


# Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

MARCH 2025

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**Indian  
Migrants  
Return  
Shackled and  
Dehumanised  
as Modi Regime  
Prioritizes  
Racist Trump  
over Human  
Dignity**

## Indian Migrants Return Shackled and Dehumanised as Modi Regime Prioritizes Racist Trump over Human Dignity



CPI(ML) vehemently condemns the dehumanising and violent treatment of Indian migrants subjected to deportation by the Trump administration in the United States. The harrowing and heart-wrenching accounts of our fellow citizens—shackled, chained, and handcuffed during a soul-crushing 40-hour journey—serve as a chilling reminder of the colonial-era subjugation. This grotesque spectacle, where migrants are treated as criminals—stripped of their dignity, bound like captives, and subjected to conditions that mirror the horrors of colonial-era transportation—lays bare the deeply racist and inhumane nature of the Trump regime's immigration agenda.

Equally unforgivable is the deafening silence of the Modi-led BJP government, which has failed to raise even a semblance of protest against this blatant abuse of Indian citizens. The Modi government's deafening silence in the face of this abuse is not mere negligence—it is complicity. While the BJP peddles jingoistic rhetoric about "nationalism" and "protecting Indian pride," it abandons Indian migrants to the mercy of racist deportation regimes.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brazen embrace of Donald Trump—whom he calls a "dear friend" and for whom he openly campaigned during U.S. elections—now stands exposed as a betrayal of India's migrant workers. Trump, in turn, repays this sycophancy by vilifying Indian migrants and deporting them in chains. This shameful reciprocity lays bare the BJP regime's servility to the U.S. imperialist interests, mirroring the historical capitulation of the Sangh Parivar to British colonial rulers. Just as the RSS's ideological ancestors bowed to colonial rulers, today's Sangh Parivar kneels before the U.S. empire, trading the dignity of Indian migrants for hollow photo-ops and empty slogans of 'nationalism.'

We demand the Indian government to reject the inhuman treatment of Indian migrants and take immediate action to ensure their dignified return. The government must deploy necessary logistical support to facilitate the safe and respectful return of all Indian migrant workers facing deportation.

We reject the Modi government's complicity and Trump's racist agenda and declare: No worker is illegal! No human is disposable!





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# Rekindle the Spirit of India's Anti-imperialist Nationalism

More than three hundred Indian citizens have already been deported to India in chains on US military aircraft over the past couple of weeks in February. A list of 18,000 Indians who are liable to be deported in the coming days has reportedly already been handed over to the Modi government. Private estimates put the figure of Indians in US facing the risk of deportation at over seven hundred thousand. India's foreign minister has defended the US action in Indian Parliament. Prime Minister Modi repeated the same line during his joint press conference with Donald Trump. Contrast this shameful capitulation to the position taken by countries like Colombia and Mexico which have denied permission to US military aircraft and brought their nationals back in their own planes with full dignity.

Let us now take a look at recent reports from Bhubaneswar which reflect the conditions for Nepali students in India. A Nepali woman student in the Bhubaneswar-based Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology was found dead in her hostel room on 16 February. This was apparently a case of suicide triggered by an abusive relationship with a male student hailing from a powerful BJP family in UP. When students started protesting in the campus demanding fair investigation and justice for the victim, the KIIT authorities responded by declaring the Institute closed sine die for Nepali students, asking them to immediately vacate the campus and dropping many of them off at Cuttack railway station. Viral videos show KIIT officials humiliating Nepali students as an 'ungrateful lot', taunting them about Nepal's low GDP and telling them to go back to Nepal.

Do we find any similarity and connection between the Modi government's acquiescence to the ill-treatment meted out to Indian citizens by the Trump Administration and the KIIT administration's racist arrogance towards students from Nepal? Capitulation to US domination and bullying of small neighbouring countries are in fact two sides of the same coin. The RSS responds to reports of attacks on members of the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh with a global cry of 'Hindus in danger'. The Modi government presents India as a Hindu-majority country encircled by hostile Islamic neighbours and has even amended India's citizenship law with a discriminatory and divisive clause to exclude Muslims. But here are students from even Hindu-majority Nepal being ill-treated in a BJP-ruled state. Appeasement of the self-proclaimed global big bully and attempts to play the regional big brother go hand in hand.

India's protracted struggle for freedom from British rule had

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*Fascism is today out to tarnish the glorious legacy of the freedom movement and destroy the democratic constitutional foundation that emerged from it. This calamity must be avoided by all means.*

given rise to a nationalist consciousness that despised oppression in any part of the world and empathised with revolutions and national liberation movements the world over. Bhagat Singh had famously combined the two slogans "inquilab zindabad" (long live revolution) and "samrajyavad murdabad" (down with imperialism) into an integrated clarion call for worldwide freedom for the oppressed. Even Gandhi, having personally experienced racism during his stay in South Africa before his return to India, could easily identify with the cause of a free Palestine. Nehru saw himself primarily as a representative of the emerging third world and shaped a foreign policy on the basis of anti-imperialist solidarity and cooperation among all the newly liberated countries of the world.

The anti-imperialist nationalism that arose from our freedom movement and defined India's identity - internally as an inclusive multi-religious multi-lingual nation and externally as a champion of national liberation and third world unity - is now under attack from the Sangh brigade's model of Hindutva or 'Hindu nationalism'. This model of aggressive nationalism seeks to coerce India's old model of 'unity in diversity' (more accurately unity through diversity) into the straitjacket of Hindu supremacist uniformity. It finds common cause with Israel's Zionist genocidal campaign in Gaza and with the anti-immigrant xenophobic, Islamophobic, racist frenzy of the far-right across the world even if undocumented Indians find themselves at the receiving end of this xenophobia as we now see in the US.

The preamble to our

Constitution describes "we the people of India" as the originating power of the Indian Republic. The use of the word 'people' instead of nation marked a conscious realization of the Constituent Assembly that India was not yet a cohesive nation, it was only a nation in the making. The Constituent Assembly had firmly rejected the idea of religion-based national identity. Ambedkar was categorical that since Hinduism, the religion followed by the majority of Indians, provides religious legitimacy to the most entrenched form of social inequality and injustice in the shape of the obnoxious order of castes, a Hindu Raj, if it ever becomes a fact, would prove to be calamitous for India. Ambedkar considered caste to be the biggest obstruction to India becoming a really cohesive nation. The Constitution of course did not compromise with the idea of any kind of exclusion or discrimination, either on the basis of religion or caste, and promised comprehensive justice, equality, freedom and fraternity for all.

In the Modi era, the Sangh brigade invokes its own image of the nation and brand of nationalism to enforce its agenda of transforming secular democratic India into a fascist Hindu Rashtra. True to the old Golwalkar doctrine of reducing Muslims to second grade citizens, the Sangh brigade is busy exploring all possible opportunities to spew venom and unleash violence targeting the Muslim community. While various strategies of voter suppression are already being employed against the Muslim electorate, the Hindu Rashtra constitution draft, which was set to be released in the ongoing

Prayagraj Kumbh advocates outright disenfranchisement of the Muslim community. Every voice of dissent within India risks being persecuted as part of an 'anti-national conspiracy', while members of the Indian diaspora who are critical of the Modi regime are also being denied visas and stripped of their status as Overseas Citizens of India.

In the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution and foundation of the Indian republic, we the people of India will have to take up the challenge of reigniting the anti-imperialist nationalism that had united us as a modern democracy and opened up the vistas for a future where every Indian could live a life of dignity. Without that the Indian economy is liable to get more vulnerable to the vagaries of imperialist dependence and remain permanently enmeshed in the disastrous trappings of crony capitalism, where India's corrupt corporate billionaires will continue to appropriate ever bigger shares of India's wealth and income while the bottom half will have to survive on a sub-subsistence level deprived of even the basic necessities of life.

From the 1857 anthem 'ham hain iske malik, Hindustan hamara' (India is ours, we own this land) to the constitutional affirmation of popular sovereignty defining India as a socialist secular democratic republic founded by 'we the people of India', our freedom movement was driven by the power of progressive nationalism. Fascism is today out to tarnish the glorious legacy of the freedom movement and destroy the democratic constitutional foundation that emerged from it. This calamity must be avoided by all means. □

# *There Can Be No Free and Fair Elections without a Neutral and Independent Election Commission*

▲ **DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA**

**O**n 18 February, just the day before the Supreme Court was slated to hear a petition questioning the dubious 2023 law passed by the Modi government regarding the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioner, the Modi government used the same law to choose the successor of the outgoing CEC Rajeev Kumar and also appoint a third member of the Election Commission. The 2023 Act authorises a three-member panel headed by the Prime Minister to choose the CEC and appoint other members of the Election Commission. The other two members of this panel are Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. In effect, the panel thus becomes a Modi-Shah partnership with Rahul Gandhi only having the option of voicing his dissent.


In the event, Rahul Gandhi made public his rightful note of dissent in which he had asked the government to defer the meeting to choose the next CEC till the Supreme Court decides on the petition questioning the validity of the 2023 Act. Ironically while the government went ahead with the appointments, the Supreme Court has deferred the hearing of the case by a month to March 19. Two years ago, on March 2, 2023 a 5-Judge Constitution Bench led by Justice K. M. Joseph had underlined the need to keep the Election Commission free from the control of the executive and had prescribed a three-member panel comprising the PM, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the CJI. The 2023 Act, passed without any parliamentary debate and

scrutiny, made a complete mockery of the very spirit of the Constitution Bench verdict.

The Constitution had not made any explicit arrangement regarding the appointment of election commissioners, but the Constituent Assembly deliberations make it abundantly clear that the Election Commission should be absolutely free from governmental control. The Modi government first exploited this silence of the Constitution to fill the Election Commission with handpicked appointees, and when the Supreme Court chastised the government and prescribed a three member committee to restrain the executive, the government effectively overturned the Constitution Bench verdict by writing executive control over the appointment of the Election Commission into law. With the 18 February appointments, we now have the chain of CECs ready till the 2029 elections - following Gyanesh Kumar's retirement in January 2029, Vivek Joshi will take over to oversee the next Lok Sabha elections. Both Gyanesh Kumar and Vivek Joshi have worked closely under Amit Shah in the Union Home Ministry.

The record of Rajeev Kumar as CEC has awoken the whole country to the ominous implications of a compromised Election Commission. The Election Commission today does not just turn a blind eye to the brazen violations of the model code by top BJP leaders and the unmitigated hate campaign unleashed in every election by BJP star campaigners. Of late major discrepancies in the entire process of conduct of elections right from the preparation of the electoral roll

to the counting of votes have been reported in various states. The EC under Rajeev Kumar never responded to serious allegations of procedural lapses and irregularities, trivialising all complaints and brushing them off in press conferences with facetious, sub-standard couplets. Democracy in India has never really had much participatory content for the people in terms of shaping of policies and their implementation or ensuring transparency and accountability of governance. And now if the electoral process too loses its credibility, democracy will indeed become a formal cover for dictatorship.

The Supreme Court must uphold the sanctity of the Constitution's essential understanding regarding the neutrality and integrity of the Election Commission, and the spirit of the March 2023 Constitution Bench verdict about restraining the executive from exercising undue influence and control over the Election Commission. The Parliament has the right to pass a law about the appointment of members of the Election Commission including the Chief Election Commissioner, but the law must uphold the core tenets of democracy. The Supreme Court had belatedly scrapped the Electoral Bond scheme calling it unconstitutional - it must not shy away from exercising its power of judicial review to scrap the farcical 2023 law which enables the government of the day to appoint an election commission according to its own choice. After all, the Supreme Court is the custodian of the Constitution and must not allow the executive to make a mockery of the Constitution and the basic spirit of democracy. 

# *Modi-Trump Meeting: More A Meek Surrender Than A Mega Partnership*

**T**he first meeting between Trump and Modi, after their respective electoral victories, is now over. While the Modi government and Godi media are busy celebrating the 'chemistry' between two 'great friends', the rest of the world is reading the real signals emanating from the Trump Administration's sundry announcements and the joint press conference and communique following the Trump-Modi meeting. While Trump called Modi a tough negotiator and flattered him by saying that there was 'no contest' between the two when it comes to negotiations, it is clear that the term 'negotiation' in this context is all but a euphemism for an abject surrender by the Modi government of India's national pride and interests.

Just a week before the Trump-Modi meeting an American military aircraft had landed in Amritsar carrying 104 Indian citizens deported in chains. A second aircraft with another batch of 119 deportees took off even as Modi was winding up his US trip. A list of 18,000 Indians liable to be deported in the coming days has already been handed over to India's foreign minister S Jaishankar during his meeting with the US foreign secretary after Trump's swearing-in. The issue of deportation of Indian citizens came up during the Trump-Modi press conference and Modi did not have the courage to call for a dignified deportation of Indian nationals. He supported the American action and sought Trump's cooperation to root out the 'ecosystem of human trafficking'. Modi's own state Gujarat, where his party has been uninterruptedly in power for nearly three decades

now, is known to be one of the most thriving centres of this 'ecosystem'.

