkata.

Comrade Kabita was also a District Committee member of AIPWA and was keen to organize working class women in the locality. She was loved and accepted by all for her lively and affable nature with strong political will and indomitable fighting spirit. Recently she was diagnosed with cancer and just within few days of taking the first dose of chemotherapy she breathed her last at her home. Comrade Kabita's sudden demise is an irreparable loss for the Party.

Red Salute to Comrade Kabita Roy Chowdhury!



Comrade Ramashankar Ram

Comrade Ramashankar Ram, a senior leader from Buxar district, passed away on June 26, 2024, at the age of 72 while undergoing treatment at PMCH, Patna. Over the past four years, Comrade Ramashankar Ram had been battling deteriorating health conditions. Born in a very poor family in Chapatahi village under Rajpur block in Buxar district, Ramashankar Ji leaves behind a son and two daughters. His entire family has been actively involved in the party, with his son currently serving as a member of the Buxar district committee and district president of the Revolutionary Youth Association.

In the aftermath of the initial wave of the Bhojpur struggle, Comrade Rajesh, Comrade Gaurishankar and Comrade Ramashankar Ram emerged as leaders during the second wave in Buxar, expanding the movement throughout the district, with its influence extending up to the bordering Uttar Pradesh.

Following the tragic murder of Comrade Rajesh, Comrade Ramashankar and his comrades took charge, steering the movement forward. In the 2010 legislative assembly elections, Comrade Ramashankar contested from Rajpur (SC) constituency under the party's banner.

Red Salute to Comrade Ramashankar Ram!!



Comrade Mankumar Singha

Comrade Mankumar Singha, a veteran leader of the Tripura unit of CPI(ML) and lifelong fighter for the rights of the poor and landless, passed away at the age of 74 years on July 10 at a hospital in Silchar in Assam. Born in August 1951 into a landless family plagued by poverty, he grew up amidst the harsh realities of deprivation. He was a resident of Village Nadiapur, Dharmnagar, North Tripura District. His journey into revolutionary activism began early, inspired by the historic food movement of the 1960s and guided by his close association with the legendary revolutionary leader Comrade Gobinda Teli.

Along with Comrade Gobinda Teli and others, Comrade Mankumar too faced imprisonment and torture during the 1970s. Released after the Emergency, he continued to work for the party and played a leading role in forming the Indian People's Front in Tripura.

His legacy as a steadfast fighter for the struggles of the toiling masses will remain a source of inspiration for the revolutionary communist movement in Tripura.

Red Salute to Comrade Mankumar Singha!



1 July: Countrywide Protests held against Three Draconian Criminal Codes



20 June: Countrywide Protest against Prosecution of Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkhat Hussain under UAPA



EDITORIAL OFFICE

CHARU BHAWAN, U-90, SHAKARPUR, DELHI - 110 092

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY

Dipankar Bhattacharya for the Central Committee, CPIML
from Charu Bhawan, U-90, Shakarpur, Delhi - 110 092

PRINTED AT: Divya Offset, B-1422, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi - 110 096

EDITOR : Arindam Sen

liberation@cpiml.org

www.liberation.org.in

PH.: 91-11-42785864