Modi was also asked if he had discussed the Adani case with Trump. His discomfort was most visible as he sought to brush it off as a 'personal matter' not worth the time of two heads of state. The whole world is aware of how Modi got Adani lucrative deals in country after country - from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to Australia and Kenya, deals that are now being reviewed and scrapped almost across the world. Only Modi can explain how the question of a globally condemned corrupt Indian capitalist, who has an arrest warrant in the US for his corrupt practices, becomes a 'personal matter'! And who it is a 'personal matter' for - Adani or Modi?

In his rambling reply to this question, Modi also invoked Indian democracy and the motto of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the whole world is one family). This can only remind the world of Modi's previous press conference with President Biden in June 2023 when in reply to journalist Sabrina Siddiqui's question on the alarming state of minority rights and press freedom under Modi, he invoked the Constitution of India to claim that there was no room for discrimination of any kind. Sabrina Siddiqui was trolled viciously for raising the issue of backsliding of democracy in India. Maybe once again we will see trolling of foreign journalists for asking questions that Indian media persons have stopped asking or are being prevented from asking. Modi's discomfort with inconvenient questions tells us why he never addresses a press conference in India and gives

interviews to only select individuals asking scripted questions.

True to his characteristic demagoguery, Modi has coined a new phrase to camouflage his government's betrayal of India's interests - he now calls it a mega partnership for prosperity! Imitating Trump's imperialist slogan of MAGA (make America great again), which translates into a reign of racist xenophobic tyranny for the US and hegemonic aggression and expansionist ambition for the rest of the world, Modi coined the slogan MIGA (make India great again) and like he had once conjured the so-called extra '2ab' by bracketing India with Canada, he combined MAGA and MIGA to conjure the fiction of a MEGA partnership between the US and India. And this when there are talks of 7 lakh Indians facing the threat of deportation from the US and the Trump Administration is busy announcing increased tariff on Indian exports.


The Modi government's own slogans of 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) now stand all but abandoned. The much-hyped defence partnership with the US is designed to increase India's military dependence on the US. While restricting Indian exports and immigration, the US wants to impose itself as India's dominant trading partner in every major field, especially in the crucial arena of oil, gas and energy. The exchange value of rupee has already declined to an unprecedented low of Rs. 87 to a dollar. To check the rupee's free fall, the RBI is buying rupee by spending dollars from its forex reserve. This makes India all the more vulnerable in

terms of servicing of dollar debt and management of international trade deficit. The BRICS bloc has been exploring options of moving away from the US dollar as the exclusive currency of international trade, but Trump has pressured Modi to desist from this BRICS plan and also from buying oil and gas from Russia.

Over the years, especially in the Modi era, Indian foreign policy has moved away from platforms of regional cooperation like SAARC or forums of third world unity like the non-aligned movement. BRICS provided the only potential

countervailing platform against the American stranglehold. But just ahead of his meeting with Modi, Trump launched a virulent verbal blitzkrieg against BRICS. While China has enough economic muscle and global political clout to counter American pressure, India's dependence on the US and lack of countervailing options will badly retard the country's development prospects. Growing economic and military dependence on the US and complete strategic identification with - if not subordination to - the US-Israel axis can only limit India's

independence and sovereignty.

Never in India's post-colonial history has India appeared so helpless and bereft of self-respect as today under the Modi government. The great anti-colonial legacy of India's freedom movement is being tarnished at every step by a Prime Minister who falsely claims to have enhanced India's international stature. With the economy in doldrums, Constitution being subverted and national pride and interests mortgaged to the US, the Modi government has become a total liability for the Republic in its seventy-fifth anniversary. 

## *BJP's Electoral Comeback in Delhi and the Challenges for Bihar*

**A**fter winning thumping majorities in successive elections in 2015 and 2020, the AAP has now suffered a major defeat in 2025. A loss of nearly ten percentage points in vote share, from 53 to 43, has brought the AAP seat tally down to 22. The BJP's vote share has increased by seven percentage points from 38 to 45, causing its seat tally to jump sixfold from 8 to 48. This marks the BJP's return to power in the national capital after a long gap of twenty-seven years and the third Assembly election victory for the NDA after the BJP lost its independent majority in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Several factors have contributed to this drastic change in Delhi. The BJP's desperation to grab power in Delhi had become crystal-clear in the 2020 elections when it ran a vicious campaign openly inciting communal violence to crush the citizenship movement. When this did not pay many immediate electoral dividends, the Modi government unleashed a

virulent campaign of suppression of dissent. The spree of arrests of student activists, human rights campaigners and even opposition Councillors was followed by a campaign of political persecution against the AAP leadership with serial arrest of several leaders including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodiya, the CM and his deputy.

This politics of vendetta apart, the BJP resorted to a systematic encirclement of the AAP government by using the apparatus of the Union Government and the office of the Lieutenant Governor. Time was when the BJP too used to demand full statehood for Delhi, but to obstruct the AAP government, the BJP overrode the Supreme Court and drastically curtailed the powers of the Delhi government, virtually crippling it and reducing it to the level of a glorified municipality by passing the dubious Delhi Services Act (The Government of National Capital Territory Amendment Act, 2023). Added to this obstructive

encirclement and erosion of the powers of the Delhi government was the clinical manipulation of Delhi's electoral roll, complete with selective deletion, inclusion and transfer of electors.

The BJP attempted a similar strategy in Jharkhand - Chief Minister Hemant Soren was arrested, the stopgap CM defected to the BJP and a toxic hate campaign was let loose in the name of electioneering to pit Adivasis against Muslims. The strategy however collapsed and the BJP got defeated for the second successive Assembly election. Why did the BJP strategy work in Delhi while it failed in Jharkhand? The answer partly lies in the way the opposition fought the elections in the two states. Jharkhand had a united anti-BJP camp and a spirited campaign in defence of the Constitution and the federal rights and aspirations of the state. Delhi had no unity within the INDIA bloc and the compelling political perspective of defeating the BJP's fascist offensive



remained conspicuously missing in the election discourse.

There is also an evident decline in the popular appeal of AAP and the 'common man' image of Arvind Kejriwal. Two hundred units of free electricity and enhanced emphasis on improved public education do still have a positive resonance among the poor and lower middle class population of Delhi, but neglect of the demands of Delhi's working class, poor performance on delivery of municipal services and almost total silence on the question of suppression of democracy and promotion of hate in Delhi have weakened the active popular support that had fetched such overwhelming majorities for AAP in the two previous elections. The allegations of liquor scam and the Rs 33.6 crore renovation of the chief minister's bungalow considerably dented the clean and simple image of the AAP leadership and Kejriwal was in no

position to pull off a victory around his fading public image.

The BJP's renewed total control over Delhi will pose a greater challenge for the common people and the whole gamut of progressive democratic forces and initiatives in the national capital. Hopefully the changed political landscape will foster a spirit of cooperation among the broad non-BJP political camp in Delhi beyond the limited framework of floor coordination in parliament. In terms of the all-India picture, all eyes will now be on Bihar, the only other election-bound state in 2025. In Delhi, the BJP had been out of power for the last 27 years and benefited from the popular disillusionment with AAP. In Bihar, the BJP has been in power in coalition with the JDU for most of the last twenty years and there is growing public anger against the all-round failure and betrayal of the BJP-JDU regime.

If a united opposition has

been successful in stalling the BJP in Jharkhand, there is no reason why the same cannot happen in Bihar. With closer connect between the electoral battle and the wide-ranging struggles on the ground and more reasonable electoral understanding within the INDIA coalition, Bihar can stop the Maharashtra-Haryana-Delhi winning spree of the BJP and deliver a decisive blow to the Sangh brigade's fascist offensive. At a time when the Modi government is insulting the legacy of India's anti-colonial freedom movement by capitulating to the US and undermining the secular democratic character of the Constitution that emerged from the freedom movement, Bihar, which has historically been a key citadel of anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles, must once again prove to be a bastion of the protracted battle for genuine democracy and social transformation. □

## *Recognition and Remuneration as Jeevika Workers*

### *Who bears the Responsibility?*

▲ NILANJANA

Last year on 2 September 2024, an order was circulated by Jeevika, Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society, Department of Rural Development, Government of Bihar, notifying that there will be successive phasing out of the honorarium paid by the Government to 'community cadre' such as community mobilisers, Lekhpals (bookkeepers) and Bank Mitras. Starting 1 June 2024, the

Government's contribution will come down from 100% to 80% and then decline progressively with each passing year to 60%, 40%, 20% until it is completely phased out (0%) by 1 June 2028. The gap between stipulated honorarium and Government's contribution was expected to be fulfilled by community institutions, that is, Self Help Groups (SHGs), Village Level Federations (VOs) and Block Level Federations (CLFs). This

caused a huge outrage among the 'community cadre' leading to several protests that forced Jeevika to suspend the order by November 2024. However, the threat continues since the order was merely suspended, not withdrawn. What does this mean for the 'cadre' and the Jeevika system as a whole?

Jeevika comprises 10,58,618 SHGs, 70182 VOs and 1669 CLFs across Bihar with millions of poor



rural women as members who save money, take loans, get training on skills and group management, engage with livelihoods and gain access to various Government schemes (Jeevika Annual Report, 2023-24). This vast network is managed by 1,57,874 'community cadre', mostly rural women, who help in formation of SHGs, book-keeping, bank linkage, and a host of other activities including access to certain schemes (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India). Without the work put in by the 'community cadre', this huge edifice will crumble affecting not just the cadre but millions of rural women who depend on Jeevika for financial inclusion and access to schemes and livelihoods for themselves and their families. Despite problems and challenges, SHG networks supported by the Government help in keeping usurious money lenders and commercial microfinance interests at bay. With the Government's withdrawal, the responsibility for honorarium falls on community institutions. The crucial questions are: do community institutions have the capacity to pay? Whose responsibility is it to pay for development? Why are the 'community cadre' finding themselves in this vulnerable situation?

Many SHGs, VOs and CLFs of Jeevika in Bihar and other state rural livelihood programmes under the aegis of National Rural Livelihoods Programme (NRLM) are struggling with issues of non-repayment of loans, dormant SHGs, apathy of commercial banks to give loans to SHGs, all of which put huge financial strain on community institutions. Thus, the total funds raised through member savings, interest payments and

bank loans are not enough to meet collective credit and honorarium requirements. Government funds help meet the gap and keep the system functioning. Withdrawal of the Government in this context would lead to a collapse of the system. The only way to manage this phasing out of honorariums by Government would be progressive dismissal of the 'community cadre' or levying additional contributions from individual SHG members. In the first case, there will be competition for limited funds, services rendered by 'community cadre' will stop and this will lead to a collapse of the system. In the second case, many members, unable to bear the additional financial burden, may drop out leading to lesser overall funds, more dormancy of groups and collapse of the system. Thus, currently the system certainly does not have the capacity to pay for the honorariums.

Will the community institutions ever have the capacity to pay? Should they? Whose responsibility is this actually? The neoliberal development paradigm of which NRLM and its state chapters like Jeevika are a part, individualizes poverty and underdevelopment instead of treating it as a structural issue and then goes on to put the onus of development on the individual herself. It focuses on a functional idea of self-help without directly addressing structural inequalities, macro-economic policies or discriminatory social norms. The idea of the collective or community institution often relates to loan decisions and monitoring rather than social action and change. As a result, such institutions and interventions focus on incremental improvements at the individual level which does not automatically

lead to radically changed capacities, whether economic or social. For example, rural women who have been socialized into gender-caste norms, who have historically been denied access to resources or decision making within the family and community, find it extremely difficult to claim ownership and control of their loans and incomes, let alone own and manage the administration and finances of institutions. As long as development interventions ignore structural inequalities or targeted social action to change those inequalities, communities should neither be expected nor asked to pay for their development. In the context of continuing inequalities and discrimination, the state needs to fulfil, at the minimum, the responsibility of 'welfare'. The move to phase out contributions towards honorariums should be seen as an abdication of the state's responsibility rather than a shift towards community ownership.

Why is it that the state finds it easiest to withdraw through phasing out contributions towards honorariums? This is because such payouts relate to the most important, yet the most unrecognized and vulnerable group of workers in the system i.e. the 'community cadre'. The 'community cadre', mostly rural women from socially and economically marginalized backgrounds, hold up the entire system through their hard labour but are not even recognized as workers. This is true not just of NRLM but of other development programmes such as the National Health Mission. For some time now, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA workers) have been demanding the status of workers and salaries instead of honorariums. One

wonders whether the decision of the Government to withdraw from paying honorarium is a preemption of similar demands from the side of Jeevika workers. Thus, the fight

against Government's withdrawal from honorarium payment is not just the community's fight for its right to welfare but also the right of workers for recognition

and remuneration. Development programmes built on the back of women's cheap labour must give women the recognition, dignity and security as workers. □

## *The Budget 2025 and the Labour*

▲ V SHANKAR

**A** media hype was created around the Modi led BJP government's budget 2025-26. It evoked a lot of debates and speculations around the tax concession and rebates but the most important proposal of deregulation of labour and its accompanied announcements in the budget was completely ignored by the media.

The undue importance attached to the question of deregulation was not even taken note of by the corporate media and other onlookers. The economic survey categorically asserted that land, labour, transport and logistics are the areas for deregulation. It says without mincing words that "Indian firms cannot adhere to applicable regulations without hindering growth, investments and job creation. For instance, exporting firms should have the flexibility to deploy more labour hours in months with a surge in orders."

When Narayanamurthy of Infosys and Subrahmanyan of L&T were proposing 70 – 90 hour work-week, there was a furore everywhere. Even a section of liberal industrial owners were questioning the rationale of productivity behind the proposal. But, now we find that the corporate bosses have only echoed the Modi's rationale or we may also infer that Modi government has accepted the proposal of the corporate bosses.

The insistence of deregulation of land points to the fact that the government is not content with the announcement of NMP (National Monetisation Pipeline) and privatisation of government owned public enterprises alone but is also proposing to hand over not only the infrastructures but also all the lands to the corporate houses in the name of monetisation. The real implications of land deregulation is yet to be clearly spelt out by the government while it has already been indicated in various ways including amendments to land laws and the policy of privatisation and monetisation.

The multinational companies are allowed to take over the insurance industry wholly by increasing the FDI limit to 100 percent from 74. The insurance industry workers movement has waged numerous struggles against 100 percent ownership for foreign capital in Indian soil. Still, Modi government has turned a deaf ear to their longstanding demand.

The economic survey 2024-25 has revealed the government's intention and urgency to implement labour reforms in the form of Labour Codes which was kept under backburner for more than four years in spite of legislating them so hurriedly without any proper debate or consultation. They have made it explicit that existing labour laws only

hinder growth, investment and job creation thereby accusing the trade union movement responsible for any non-growth or lesser growth.

The union government has made it very clear that the threshold limit of workers strength should be increased to 300 as proposed by Labour Codes from the present 100 for the applicability of labour laws by saying that 'deregulation is critical for MSME rather than large enterprises as the latter find a way around compliance'. By increasing the threshold limit to 300 for applicability, it is estimated that more than 85 percent of the industries presently under the purview of labour laws will go out of its purview. Modi government is only shedding crocodile tears about MSMEs because they do not really employ even 100 people. It is only the corporates operating under the garb of MSMEs employ more than 100. Hence, the threshold of 300 workers strength is a bonanza for corporate houses and not for any MSMEs.

According to the survey, "The annual unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 years and above has declined from 6% in 2017-18 to 3.2% in 2023-24.... The proportion of self-employed workers increased from 52% in 2017-18 to 58% in 2023-24 reflecting growing entrepreneurial activity and preference for flexible working conditions. However,

the share of workers in regular/salaried jobs has decreased from 23% to 22%.” The survey interprets that the abnormal increase in the share of self-employed means the growth in “entrepreneurial” activity. It is a big joke indeed! The so-called entrepreneurial activity in Modi’s parlance is nothing but an employment in selling pakodas. The increase in self-employed means nothing other than an increase in street vendors or similar employments where the people struggle to earn their bread and butter. But the Modi government and Nirmala Sitharaman preach that it means an increase in “entrepreneurial” activity. This is how the Goebbelsian propaganda makes us to believe that the country is advancing. But, unfortunately, they are unable to conceal the fact that the share of regular / salaried jobs has decreased in the same period. The biggest joke is the statement that the increase in self-employment means the decrease in regular jobs which is mainly because of “workers’ preference for flexible working conditions”, in other words, workers preference for self-employment (selling pakoda) against salaried jobs, according to the economic survey!

Hence, it says, “Increasing flexibility in the labour market will create an enabling environment for businesses to grow. India’s labour regulations impose extensive compliance requirements on businesses.” It implies that the business can grow only by throwing the labour at the altar of the super profit. So, make hire and fire the norm, flexible and increased working hours the habit, pay a pittance as wages for the salaried and call it a parity with informal labour – these are the mantra of the BJP government.

## The Inequality in India

The usual rhetoric of eliminating poverty, etc., is completely absent in the budget while it is talking about working poverty indicating meagre or starvation wages for workers. The inequality in India has risen manifold since the implementation of neo-liberal reforms and in spite of the much trumpeted higher growth of the GDP. According to the World Inequality Report 2024, the top 10 percent of the filthy rich in India holds 77 percent of the national wealth in the country, 73 percent of the wealth produced in 2017 went to the richest 1 percent while the wealth of 67 crores of poorest half of the population witnessed only an increase of 1 percent in their wealth.

The number of billionaires in India was only 9 in 2000 which rose to 101 in 2017. The current number of billionaires is 271. The number of new billionaires added in 2023 alone is 94. The report also says that a minimum wage worker in rural India will take at least 941 years to earn what the top paid executive in a garment company earns in a year. The inequality between executives and wage earners increased manifold after the 5th pay commission and direct recruitment for top posts. This is also a reason why we find Murthys and Subramanians everywhere - in the government, private, corporate and Contract structures.

The report which is also co-authored by Thomas Piketty says that the income inequality in the so-called Independent India is much higher than the inequality witnessed in the period of British colonial period. Another important aspect of global inequality is that the nations have become richer since the 1980s, but the governments have become poorer, manifesting the crude reality of neoliberal policy regime.

## Modi’s Dream Model of Employment

From the angle of deregulation of labour, the implementation of Labour Codes is the primary tool being perceived by the Modi government. In addition to indiscriminate contractualisation and informalisation in formal industry, Fixed Term Employment, Trainee – Apprentice system, etc., Modi is dreaming of promoting a model of labour relations similar to Gig and platform economy and the same is being pushed as the future work or the future labour relations in the country. To put it more popularly, gig and platform economy is nothing but a slave economy and labour relations being proposed for gig and platform workers is nothing but a relationship of slavery that existed between the slave and the master, well before the evolution of a feudal society.

Even the model of contractual employment is becoming obsolete because contract employees have some minimum rights, at least. They want to replace the system with trainees, apprentices and more importantly with the system of gig workers where the principal employer is unidentifiable.

As of now, most of us are of the impression that gig and platform work is only about delivery workers and Uber, Ola drivers and such transport network which is not true. The gig model is bound to spread to all sectors of economy and labour including construction, house-keeping, sanitation, gardening, etc., blurring formal and informal sector, organised and unorganised sector, etc. The Labour Codes have already removed such employments from the category of core work. Modi claims that the future worker will voluntarily reject any permanent employment because he can make some quick money by engaging in gig economy

which is far from the reality. The gig workers are suffering from low income, extended working hours and hard labour to earn such a meagre amount.

Gig workers are not named as workers but are called as partners, executives, short term contractors (not workers), etc., to assert that they have no employer and cannot claim workers' rights. No minimum wages because they are the workers without employers. They are workers without any permanent work place. They are workers without any definite time of work. It is a freelance work on a short term contract. To be precise, gig work is designed to make workers vagabonds with unstable income, without time and space and with uncertain future. This

is the future model of employment being perceived by Modi led BJP government to serve the corporates. The companies design virtual platforms to engage workers for all professions and trades including building work and are relieved of any responsibility towards its own workforce.

Workers of this nature, as of now, is counted as 70 lakhs and is expected to grow to the tune of several crores in 2030 and is perceived to be the dominant form of labour relations in a decade or so. With this kind of employment model, Modi is not only planning to eliminate the rights of workers and trade union movement in the country but also to eliminate any stable life and livelihood for workers as a class.

But, the workers movement has always reinvented itself against all forms of repression and strategies of the ruling class. Trade union movement is not only about some economic demands but also about the rights and dignity of the working class. Throwing some peanuts to workers in a future world of work alone may not be sufficient because the history of human struggle has always displayed that workers and toilers have uncompromisingly fought for their rights and dignity. They have risen against all forms of subjugation, dominance and slavery. The workers and the working class movement will not rest until the fascists are thrown out of power and see the dawn of an egalitarian and democratic society. □

## *Displacement of Manjhi Families in 'Smart City' Patna*

▲ VANDANA PRABHA

**T**he BJP-led Nitish government's vision of a "smart" city is one that does not include the poor, even though these very individuals are the ones who sustain and support the backbone of the city. In the name of transforming Patna into a "Smart City," the government has ruthlessly driven out the poor from the city, all while prioritizing the interests of the wealthy and influential. The exclusion of the most vulnerable members of society from the supposed modern urban spaces stands as a glaring contradiction in the government's proclaimed mission - Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas!!

The urban poor are often marginalized at the edges of city development, majority belonging

to Dalit communities who have a history of long endured violence, discrimination, and neglect by mainstream development. There have been several recent cases illustrating the rise of anti-Dalit violence in Bihar and also nationally. Last year in October, 30 houses of Mahadalits in Nawada were torched by the alleged land mafia. In the same month, Rinku Manjhi of Muzaffarpur was beaten and urinated upon for asking for his due wages from his upper caste employer. Rinku Manjhi faced death threats for filing complaints with the police. Just the previous month, a Dalit woman was stripped and urinated on for a police complaint about a moneylender in Patna. The cases of atrocity have been on rise recently.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)'s most recent comprehensive data, in 2022, a total of 57,582 cases were registered for crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs), marking a 13.1% increase from the 50,900 cases reported in 2021. Increasingly fewer crimes against Dalits are investigated in Bihar, a small number of them end up in courts and only a fraction among them ends in conviction (The Hindu).

### **Demolition drive of Manjhi families from Buddh Murti, Musahari**

A recent incident in Patna City's Buddh Murti Musahari area of Kadamkuan brings this issue into sharp focus. For years, hundreds of Majhi families have lived along the roadside, enduring inhuman



conditions without access to basic necessities like clean water, sanitation, or proper shelter. These families, including young children, elderly individuals, and women, were abruptly forced to vacate the footpaths with no discussions or plans for resettlement. Instead of providing assistance and solutions, the government's actions have only intensified their suffering

In an attempt to defend the rights of these families, a delegation from the CPI-ML, led by Phulwarisharif MLA Gopal Ravidas, met with the Patna Municipal Commissioner on January 22, 2025. They called for an immediate halt to the eviction process until the affected families were properly rehabilitated. The commissioner promised that the government would ensure the rehabilitation of the evicted families within 15 days. However, these promises turned out to be empty words. Instead of fulfilling their commitment to rehousing the families, the government continued with the evictions.

On February 11, 2025, in a shocking turn of events, the Deputy Chief Minister, disgusted by the sight of the lined up jhuggis, gave orders to vacate the area occupied by Manjhi families in Buddh Murti, Musahari. This decision highlights the deep-rooted feudalistic mindset that permeates the BJP government's policies. In response to this, CPI(ML) MLA Comrade Gopal Ravidas along with the displaced families launched a hunger strike on February 13, 2025, to demand justice for the evicted Manjhi families. Since the eviction, around 50 families have been living on the streets in the severely cold month of January along with small children and the sick.

Anjali Manjhi, a 15 year old, has always lived on the street. Both her parents are rag pickers while

one elder brother is a contract worker with the Patna municipality. She has never gone to school but learnt sewing and proudly shows her machine tucked on a cart. She shared she wants stitching work but caste discrimination has been the main challenge in finding work in the nearby area.

Sabatiya Devi, a 55 year old widow, has been living at Buddh Murti, Musahari, as far as she could remember. She has been living on ragpicking but recently there has not been much income. She depends on her sons who are daily wagers. She thoughtfully comments on how the livelihood of rag pickers like her has been destroyed since the municipality took over the cleaning and maintenance. It is very difficult to find waste to pick now. And her small shanty was all she had for her old age. She is also one of the protestors along with other women.

Sushila, 21, has been married for two years now. She has two young sons, both born in her shanty in Buddh Murti. She has studied till class 7 but dropped out to work after that. She shyly shares her love marriage story, how she defied her parents for pressuring her to marry a boy who was demanding a motorcycle as dowry.

She along with her two toddlers have been on the streets since the demolition. She and her husband hope to find a small room for her family soon, with or without government help.

Dukhiya Devi, 50, is a firebrand speaker and local leader of the party. She has been a vocal voice regarding the demand for permanent housing.

Dukhiya was 10 years old when she was married by her aunt after both her parents died. Her in-laws had to migrate to Musahari after Ranvir Sena violence made it impossible for the families to survive

in their village. She along with her husband Satish Manjhi, have been rag-picking for decades. For the last five years, her husband Satish has been paralysed and under her care. Her sons send her monthly expenses, since work is scarce.

She says 'the government thinks we are dirty creatures. We are not allowed to touch the plants or enter the garden'.

While the Majhi families were being forcefully evicted from their homes, just 100m away the Deputy Chief Minister and his family were constructing a lavish mansion (see photo). The internal roads of the society are being broadened to give a 'posh' look for the VIP members who will be frequenting the area with plantations on the sides. The government's vision for the city is focused on beautification and modernization. By prioritizing the aesthetics of urban space and catering to the elite's interests.



### **Where do the Manjhis stand for fair compensation ?**

Recent government ranking by Smart City Mission placed Patna in 83rd place out of 100 cities, severely lagging behind. A total amount of 1679 crores has been allotted for



39 projects in Patna city alone. In the year 2011, Bihar launched 'Bihar State Slum Policy, 2011' (BSSP) to make the cities slum free. BSSP requires that livelihood security and opportunities be considered while planning for the development of the slums, especially where relocation is the option. In the same direction

City Development Plans 2030 (CDP) was prepared for 28 ULBs in Bihar for holistic development of urban areas with special focus on rehabilitation.

Most of the policies and plans take into consideration only the people with proper documentation. Most of the Dalits have either distress migrated to the cities or have been

settled in the nearby areas by their individual feudal lords. They were allowed to live and thrive on these lands till now but had no ownership of the lands. The government process is not sensitive towards such historical contexts. They cancel any permanent rehabilitation on such 'technicalities'. The government should immediately make permanent housing provision for the socially and economically most vulnerable Manjhi community who have been the invisible workers who keep the city running and yet are continually pushed to the margins, denied their rights, and treated as expendable.

On the third day of the hunger strike, Patna corporation authorities promised to relocate the evicted families in a nearby plot. The protest fast was ended on the basis of this assurance, but given the government's dubious record of renegeing on assurances and even written agreements, the evicted families and all their comrades will have to remain vigilanr to ensure rehabilitation in real life. ❑

## Protests against Casteist Insult of Dalit MLA

Protests were held on 29 January in many towns of Bihar condemning BJP backed Manuwadi forces who didn't allow a CPIML dalit MLA, Comrade Gopal Ravidas, the unveiling of the plaque of the Preamble of the Constitution and inauguration of a school built by latter's recommendation on the Republic Day. The upper caste miscreants had hurled casteist abuses and insults in Kurthaul village of Phulwari Sharif block of Patna.

A big protest march was held in the state capital from Kankarbagh which passed through many areas of Phulwari assembly constituency including Changar, Ashok Nagar Ramlakhan Path, Sorangpur, and East and West Ramkrishna Nagar. The angry protesters shouted slogans like 'Dalit Garib hai Taiyar - Bhajapayi Dabango Hoshiyar', 'Shame on Nitish Kumar', 'Every insult will be avenged', and 'Down with the rule of feudals and criminals under Nitish Kumar'. They demanded arrests of all Manuwadis who were involved in the incident of 26 January.

A big protest was also held in nearby Fatuha town which was led by comrade Gopal Ravidas. The protesters and activists

pledged to defend the egalitarian democratic values of the constitution and defeat feudal reactionary casteist forces.

Gopal Ravidas has given in writing the details of that incident to the Speaker of the Bihar Assembly demanding immediate punitive action from the state legislature. A higher secondary school was constructed in Kurthaul village with an expenditure of Rs. 2 crores at the recommendation of comrade Gopal Ravidas, who is also the president of this school's management committee. He was invited to inaugurate the school on the Republic Day at 2 pm. But was stopped by upper caste domineering goons led by Chunnu Singh, Mithilesh Singh and Hansraj Hans with hurling caste abuses and manhandled when he unsuccessfully tried to pacify them with a dialogue. The whole incident was reported in writing to the Principle of the school and an FIR was lodged in the Parsa police station but so far none of the attackers has been arrested by the police. Gopal Ravisad also questioned the casteist leanings embedded deep into the state and the district administrations in Bihar. He cited another incident where he was not invited at the Flag hoisting programme, which was attended by CM himself, in a clear violation of the protocol.

# *Reductio ad Absurdum: A Misplaced Judicial Scrutiny*

▲ RISHAV SHARMA & KSHITIJ GOEL

**D**uring the recent hearing of a public interest litigation concerning urban homelessness, Justice BR Gavai made a striking yet unsubstantiated remark, questioning whether welfare measures for the most marginalized were fostering a “class of parasites” “rather than integrating them into mainstream society”. This sweeping statement, devoid of evidentiary backing, was made in a case concerning those who lack even the most basic human necessity i.e. shelter. The judicial rhetoric of equating welfare schemes with “freebies” or revdis, unlike indulgence in decadence, a politically charged word towards maintaining limited government intervention even for those trapped in destitution. The remark signals a troubling shift in India’s discourse as a socialist welfare state, where the Preamble ingrains socialism as a core principle, and the Supreme Court has, over time, refined an indigenous socialist model. The Nehru-Indira era upheld a mixed economy, but the steady march of neoliberalism has systematically eroded its edifice.

The assertion that “freebies” make people not willing to work is particularly unsettling in the era of economic disparity as the top 1 per cent holds 50 per cent of the country’s wealth and the bottom 50 per cent holds just 3 per cent; the fault lines are evident. The unemployment rate stood at around 7.8 per cent as of September 2024 according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey Report. Despite the rapidly expanding workforce, job creation remains almost stagnant leaving millions awaiting to be absorbed in the workforce. Against all the backdrop, dismissing welfare schemes as ‘freebies’ as a sort of opioid that saps the masses

rather than recognizing its necessity ostensibly lays bare a troubling judicial apathy towards the very individuals these institutions are sworn to protect.

This is far from the first time the judiciary has chastised the welfare schemes or, more disturbingly, branded a section as a “parasite” in the realm of public interest litigation. The late 70’s witnessed the emergence of public interest litigations (PILs) to raise various issues like prisoner’s rights, bonded labour, etc. Prof. Upendra Baxi interpreted this as the transformation of the highest court of the land from the “Supreme Court of India” to the “Supreme Court of Indians”, as PILs had opened the judicial process for all. Over time, it has also been witnessed that PIL jurisprudence has on occasion drifted from its intended purpose; Prof. Anuj Bhuwania in ‘Courting the People: Public Interest Litigation in Post-Emergency India’ an ethnographic research, point to several maladies. A few of them being ‘Omnibus PIL’ where a PIL filed to address a specific localized issue is often transformed into broad, generalized litigation often substituting the petitioner with amicus curiae, undermining the agency of the petitioner and judiciary assuming a disproportionate role in steering the case to its priorities rather than the issues raised in the petition. Here too Justice BR Gavai while dealing with the issue of shelter homes and homeless people, instead of holding responsible the state machinery and the requirement of state intervention steered the matter into a debate of freebies which was definitely the issue before the Court.

There have been previous such instances where the Courts have done such. For instance, in the early 2000s, in Almitra H Patel

vs Union of India, the petitioner sought the formulation of Solid Waste Management (Management and Handling) Rules. The then Supreme Court judge, Justice BN Kripal steered the petition away from this subject, to the altogether different issue of proliferation of slums in Delhi. In an interview, the petitioner lamented that the court had derailed the case for ‘over two years’. Similarly, in Sudhir Madan vs MCD, during arguments for ascertaining the hawker’s rights, Justice BP Singh made dismissive remarks suggesting if broad rights were granted to the hawkers, Delhi would be renamed as ‘Hawkers Nagar’ and soon the “hawkers would be selling food in the Supreme Court building”. More recently, a division bench of [Madras High Court](#) comprising Justice N. Kirubakaran and Justice B. Pugalenthi expressed strong disapproval of welfare schemes providing necessities such as laptops, household utilities, and job guarantees. The judges lamented that such measures were making people lazy and discouraging hard work, even arguing that the culture of “freebies” had led to increased reliance on migrant labour from northern and northeastern states.

Dismissal of welfare schemes though rampant, is not the position in law as laid down by the Supreme Court. In the case of S. Subramaniam Balaji vs The Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors, where it was contended that the gift, offers or promise by the candidate or agent (political) amounts to ‘bribery’ or ‘inducement’ under Section 123 of the Representation of Peoples Act, the Apex Court had held that promises made in manifestos and delivering upon the promises by the future government are not in the

court's domain. Further, the court observed:

The concept of State largesse is essentially linked to Directive Principles of State Policy. Whether the State should frame a scheme, which directly gives benefits to improve the living standards or indirectly by increasing the means of livelihood, is for the state to decide and the role of the court is limited in this regards.

The Apex Court concurred with the State government's stance to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting, with the objective of achieving social and economic justice. The Apex Court added that livelihood and standard of living are bound to change in their content from time to time, and what may have been considered a luxury has now become a necessity and the concept of livelihood can no longer be confined to bare physical survival. This judgment, in that sense, follows the

doctrine of separation of powers, that is policy is the domain of the executive and the judiciary does not have to jurisdiction or expertise in that regard.

The Mandela effect of welfare schemes permeating lethargy and other vices is unfounded. Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee while addressing the 20<sup>th</sup> foundation day of Bandhan Bank suggested that there is no empirical evidence to suggest that such government intervention towards uplifting the poor makes them lazy. On the contrary, welfare schemes have proved themselves to have positive ripple effects. Governmental affirmative action helped in the upliftment of the poor and made them more productive and creative based on his decade of research in diverse economies from different continents.

As far as political parasitism is concerned, the true parasites are those who exploit their host

while remaining invisible, escaping recognition and accountability. Consider the two parallel systems at work: on one hand, corporations benefit from generous incentives like tax deductions and waivers, amassing wealth generated by the labour of billions in India who toil in drudgery; on the other, the surplus produced by this labour is disproportionately enjoyed by those at the echelons. Yet, the idea of parasitism doesn't hold in the public imagination in a real sense. As has been aptly put by Marxist Scholar Prof. Jason Read the moment something is identified as a parasite, it risks eradication. The most successful parasites are never labelled as such, they seamlessly integrate into the system they exploit. If at all the parasites have to be called out, they are those who have mastered the art of invisibility, ensured survival and flourished while the rest bear the burden. □

## *Thiruparangunram - A Ploy to Disturb Communal Harmony*

▲ SIMPSON

The Sanghis are trying to communalise Tamil society by articulating slogans like 'Protect Thiruparangunram hills (Madurai) and 'Liberate Thiruparangunram hills'. The BJP – RSS had a mobilisation in the hills to incite communal passions and divide the society when the prohibitory orders were in force. After trying in various ways, now the BJP is raising the question whether the Thiruparangunram hills belong to Kandar (Tamil Hindu God, believed to be an avatar of God Murugan) or Sikkandar (a Muslim disciple of Muslim

Prophet Mohammad). This is the latest attempt of BJP in Tamil Nadu to communalise the Tamil society along the model of Ayodhya and Ram temple. The same police of the DMK government which do not even allow the families to visit the relatives in Vengai Vayal village in Pudukottai where faecal substance was dissolved in drinking water tank used by Dalits, acted as spectators when the BJP defied and violated prohibitory orders. The people are raising eyebrows questioning the role of the so-called 'Dravidian model' government led by MK Stalin and DMK.

### **An Overview of the Issue**

A temple of an avatar of Lord Murugan is located on one side of the Thiruparangunram hills, and a shrine of Sikkandar is located on the other. A small temple of Lord Shiva and a local god of downtrodden castes, Karuppannasamy are also located in the same hills. These are the hills which the BJP has chosen now to promote its politics of hate against the harmony among people of all religions in the hills and around.

A British writer Mr SC Hill in 1914 authored a book titled, "Yousuf Khan, the Rebel Commandant" which says



that a Muslim disciple of the Prophet called Sikkandar lived, fought and died for the people in the hills then. Yousuf Khan later built a shrine for Sikkandar in his cemetery. The place is considered to be a shrine of Sufism where Hindus and Muslims used to visit and worship.

Another writer Nelson, in 1968, in his "Madurai Manual" wrote that there was a temple of Lord Murugan and also a cemetery of a Muslim and a Dargah (shrine) around it in the 500 feet high Thiruparangunram hills.

There had been several cases from 1926 to 1931 in several courts, including the Madras High Court and also in the privy council of a King then. Sir George Lowndes has noted in his judgment on 12.05.1931 the existence of places of worship for Hindus and Muslims in the hills. The imprints of existence of an altar for goats and a kitchen is seen even now.

The Places of Worship Act 1991 has already mandated that the 1947 status of the places of worship should be preserved and no alteration is allowed. It has also prescribed three years imprisonment for any violations. Still, the BJP Sanghis are openly violating the law and articulating demands against the law.

### **Why the New Found Love for Sanghis on the Hills**

Sanghis are saying that Muslims eat non-vegetarian food in the hills, and that this is polluting and contrary to Hindu spiritualism. But, all communities including the Muslims have been consuming meat on these Hills from time immemorial. Why are the Sanghis creating a dispute now then? Is it because the Tamil Nadu assembly elections are due in 2026? In order to create a divide among the harmonious Hindu-Muslim relationship, the BJP is articulating this issue, not out of any love or respect for Lord Murugan. The same

BJP that is opposing the legislation of the Tamil Nadu government that allows people of all castes, not just Brahmins, to become archakas (Hindu Priests) in temples, that abuses Hindus of other castes (other than Brahmins) as fools, Shudras and untouchables, is now calling for a unity of 'Hindus' to 'protect the hills'. It is the same Sanghis who locked the gates of Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai against the entry of people of all castes, it is the same Sanghis who never gave a call to protect the temples to be demolished in the areas of Tungsten mining project of the union government, are now giving the call to remove a Muslim Sufi Shrine from the hills. The reason is obvious. They want to politicise and communalise the people's faith and the rituals. Mr Gurumurthy, a well-known leader of Sangh Parivar, openly admitted that it is nothing but politics while their lawyer was arguing in the court otherwise. The politics of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar has nothing to do with spirituality whatsoever.

### **The Role of the Police and the State government**

Tamil Nadu police, which is otherwise considered to be a strong force, acted only as a spectator in the case of BJP's mobilisation and the attempt to communalise the people's faith in Thiruparangunram hills when the prohibitory orders were in place. On the contrary, a "Rally for Harmony" proposed by the left and progressive forces of the district was promptly prohibited by the police. Even in court, the government advocates put up weak arguments and failed to submit the literary, historical and legal evidence against the arguments of the Sangh Parivar. It is only the impleaded advocates of progressive organisations who articulated the effective counter arguments in

favour of the people and to preserve the tradition of the hills.

Any counter to Sanghis attempt to spread communal virus, can only be to spread progressive ideas and values of the Tamil people and the society. Unfortunately, the government is indulging in competitive communalism, of course of a soft variety, by organising conferences on God Murugan and the Goddess Amman.

The political intentions of Sangh Parivar were exposed when one of the Hindutva organisations petitioned before the court seeking permission to hold a "Vel Yatra" (Vel is a spear-like weapon in the hands of God Murugan) in Chennai. The High Court judge questioned the rationale behind holding a rally in Chennai to 'protect' Thiruparangunram hills in Madurai. He also asserted that a constitutional right to protest cannot be granted to programmes that destroy the social and religious harmony, unity and sovereignty. He directed the police not to give any permission for such programmes while upholding the people's right to worship.

The people of Thiruparangunram hills have also resolved that they will do their best to protect the prevailing social harmony and tradition while being cautious about forces disturbing the same. Thiruparangunram (a popular place of worship of Hindus), Vailankanni (a popular place of worship of Christians) and Nagore (a popular place of worship of Muslims) are symbols of religious unity and harmony in Tamil Nadu, and shall be preserved as the same. Any attempt by communal forces to disturb the same for their own political purposes should be handled with heavy hands and the DMK led state government should not fail to perform its constitutional duty. □

# *The Kumbh Tragedy and the Culpability of the Modi-Shah-Yogi Dispensation*

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**T**he periodic congregation of sadhus and ordinary believers and practitioners of various schools of Hinduism on the bank of the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna in Allahabad, now renamed Prayagraj, or in other centres like Haridwar and Ujjain, has been an age-old Hindu pilgrimage practice. While early references to the Kumbh describe it more as a philosophical event dominated by scriptural discourse and debates, over the years it metamorphosed into a riverside religious fair. In the Modi-Shah-Yogi era, it has now become a politico-religious spectacle, a platform that draws on the religious faith of common Hindus to project the power of corporate Hindutva and increasingly promote the communal fascist agenda of Hindu Rashtra. The current Prayagraj Mahakumbh has taken this trend to an ominous level.

With Delhi went to polls on February 5, the Sangh brigade had gone the whole hog to use the Prayagraj Mahakumbh as a mega publicity platform. February is also the month of the budget and what better option could the Modi government have had to distract public attention from the gloomy economic conditions than projecting the Kumbh as a great success story? With thousands of crores of rupees pumped in from the government coffer, the Modi-Yogi double engine dispensation propagated the Kumbh as a massive management marvel. Even as Sangh-inspired demands for keeping non-Hindus, especially

Muslims, strictly away from the entire event become more strident, the Kumbh is being publicised as a great celebration of 'social equality'. But following the tragic 29 January crush (ground reports now reveal at least three crush sites), the propaganda balloon has been thoroughly punctured and the truth has started coming out.

The stampedes which have claimed reportedly at least fifty lives and injured scores of pilgrims, and the repeated incidents of fire that destroyed many tents and stalls expose the government's self-congratulatory claims regarding the management of this mega fair. If anything, the stampedes are a shocking testimony of utter mismanagement and complete disregard for the plight of ordinary pilgrims while remaining fixated on VIP comfort and privileges. What is even worse is the shocking response to the tragedy - the concerted attempts to suppress and downplay the tragedy by the government, faithfully echoed by the dominant media with a few honourable exceptions, presenting it as a minor and inevitable mishap of little consequence in an event of this scale. We even had a shockingly insensitive comment by a Hindu Rashtra champion describing the stampede deaths as attainment of salvation by fortunate pilgrims.

The Prayagraj Kumbh has become a platform for the projection of the business-politics-religion nexus that drives the Modi government. Yogi Adityanath's office released a photo of Yogi Adityanath and Baba Ramdev performing a

yogic tango of sorts, Amit Shah was seen having a holy anointment by a dozen sadhus surrounding him while taking a dip in the river, while Gautam Adani collaborated with ISKCON to serve free food to pilgrims in the ISKCON camp, calling the Kumbh fair a great display of India's 'spiritual infrastructure'. Meanwhile, a stall of Acharya Prashant, the spiritual preacher who combines his spiritual discourse with an anti-superstition campaign, was vandalised by a group of 'sadhus'. And to top it all, the Kumbh also witnessed the release of a 501-page draft constitution for an 'Akhand Hindu Rashtra' prepared by a 25-member team of 'scriptural scholars'. The draft claiming to draw on Hindu scriptures ranging from Ramayana and Krishna's gospels to Manusmriti and Chanakya's Arthashastra, advocates a presidential form of centralised government with voting rights denied to Muslims.

For millions of Hindu believers, the Kumbh may be an ancient celebration of faith, but for the Sangh brigade and the entire lobby of Hindu Rashtra advocates, the Kumbh is clearly a political project. When religion is amalgamated with politics, the beliefs of ordinary people get subordinated to the political interests of dominant forces. The Kumbh tragedy must serve as a stark reminder of the disastrous implications of political exploitation of religion.

The Modi-Yogi 'double engine' dispensation must publicly take responsibility for the Kumbh tragedy, and pay adequate compensation

for the victims and the injured. The Supreme Court of India as the custodian of the Constitution should take cognizance of the anti-Constitution campaign launched by the so-called Hindu Rashtra Samvidhan Nirmal Samiti and nip

this latest manifestation of the anti-Constitution conspiracy in the bud. It should now become abundantly clear to all that the disparaging remarks made by Amit Shah on the floor of Parliament were no sudden slip of the tongue. The conspiracy against

the Constitution and the Republic is gathering momentum, and the people of India who are committed to the constitutional proclamation of a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic of India must rally unitedly to foil this attack. □

## *After How Many Monsoons will the Stains of Blood be Washed?*

▲ K.K.PANDEY

**T**he Mahakumbh in Prayagraj was preceded by a long publicity campaign which included posters and hoardings of the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister inviting people there, preachers- both male and female, proclaiming that “A Hindu that did not visit the Kumbh was a traitor”. A veritable mass hysteria was sought to be built to serve political ambitions by invoking the bogey of Sanatan pride. The invitees were assured of a high-quality infrastructure that would render transport, security, accommodation, clean bathing ghats as well as 5-star hotel like facilities for those willing to purchase them. When the event commenced on 13 January on the day of Paush Purnima, the mass influx began to occasionally challenge the preparations in the city and the Mela ground. The recourse taken was to shift the parking to a distant location and let the devotees walk on foot, distances as long as 15 to 20 km to reach the Sangam. Every day, a VVIP, VIP, a high-ranking government official or a minister would be present in the mela and become a source of traffic jams. The CM was literally operating his camp office from the mela ground. On the auspicious day of Mauni Amawasya on 28-29 January, when

the largest number of devotees prefer to take a holy dip, the 60,000 odd strong security contingent, aided with thousands of CCTVs and AI assisted surveillance devices proved ineffective in monitoring and controlling the deluge of masses that came pouring in. A stampede resulted in the death of many innocent pilgrims. A similar stampede in 1954 in Sangam had stained with blood the city of Allahabad.

Incidentally, in the 2013 Kumbh, an accident occurred at the railway overbridge in Allahabad (now Prayagraj) in which many devotees lost their lives. The actual number of deaths was made public. The then incharge minister of the mela, Azam Khan had resigned after taking the moral responsibility for the mishap. However, this time, the state machinery was busy hiding the actual number of deaths and even went to the extent of intimidating journalists in the name of curbing rumours. Even after a few TV channels played visuals of corpses lying in hospitals, the Chief Minister, after many hours of the mishap, went public with reduced numbers of the dead and appeared more inclined towards warning against rumours. A similar stampede was reported in the Jhusi area near Sangam.

It would shame people to know that within hours of the stampede, the belongings of the dead were hurriedly removed from the site by JCB and tractors to facilitate the bath of the saints and rose petals were air dropped over them, just adjacent to the site where many had lost their lives a few hours ago. Was it not possible for the saints to observe a minute's silence in the memory of the dead? Would it not have been more sensitive to refrain from showering petals?

Some of us had been observing the influx of masses in the city and were keeping our fingers crossed for their safety. However, the ground realities were presenting a disturbing picture. Before the Mela started, a warning had been issued against the entry of Muslims in the mela. The reality however was found to be different. Many labourers working in the mela were Muslims. Two Muslim labourers had already lost their lives while constructing the road overbridge from Soroan. The Khusro Bagh mosque near the railway station had been barricaded. Some mosques and churches lying on the route from the city to the mela ground witnessed provocative slogans from some mischievous devotees but the people displayed their maturity

and no untoward incident was reported. As a gesture of harmony, many Muslims living in areas of mixed population handed over their houses to their Hindu neighbours for accommodating the devotees. The 500 odd buses arranged by the state government proved inadequate in transporting the devotees. Before Makar Sankranti on 13 January, the transport vehicles were ordered to be parked 15 km from the mela ground, leading to immense hardship to the devotees who had to travel on foot to reach the mela ground. The vehicles of VIPs and VVIPs were however allowed to ply right into the mela ground, thereby causing hardship to the pedestrians.

On the day of Mauni Amavasya (28 January), my acquaintance Shatrughan Nishad, who runs a tea shop near the Dasashwamedh ghat informed me that the security forces were forcing the devotees

into small bylanes and locking them there. The question is that when the situation had become alarming on 28 January morning itself, what steps did the administration take to manage the crowd so that the stampede on 29th morning could be averted. The Home Minister had taken a bath on 27th morning and a high-level meeting was convened by the Chief Minister on 27th evening. Why did the administration, equipped with modern surveillance equipment not take measures to control the large numbers of devotees who had started gathering from 27th morning itself.

During the intervening night of 28-29 January, the art editor of the magazine Samkaleen Janmat, Ankur walked 10 km to reach the ghat at 12.30 in the night. He was shocked to hear the sound of the sirens of ambulances there. He presumed that maybe a mock drill

was being conducted there. But later he realized that a stampede had taken place. His co-journalists like Sushil Manav, Mohd. Anas and senior photojournalist S K Yadav were busy shooting the whole scene.

The high-profile hightech 100 bed hospital, built at the mela ground was flooded with men and women after the stampede, with doctors and medical staff struggling to provide medical care. Later, the dead bodies were moved to the medical college mortuary and the Swaroop Rani hospital mortuary. Other than the list of the 30 dead that was displayed on the main gate of the post mortem house, no information about the missing, dead or injured was made available till 2 February. Ganga Prasar centre 1, one of the over ten lost and found centres built in the mela, sheltered 38 women till the night of 1 February.

The name of Allahabad was

**Statement:**

**CPI(ML) mourns the loss of lives in the tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway station**

February 16, 2025, New Delhi:

A tragic stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station has claimed 18 lives and left several injured on 15th February, Saturday. The stampede, triggered by the delays in multiple services during the Maha Kumbh rush, is a direct indictment of the Central government's callous mismanagement of India's railways. Despite clear warnings from ticket sales data—which showed 1,500 general tickets sold hourly—railway authorities failed to deploy adequate crowd control measures, leaving platforms dangerously overcrowded. Passengers, including women and children, were left to scramble for space, crushed under the weight of systemic apathy.

The severity of the incident was such that, the first responders rescuing the people were the coolies of the railway station. The railway administration didn't have emergency measures in place to deal with an

incident of this magnitude. It is clear, the Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw whose focus is primarily on PR management and content creation has failed to strengthen the railway safety and administration.

Despite the Minister ordering a high-level enquiry, the abject failure of his leadership has repeatedly led to common people losing their lives in ever increasing train accidents and his gross failure in strengthening administrative mechanism. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw must be removed from his post forthwith.

The massive propaganda of the Modi-Yogi government stating that the Maha Kumbh has been organised keeping the pilgrims in focus, is exposed as each day passes. Both the state and central governments have failed to ensure a safe Maha Kumbh that was visible through the tragic deaths in the more than one stampede at Maha Kumbh, huge traffic snarls, abysmal planning of facilities and ease of movement for the general public, and whereas VIPs are being provided with green corridors.

It is time that the double engine government is held responsible for people's miseries and deaths due to its gross mismanagement.



changed to Prayagraj before the last Kumbh. An anti-Muslim hate campaign launched then had failed to dampen the spirit of communal harmony that was part and parcel of the civic life of the city. The citizens of Allahabad and the Muslims residents came out to help the people reach the railway station. To avert any untoward incident because of the swelling crowds, the residents of the old city areas like Ghantaghar, Nakkhas, Raushan Bagh and Khusrobagh opened the gates of their mosques, dargahs, madrasas and schools to provide shelter to the devotees. They provided food and clothing to the needy during 29 and 30 January. On the other hand, there was no relief forthcoming from the grand Akhara tents, corporate rest houses and 5-star tents. On the morning of 30 January at 4 am, I met an elderly lady Yashoda, hailing from Gulabpura village of district Auraiya, who had walked 20 km and had to walk another 5 km to reach the Subedarganj railway station. She thanked Ganga maiyya for saving her life though she was worried about her swollen legs.

The sanitation workers working day and night at the mela were harassed by the police and the companies. Their leader Balram Patel of the Safai Mazdoor Ekta Manch, Allahabad handed a memorandum to the mela administration on 1 February. Even after spending 7300 crores, there appears no end in sight to the troubles there. The multinational event management company Ernst and Young, which was awarded a multi crore order for event management, Dabur, Nestle, Blinkit etc. had filled the mela spot with their advertisements. They had turned it into a mela showcasing the corporate-political nexus. Adani sponsored a 45 day food distribution camp in collaboration with ISKCON.

I cannot end here without asking a question to my Prime Minister. The first tragedy occurred in the Kumbh in independent India in 1954. Some people were trying to shield Nehru by saying that he was not physically present during the stampede and he had left a day earlier after taking stock of the preparations. However, Nehru accepted on the floor of the house that he and Dr. Rajendra Prasad were physically present near the site when the accident occurred. He offered an apology for the accident. The then chief minister of UP, Govind Ballabh Pant wanted to hush up the accident. A.N. Mukerjee, a senior journalist of Anand Bazar Patrika who was injured in the stampede took photographs of the accident and they were published in the newspaper on 4 February. Pant told him to tender an apology for publishing false news. Mukerjee did not bow down and secretly reached the place where the dead bodies were placed to be cremated. Again on 5th February, these photos were printed. Shishir Kumar Ghosh, the editor of Anand Bazar Partika had been persecuted by the British and his paper had been banned but he started a newspaper with the name Yugantar in 1937. How could such a man succumb before the threats of a CM or a PM?

It is pertinent to note that during the recently concluded Delhi elections, the PM was offering his condolence for the bereaved souls of Kumbh stampede, the officials like the SSP of Kumbh were busy parroting the statement that no stampede had taken place. Will the PM take some steps and at least tell the nation the actual figure of the dead? It is worth recalling that during the Kumbh of 2019, the PM had blamed Nehru for the 1954 stampede. The PM had himself visited the Kumbh a month ago for laying the foundation stone of many projects and had proclaimed

that CM yogi was on the job. The CM had invited all Hindus who believe in the Sanatan dharma to participate in the Kumbh. So would he now take the responsibility for the deaths in the tragic stampede. UP minister Azam Khan, who had resigned after the stampede at the railway station was being castigated for being a Muslim and organizing the Kumbh by the CM and his Deputy CM. Has not the time come for CM Yogi to resign too? Or would the whole matter be hushed up by forming a three-member inquiry committee comprising of a retired judge of the High court, an IAS and an IPS officer? The committee did ask some questions from the mela organising committee but when will the nation know about the actual number of the dead or the whereabouts of the more than 1500 still missing.

On 3 February, in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge paid condolences to the thousands that had lost their lives in Kumbh. The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and the Vice President Mr. Jadgeep Dhankar protested and asked Kharge to take back his words. Kharge replied that this figure was his estimate of the dead and if the government feels that the data is wrong, it should come forward with the actual data. He added that he would apologise if proved wrong. The statement by the leader of the largest opposition party of the country about the figure of the dead and the reluctance of the government to issue the actual figure lends credence to the claims of the opposition about the large number of unreported deaths. □

[Translated and slightly abridged version of the article published in Samkaleen Janmat. The title of the article is borrowed from the fourth line of the poem 'Upon returning from Dhaka' by Faiz Ahmad Faiz.]

# Left Parties Oppose Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill 2024

**L**eft parties and various mass organisations have submitted their objections to the proposed Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill 2024 which was tabled in Maharashtra Assembly in December last year and was referred to a Joint Select Committee. CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) Liberation, Peasants and Workers Party, Lal Nishan Party along with more than two dozen other organisations have sent a letter to the Select Committee calling the provisions of this proposed Bill draconian, repressive and unconstitutional. This Bill is intended to be weaponised against political opposition and any form of dissent in the name of tackling “Urban Naxals”.

This Bill empowers the Government to declare an organisation as “unlawful”, the consequences of which are manyfold. This violates the fundamental tenets and principles of law – 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, the principle of non-retroactivity, right of Self Incrimination and the specificity of offences. The Bill is marked by vague and broad definitions that are antithetical to criminal statutes.

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”. Thus by this broad definition, every act of dissent including peaceful protests and non-violent civil disobedience could be criminalised. The basic freedom of speech and expression and right to dissent would be rendered illusory.

Another deeply problematic aspect is that several terms used in this definition – danger, menace, encouraging, preaching, etc. are not defined in the Bill. 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.

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. 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 nonviolent activity, speech, or communications) illegal, to restrict its activities, and to punish some or all of its members.

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”. 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 up to seven years and fine upto five lakhs rupees.

The penalties laid down in the Bill are grossly arbitrary.

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.

Reading this Bill, one is reminded of the Public Safety Bill ushered in by the British colonial rulers in 1918. The purpose of that legislation was to tackle the independence struggle and to suppress the genuine aspirations of the people. The 1918 Public Safety Bill was finally rejected by the Assembly, with Motilal Nehru strongly rejecting it on behalf of the Indian National Congress.

The present legislation has similar draconian intent to suppress dissent and cause alarm amongst the citizenry. This attempt to enact the bogey of urban naxals into law, runs contrary to the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and reintroduces colonial tools of control and suppression at the cost of democratic norms and ethos and ought to be rejected in toto. □

# Uttar Pradesh State Conference of CPIML

**T**he 14th Uttar Pradesh State Conference of the CPI(ML) Liberation commenced with a march in Lucknow on February 15 against the politics of hatred and the authoritarian ‘Bulldozer Raj’ of the Yogi-Modi regime. The two-day conference, attended by 400 delegates, began with the flag hoisting by veteran leader Mukhtar Ahmad and paying tribute to martyrs by observing two minutes of silence.

The inaugural session was addressed by CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, who sharply criticised the BJP government’s handling of key issues. He particularly condemned the recent deportation of Indians by the United States in handcuffs, terming it an attack on the dignity and sovereignty of the Indian people. He remarked, “While smaller nations like Colombia are protesting against this humiliating treatment of their citizens, Prime Minister Modi visits the US and legitimises this move under the guise of combating human trafficking. Gujarat, the showcase of Modi’s much-hyped ‘model’, has seen a rise in such trafficking over the past three decades of BJP rule.”

Com. Dipankar’s speech highlighted various facets of state repression under the BJP’s ‘double-engine’ government, rising atrocities against Dalits, minorities and the working class, alongside the increasing use of bulldozers to illegally demolish homes. The session was addressed by CPI(ML) Member of Parliament from Ara (Bihar), Sudama Prasad, Deputy Leader of the Legislative Party in

Bihar Satyadev Ram, ex-MLA Amar Yadav and CPI Uttar Pradesh State Secretary Arvind Raj, reinforcing the need for a united left-democratic resistance against the ruling regime’s anti-people policies. Noted social activist and writer Naish Hasan from Lucknow also spoke at the event denouncing the growing communal and patriarchal violence in Uttar Pradesh.

The conference deliberated on strategies to strengthen CPI(ML) and left-wing mobilisation in Uttar Pradesh, with a particular focus on workers’ rights, agrarian distress, and the protection of constitutional freedoms against the communal fascism onslaughts. Comrade Indresh Maikhuri, central committee member, was the central observer for the conference. Party’s UP incharge Kunal also addressed the conference. After two days of deliberations the conference elected a 65-member state committee which in turn elected Comrade Sudhakar Yadav as Secretary. 57 delegates shared their views on the work report which was passed unanimously.

The conference passed resolutions that included a condolence resolution for the pilgrims who died in the stampedes in the Kumbh Mela and at New Delhi Railway station due to governmental negligence and mismanagement. This resolution also demanded the resignation of the Union Railway Minister for his incompetence. Another resolution condemned the Modi government for shamelessly accepting insults meted out to Indian migrant workers who were sent back in chains.

The conference demanded immediate halt to the ongoing imposition of smart electricity meters giving inflated bills, 200 units free electricity to each household, removal of ESMA imposed on struggling employees, and inquiry into every incident of fake encounter and custodial death under the Yogi regime. It was resolved by the conference to intensify the fight against Yogi’s bulldozer raj which is illegally demolishing the homes of poor, dalit, adivasi and minorities besides displacing a large number of villages and localities on the pretext of forest or public lands without rehabilitation and compensations.

The issue of justice for IIT-BHU gangrape victim was raised vehemently. The conference expressed solidarity with the agitating youth against 69,000 teachers recruitment scam. The debt waiver of poor households and women trapped by atrocious microfinance companies was also discussed.

The delegates strongly criticised Yogi government for its anti-muslim actions and passed a resolution against state sponsored violence perpetrated in Sambhal and Baharaich and demanded to stop the oppression of minorities and strict implementation of Places of Worship Act 1991.

The conference reiterated the Party’s resolve to intensify people’s movement against divisive politics of BJP-RSS and to bring people’s basic issues to the centrestage of UP’s politics. □

# Convention on Proposed PESA Rules in Jharkhand

A convention on proposed PESA Rules was organised in Ranchi on 5 February 2025 at Mahendra Singh Bhawan. Jharkhand these days is intensely discussing the revised Rules (originally proposed and made available to public in 2023) for Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act). The PESA was enacted in 1996, the Rules for this are yet to be made and implemented in Jharkhand. Odisha is another such state waiting for the framing of rules while rest of the eight states where PESA applies have made their Rules. Now this has become important to understand and make people aware of the ongoing debates regarding the proposed Rules in the context of preserving the autonomy of tribal communities as well as their culture and rights over the Jal-Jangal-Zameen.

The 73rd Constitutional amendment in 1992 led the way for the Panchayati Raj Act. This also raised apprehensions about encroachment on the culture and autonomy of adivasi communities having their own community self-governance traditions. Therefore, to extend Panchayati Raj in Fifth Schedule areas some changes and exceptions were suggested by the parliamentary committee led by Dilip Singh Bhuria. These were incorporated through the enactment of PESA Act 1996. The intention was to protect the traditional self-governance of tribal communities and rights over land, water and forest resources along with maintaining effective control over local markets and institutions. A similar mechanism already exists in the Sixth Schedule areas in the North-East states where elected

Autonomous District Councils have been given various administrative and financial powers. PESA actually meant to provide similar rights to Gram Sabhas and Adivasi communities in Fifth Schedule areas in ten states.

Unfortunately, implementation of PESA Act has effectively been turned into a mere ornamental paper work by the administration and corporate nexus, betraying its fundamental objectives. The rights of adivasis and gram sabha over their land and forest produce are deceitfully, and in many cases forcefully, been trampled betraying PESA in letter and spirit. Adivasis' forests and lands are being acquisitioned, their legal rights over forest produce not implemented. The implementation of the Act needs a conscious socio-political intervention and adequate resistance against the unwillingness of the government. Even before the implementation of PESA, Jharkhand witnessed manipulations to undermine the rights of gram sabhas, besides inter community conflicts politically engineered by ruling parties' leaders.

The Gram Sabha is the basic unit enjoying rights under PESA and must be respected by higher bodies like Panchayat or Zilla Parishad. The draft rules proposed by the Jharkhand government more or less talk about continuing traditional adivasi forms in the Gram Sabha, but this actually reflects what was given under the Jharkhand Panchayat Act of 2001. The state has already diluted CNT and SPT acts and the Wilkinson Rules meant to protect tribals, through a land acquisition amendment Act enacted in 2017 and a Land Bank policy made under BJP's Raghubar Das government. Without scrapping

these two latter provisions any talk of empowering gram sabhas and communities in scheduled areas is redundant. The CNT-SPT Act and Wilkinson Rules empower the Deputy Commissioner for taking decisions with respect to the transfer of land. This clearly overrules the rights of Gram Sabha enshrined under PESA. The proposed draft rules do not provide any solution for this, hence defeats the very objective.

Urbanisation is taking place at a fast pace with new industrial areas, cities and towns developing. This has increased the non-*adivasi* population in Scheduled areas requiring extra measures to be taken to protect village communities and *adivasis'* rights. Special provisions are needed to preserve water and other resources and village communities' control over local markets. The rights over local traditional liquor production and sale should also be protected along with increased women's participation and monitoring. The draft rules do not address these issues.

The use of police force or private gangs for overtly or covertly suppressing the opinion of gram sabhas in matters of land acquisitions has become the norm. Heavy presence of officials and police at gram sabha meetings is actually intimidating. The proposed draft rules should have introduced provisions to negate such intimidating situations. Another provision needed is to empower respective village communities in Scheduled and Forest areas to monitor and write preliminary reports to be considered FIR for law and order situations.

This would be highly improper to ignore the demands, message and spirit of the historic Paththalgarhi



movement of Jharkhand when formulating rules related with the adivasis in the state. There must be punitive legal provisions for officials violating the tribal area autonomy given under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution. The PESA Act ensures devolution of rights up to the grassroots level hence the simultaneous process of decentralisation and democratisation are inherent in the Act. Any attempt to demean the democratic values and norms would be an attack on the rights of respective communities. This cannot be achieved by merely paying lip service with some pro-advansi rhetoric while the basic structure remains the same as was in the Jharkhand Panchayat Act of 2001. Moreover, there are attempts to derail the whole subject by diverting it towards the manufactured debate of moolvasi versus adivasi. We must concentrate and focus on achieving the objectives of the PESA Act without undergoing any such useless debates. There cannot be any other way of protecting the interests of moolvasi in the Scheduled areas other than PESA.

The implementation of PESA

has already been delayed and the government has accomplished, or is in the process of completing so many land acquisitions and MOUs. Many villages are facing displacements. Police atrocities, use of muscle power by corporates is rampant resulting in false criminal cases on villagers and eventual displacements. Any delay in framing rules could prove disastrous, but at the same time leaving space to undermine the Scheduled Area provisions would be more disastrous and unproductive just like 1985 domicile policy.

This demands an united people's intervention in order to achieve effective PESA implementation, which also requires tweaking in some other related Acts as discussed above. The Jharkhand government must listen to the elected people's representatives as well as representatives of rights organisations and adivasi movements in Scheduled areas, along with subject matter specialists and competent administrative officials and include their opinions in the final draft rules and implement them within a time frame of maximum six months.

The convention began after

paying tributes to CPIML leaders Vinod Lahari, who passed away recently, and Srilata Swaminathan on her 8th death anniversary. This was attended by more than 70 activists from many districts of Jharkhand including Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, Dumka, Jamtara, Palamou, Garhwa, Latehar, Bokaro and Gumla. CPIML state secretary Manoj Bhakt was among the speakers along with Nita Bedia, Alma Khalko, Kamlesh Singh Chero, RD Manjhi, Santosh Munda, Bunda Baske, and Dhaneshwar Kharwar. The proceedings were conducted by Gautam Munda. Devkinandan Bedia, Jagarnath Oraon, Sushila Tigga, Sukdev Munda, Sudama Khalko, Anjala Tigga, Nageshwar Munda, Manaram Manjhi, Ramchandra Oraon, Siraj Dutta, Aitee Tirki, Shanti Sen and many others also shared their views on the drawbacks of proposed rules in the convention.

The Convention resolved to launch a mass campaign from 8-20 February throughout the state to culminate in a mass mobilisation in Ranchi on 21 February where a demand charter was handed over to the Chief Minister. □

## Statement:

# *Stop Human Rights Violations, Extra-judicial Killings and Militarisation of Bastar*

**T**he escalated war on Maoists has seen security forces in Chhattisgarh kill at least 47 Maoists within 3 weeks of January 2025, while it is reported that 250 Maoists were killed in Chhattisgarh in 2024. Amit Shah has set March 2026 as the deadline to make India Maoist-free. This means large-scale proliferation of security camps in Bastar, use of advanced warfare

equipment including Israeli drones, and unmitigated extra-judicial violence by the state.

Reportedly, since 2019 a total of 290 security camps have been set up in the LWE affected States, mostly in Chhattisgarh and Odisha. In addition to the 48 security camps established last year, the Central security forces and police aim to establish 88 additional security

camps in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected States this year.

This alarming militarisation of Bastar has been met with peaceful and sustained protests by Adivasis against the establishment of security camps in Fifth Schedule Areas without any consultation and consent of the concerned Gram Sabhas, and illegal appropriation of their forests, lands and other resources while also

demanding proper schools, health facilities and other basic amenities. The Chhattisgarh government has responded by banning a people's rights organisation like the Moolvasi Bachao Manch, in October 2024, under the provisions of the draconian Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act.

In the name of 'Naxal-mukt Bharat' the BJP-led governments have thus unleashed a campaign of complete militarisation of resource-

rich Adivasi areas like Bastar and launch an unbridled war on the Adivasi people and all kinds of protests and people's rights campaigns.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation condemns this policy of militarisation and war and calls upon all justice-loving forces to insist on an immediate halt to this war of extermination and guarantee of a democratic space and environment for the deprived and oppressed Adivasis in Bastar

and other areas of Adivasi unrest. The policy of extra-judicial violence against Adivasi protests is totally antithetical to constitutional rule of law, and the government cannot be allowed to get away with such a policy in the name of eliminating Maoists. CPIML demands the release of all human rights activists, leaders of people's movements and innocent Adivasis who have been unjustly incriminated and jailed in false cases. □

## *CPIML MPs Confront Modi Government on Budget and Failed Promises*

On February 11, CPI(ML) Liberation MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad walked out on Nirmala Sitharaman's reply in parliament to debate on budget for failing to address the major issues faced by the people. They noted that the budget failed to address the key issues affecting people of Bihar and the country. Despite the finance minister repeating Bihar's name in her speech numerous times, the failure of the government to address pressing questions of youth, farmers, women, poor and marginalized has exposed the hypocrisy of BJP led NDA at centre.

Earlier on February 7, speaking on the budget in the house, Com. Sudama Prasad said that the Union Budget of Rs 50,65,345 crore for the year 2025-26 is a budget that increases the burden of the common people by giving relief to the corporates. The people wanted a budget that would reduce the growing economic inequality and increase the purchasing power of the common man. The middle class has got some relief in income tax. The Government spent Rs 93,978 crore less on central schemes than the amount announced in the budget last year.

He further added that the allocation of the Agriculture and Welfare Department has been reduced in the budget. The budget of the Food and Public Distribution

Department has also been reduced. Only Rs 600 crore was spent out of Rs 1,435 crore on the budget for skill development and entrepreneurship. The Government has increased foreign investment in the insurance sector by 100 percent, while the allocation in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana has been reduced. The truth of the decline in the real wage rate of workers and their decreasing opportunities for regular employment has been ignored. The claim of doubling the income of farmers has proved to be completely hollow. After the new education policy in 2020, people are having to take loans to study even in Government institutions. He also demanded the footpath shopkeepers and small and medium businessmen should be given interest-free loans of Rs 2 lakh each for five years. Bihar should be given the status of a special state," noted Com. Sudama Prasad.

In a letter to S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Comrade Raja Ram Singh strongly condemned that inhuman and dehumanising treatment of Indian migrant workers deported by the US government. Questioning this silence of Modi government on this issue, he said "the Indian government has a moral responsibility to safeguard the interests of its citizens, especially those who

have contributed to the global economy and upheld the values of hard work and perseverance. It is imperative that we take a principled stand on this issue and ensure that our people are treated with the respect and fairness they deserve."

Comrade Raja Ram Singh specifically targeted the mishandling of religious gatherings like the Mahakumbh, pointing out the tragic overcrowding and stampedes that result in fatalities.

Com. Raja Ram Singh in a letter to Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan and UGC Chairperson Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar demanded the withdrawal of UGC Draft Regulation 2025. He said that **under the draft regulation, India's higher education is being served on a platter to the private sector.** This not only undermines the capacity of individual states in determining their education policy, but also is dangerous for social and economic justice.

He added that the BJP govt at the Centre is not interested in tackling key issues of poor infrastructure in colleges and universities, lack of scholarships or any such issues which hinder academic inclusion of the marginalised in our country. Comrade Raja Ram Singh demanded that **the academic autonomy of institutions must be protected, while ensuring sufficient funds for them.** □

# Badlo Bihar: CPIML's Resolve to Transform Bihar

**S**ince the month of January, Bihar is witnessing a major political campaign organised by CPI(ML) in the lines of historic Badlo Bihar Nyay Yatra that marched across the state with clarion call for justice in month of October last year. Badlo Bihar Samagam, in form of conclaves across the state and a padayatra in Seemanchal region (Badlo Bihar Nyay Yatra- Seemanchal) were organised as part of the ongoing campaign to transform Bihar and ensure justice and people's rights. These segments of the campaign against twenty years of Nitish misrule will culminate in a Badlo Bihar Mahajutaan (mass gathering) rally to be held in Patna on 2 March 2025.

## Badlo Bihar Samagam

Samagams or citizen conclaves were organised across the organised across Bihar from 18 January onwards to highlight major issues affecting people witnessed participation of struggling people ranging from victims of microfinance companies and Scheme workers to farmer leaders, trade unions, youth and teachers. After twenty years of Nitish rule in Bihar poverty is at extreme levels. 92 lakh families in the state could not earn even Rs 6000 in a month. People's urge for a complete change in these inhuman situations and injustice was evident in their huge participation in these Samagams held at regional level in all parts of Bihar. Here are some brief reports of these conclaves.

**Munger Samagam:** The Munger conclave was held on January 18 where many representatives of trade unions and mass organisations, along with activists from Adivasi Sangharsh Morcha shared their issues and resolved to work towards ousting Nitish-BJP government in the coming

elections.

**Patna Samagam:** In a significant gathering held in Patna on January 19, CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya addressed the Badlo Bihar Samagam (Transform Bihar Conclave), a platform that brought together representatives of social movements, civil society, and ordinary citizens. This became an united platform for people's movements. Dipankar Bhattacharya highlighted the repression accompanying Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's so-called Pragati Yatra (Progress Journey), which he termed a "Yatra of Repression." "No one can approach or petition the Chief Minister without facing extreme crackdown. On one side, we have the struggle to transform Bihar, and on the other, a desperate, repressive campaign to retain power," he said.

The conclave concluded with the adoption of the following eight-point resolution:

1. To uphold communal harmony and equality, resolving to build a prosperous and just Bihar where dignity, rights, and justice are guaranteed for all.

2. Calls for the unity of all socio-economic groups and civil society to build a wave of struggles that can transform Bihar, making the 2 March Mahajutan an emblem of collective resistance.

3. Condemning the BJP-RSS's attacks on India's Constitution and democracy, denouncing statements by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat undermining India's independence and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks against Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

4. Condemning the government's repression of BPSC aspirants, scheme workers, and its use of the Pragati Yatra to spread fear.

5. Calls for the implementation of government promises, including Rs. 2 lakh grants, 5 decimal housing land, and permanent housing for all poor families. Demands regularisation of Dalit and marginalised settlements and ownership rights for landless communities. Calls for halting the ongoing land survey in Bihar.

6. Demands an end to exploitative smart electricity meters, free 200 units of electricity. Call for agriculture and the poor, and wage guarantees and increase for over 10 lakh scheme workers. End to the exploitation by microfinance companies and the immediate return of Sahara investors' money.

7. Demands the inclusion of the expansion of reservations for Dalits and backward communities in Bihar under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution and the conduction of a nationwide caste census.

8. The gathering calls for the revival of closed sugar, jute, paper, and cotton mills, along with other industries, and the creation of a detailed action plan to establish a chain of agriculture-based industries. It also demands special status for Bihar to help the state break free from the vicious cycle of poverty.

**Gaya Samagam:** This conclave was held on 23 January, was attended by leaders of Jeevika cadres, microfinance debt trapped women, minority community members, ASHA workers, workers of Lohia Swachhata mission, many trade unions, peasant leaders, youth, students and teachers as well as common citizens.

**Shahabad Samagam:** On the eve of Republic Day, January 25, Shahabad regional conclave was held in Nagari Pracharini auditorium in Arrah town. Dozens of organisations from the region were present along with peasants, rural workers and a large posse of Scheme workers - ASHAs, Aanganwadi and Jeevika cadres.

Attendees paid tributes to martyrs of the Freedom movement and from post-independence people's struggles.

**Muzaffarpur Samagam:** Activists from many organisations from Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Sitamarhi and Sheohar districts of Tirhut region attended this conclave. Presence of representatives from Bagmati Sangharsh Morcha, Sahara Bhugtan Sangharsh Morcha, Bihar State Panch-Sarpanch Sangh, Bihar Karmchari Mahasangh (Gope) and Idrishia Darzi Sagathan were prominent along with dozens of other mass organisations. Many prominent intellectuals and minority representatives also addressed this conclave.

**Darbhanga Samagam:** On 25 January Badlo Bihar Samagam in Darbhanga was organised in Laheriasarai auditorium, where wide range of activists from Mithilanchal participated. This was addressed by Comrade Dipankar, Dharendra Jha and Shashi Yadav among others. Members of progressive Electric Workers' Union, Chikitsa Evam Jan Swasthya Karmchari Sangh, Medical college daily wage workers' unions presented their demand charters to the organisers. Railway workers and MGNREGA Workers Union leaders also addressed this conclave. Siwan Samagam: Sanitation workers, people affected by highway construction demanding compensation, river sand mining workers' union, ambulance drivers union, Polio courier Sangh, ASHA workers union and NREGA workers joined this conclave along with a few dozen more organisations' representatives. Colleges in every block of the district, compensation to land acquisition victims and increase in the amounts disbursed in various welfare schemes were the major issues that came up in the conclave.

**Purnea Samagam:** A Seemanchal regional conclave organised on 25

January in Purnea was attended by social activists from different streams and prominent citizens besides a large number of movemental forces. Saharsa Samagam: Kosi regional conclave held on 26 January in Saharsa began by reiterating the pledge to defend the republic and the constitution.

### **'Yatra' in Seemanchal**

A five-day - 100 km 'Badlo Bihar Nyay Yatra' - Seemanchal padyatra, which started from Forbesganj on 1 February and ended in Purnea on 5 February witnessed a spirited assembly of activists and people. The foot march was led by CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya. Across Seemanchal, the yatra witnessed heightened insecurity among the rural poor who face a growing threat of displacement in the wake of the ongoing land survey. Declining opportunities of local employment drive the youth into migration to faraway states in search of livelihood, turning the region into a captive export zone of cheap labour. The infrastructure of public education and health remains woefully inadequate. Maize and Makhana (water lily or foxnuts) have emerged as the main items of agricultural production, but the people involved in this activity do not earn enough either by way of crop price or wages. And with little facilities for further processing and lack of necessary agro-based industries, the region does not benefit much from this local production. The yatra concluded with a convention in the Kala Bhawan in Purnea after paying homage to Babasaheb Ambedkar at Ambedkar Sadan and Comrade Ajit Sarkar, the popular communist leader of this region and MLA from Purnea who was killed in 1998.

### **Convention: 75 Years of Republic**

A civil society convention on '75 Years of Republic: Challenges for Bihar' was held in Patna on 12 February. Dipankar

Bhattacharya, Delhi University teacher Ratan Lal, Dr. Laxman Yadav, Navin Kumar of Article19, Dr. Chintu Kumari, activist Vandana Prabha, Insaf Manch president Gopal Ravidas and Prof. Shamim Alam addressed the convention which was conducted by Sandip Saurav.

Comrade Dipankar said after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections the urge for transformation of Bihar gained strength with rising voices of struggling forces. The BJP desperately tried to capture and divert people's resentment through its divisive agenda but Bihar is determined to move on a firm footing with concrete issues.

Navin Kumar of Article19 said the whole world is facing a crisis that demands bigger struggles for dignity by the masses. Dr. Laxman Yadav said the country is on the verge of losing the gains of 75 years of independence. We see the constitution openly being subverted in Uttar Pradesh, at the same time Bihar, the land of social justice and peasant movements, gives us hope.

Prof. Ratan Lal criticised dalit leaders inside the NDA for their indifference on the question of employment and education of dalits. They are pulling the Hindutva cart at the cost of dalit unity and rights, he added.

Gopal Ravidas shared his own experience of being a dalit leader. He said even after being elected as MLA he had to face insults from upper caste people. The sorry plight of working women and Scheme workers in Bihar was discussed by Chintu Kumari. Vandana Prabha criticised the Bihar government as the latter tries to limit the existence of common citizens and women into scheme beneficiaries undermining their equal rights and freedoms. Prof. Shamim Alam said we must protect our syncretic culture against the attacks of fascists. Kamlesh Sharma thanked the audience that included a good number of teachers, lawyers and social activists. □



# Stop JCB's Bulldozer Genocide

## New Report And Case Filed On British Company JCB's Role In Human Rights Violations

**O**n 25th January 2025, the eve of Republic Day, which also marked one year from the International Court of Justice's provisional ruling on Israel's genocide in Gaza, in a packed hall in central London, The Stop JCB Demolitions Campaign, a coalition of organisations campaigning against demolitions carried out by British construction manufacturer JCB, held a public meeting to launch a new report, 'Stop JCB's Bulldozer Genocide'. The report in full is available online at [tinyurl.com/stopjcbreport](http://tinyurl.com/stopjcbreport)

Speakers at the launch included researcher and activist Afreen Fatima, from India, whose home in Allahabad was punitively demolished in 2022, Lun Fitton from Kuki-Zo organisation Unau (Welfare Organisation UK and International), Palestinian community activists Tamara Ezz El-Din Barbar and Sara Maher Fhedat, from East Jerusalem, whose homes and communities face demolition to make way for illegal Israeli settlements; and Peter Frankental from Amnesty International, who has researched JCB extensively.

The meeting also announced the filing of a complaint with the UK National Contact Point, under the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, alleging JCB UK's failure to take necessary actions to address the adverse human rights impacts resulting from the use of its heavy machinery products in "punitive demolitions" in India. As documented in the Stop JCB's Bulldozer Genocide report, bulldozers manufactured by JCB, a British manufacturer of construction equipment, are used to advance settlement expansion in

occupied Palestine and the punitive demolition of homes, places of worship, businesses and other institutions in India.

Afreen Fatima said: 'the need to address state violence through demolitions and hold JCB accountable is urgent not just because it reflects corporate responsibility, but because it unearths a deeply entrenched system of oppression and hate that makes such violence possible and even celebrated.

Let me be clear from the outset, demolitions are not neutral acts of governance or administration. They are acts of violence, deliberate, punitive and deeply symbolic.

They are weapons of terror. They destroy not just homes, but entire lives, communities and histories.'

Lun Fitton from the Kuki-Zo Unau Welfare UK and International spoke of the role of JCB just before and after the state-sponsored ethnic genocide that erupted in Manipur in May 2023. Like many other families she had lost close family members to mob lynching on May 4th 2023 in Imphal, 'Less than a month before violence erupted, on April 11 the state government demolished 3 tribal churches on the pretext that they were built on government land. The church members didn't even have time to evacuate the properties as JCBs arrived suddenly at 3am in the morning. No similar steps were taken against structures of other faith built on government properties. On February 20 of the same year, a team of police and forest personnel arrived with 6 JCBs to village of K.Songjang in Lamka, my district, and razed to the ground all houses and properties. Today when we look through parts of Manipur on Google Earth, we see flattened and

burnt land where our houses, villages and churches used to be.'

### The introduction to the report is below

#### Why are we campaigning against JCB?

The sun may have set on the British empire but British imperialism lives on. Today's robber barons are ruthless and unethical multinational companies like J.C. Bamford Excavators Limited (JCB), a British construction company which manufactures bulldozers and other construction equipment.

JCB's Chairman, billionaire Anthony Bamford or Baron Bamford of Daylesford and Wootton, is a major donor to the British Conservative party and a close friend of Boris Johnson. The JCB empire is controlled by the Bamford family trusts, which have been involved in off-shore tax scandals. Despite this, in January 2025, JCB received a Royal Warrant of appointment from King Charles III in appreciation of its ongoing work.

In Palestine, as Amnesty International write in their report JCB Off Track:

'For over 50 years Israel has been displacing Palestinians, demolishing their homes, destroying their livelihoods, and seizing their land for Israeli settlers. This is a war crime: a breach of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit an occupying power from transferring its own civilians into the territory that it occupies. British company JCB is a key supplier of machinery used in this systematic violation of human rights'.

Here JCB operates through its sole dealer, the Israeli company Comasco, which holds contracts with Israel's Ministry of Defence for the same model of JCB machines used in the demolitions and construction of settlements. From as

early as 2006 the Israeli military has been photographed demolishing Palestinian homes with JCB bulldozers.

In India, Narendra Modi's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has consistently used JCB bulldozers to demolish Muslim homes, shops and places of worship across various Indian states in an ongoing project disturbingly named 'bulldozer justice'. In fact, as we show in the pages which follow, JCB is so closely intertwined with this project that it has come to symbolize attacks on Muslims. JCB bulldozers have been used to carry out both punitive and arbitrary demolitions. In the punitive demolitions the homes of people accused of crimes, which include protesting against the BJP, are destroyed. Arbitrary demolitions are illustrated by experiences such as that of Hasina Bi, a 56 year old widow from the state of Madhya Pradesh: 'Everyone at home was asleep that noon, from the fatigue of fasting for Ramzan. Suddenly we heard a lot of commotion outside.

We came out and saw four or five JCB machines coming towards our house. The machines directly attacked our house. We weren't given any notice, nothing'.

In Kashmir, which is one of the most militarised zones on earth, the Indian army has, for decades, acted with total impunity. Despite this, until 2019 the region of Jammu and Kashmir retained autonomy on various internal matters and only Kashmiris were eligible to buy land. This changed in 2019 when India revoked Article 370 of its Constitution. Non-Kashmiris can now buy land and settle in Kashmir. In order to facilitate the entry of Indians and Indian capital, land and property is being acquired, dispossessing local owners without any due process.

A series of demolition drives are being carried out frequently using JCB bulldozers. Many of the properties demolished belong to non-BJP political figures, with authorities making baseless allegations of illegal land acquisition or

construction. However, there have also been brutal arbitrary demolitions such as the experience of Suhail Ahmad Shah, a worker in a workshop selling second hand car parts in Srinagar: 'No notice was served to us. The officials came suddenly and demolished our workshop. No one is listening to us. We've been paying rent. Isn't this an atrocity? They have snatched our livelihood.'

### **The campaign and its demands**

The campaign 'JCB: Stop Bulldozer Genocide' is a coalition of organisations with two main demands:

1. JCB must end its relationship with the Israeli Ministry of Defence and cease all activities in occupied Palestine.
2. JCB must commit to ensuring that its products are not used for human rights violations through robust monitoring and prevention systems. This includes making compulsory the use of its existing LiveLink technology to trace and locate JCB machines. ❑

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## *Immigrant Workers in the US: Wealth Creators facing State Terror*

▲ TAMARAI

**T**he US President Donald Trump, who 'reigned' the empire previously from 2017-2021 and was sworn in for a 2nd term on January 20, 2025. He has gone to new lengths to cause untold suffering to the immigrant communities. Immigrants without legal status also called undocumented immigrants account for around 11-12 million people and are disparagingly called illegal immigrants/illegal aliens. During the election campaign Trump used racist and xenophobic rhetoric including one outrageous and baseless remark

about Haitian immigrants eating dogs in a small town.

Within weeks of his swearing in as President, more than 8000 undocumented immigrants have been arrested by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). 104 undocumented Indian migrant workers were transported using a C-17 military transport plane. The US Border Patrol shared a video on social media platform X that showed the workers handcuffed and their legs shackled as they boarded the US military plane for Amritsar. This video was set to dramatic music as

the detained migrants marched on board. The parade of these migrants in shackled feet has shocked and deeply hurt justice minded people all over the world.

It was shameful that the foreign minister S. Jaishankar did not openly condemn this inhuman treatment and stated that these deportations were not new and had been going on for years. CPIML MP, Raja Ram Singh, in his letter to the government demanded that the Indian government stand by its people and not bow down to the US imperial policies. He pointed out that US corporations have thrived and made

profits on the backs of immigrants. Raja Ram Singh also questioned "... rather than standing by its people, why has India compromised its independent foreign policy to placate the new President Trump?"

In a total contrast to the Indian government's shameful response, Gustavo Petro Colombian President in an interview with Univision said "... No Colombian men or women will enter here in handcuffs unless they are proven criminals". Colombian Air Force plane arranged for more than 100 migrants to return without handcuffs and were treated with dignity. The American Civil Liberties Committee (ACLU) and a few other immigrant rights organizations just filed a legal suit against the Trump administration for transporting more than 50 immigrants to the notorious U.S detention facility in Guantanamo where they will not have even access to legal aid.

### **Deals and Deportations**

Modi met with Trump on February 14 to discuss bilateral trade, military deals and private industry collaborations between both the countries. India and the U.S. have agreed to enhance their defense partnership, the US is currently the 3rd largest arms seller to India. There will be expanded military sales to India and as Trump said "... by many billions of dollars starting this year". There will be increased cooperation and military presence from both countries in the Indo-Pacific region. These are ongoing efforts of US imperialism to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative in the region with military threats. While Modi and Trump were thumping their chests, more Indians have been deported to India, again handcuffed and chained, and at least 500 more are expected to be deported in the coming days.

It is also an interesting coincidence that Nita Ambani,

chairperson of Reliance India Foundation is one of the prominent speakers at the Annual India conference of Harvard University in Boston which began on February 15, 2024. India's richest billionaire will be among the many CEOs who will wax eloquent on the emergence of India as a "global leader" at the conference. The Ambani family in its shameful display of wealth lives in a multimillionaire dollar home in Mumbai, while the city of migrant workers has more than 9 million people living in slums. According to civil rights groups, more than 200,000 people in Mumbai are homeless.

### **Who does the important work in the American society?**

The United States (US) population is 335 million. The PEW research center's data shows that immigrants (foreign born) account for 14.3% of the population. Out of this immigrant population, 23% are from Mexico, Indians constitute the 2nd highest and are 6% of the population. People born in China come a close 3rd to India, accounting for 5%. Other countries from Latin America (excluding Mexico) account for 26% of the population. Overall, immigrants from Asia account for a total of 28% of the population. Based on American Community Survey, undocumented immigrants account for around 11-12 million people. In total, 8.5 million of workers in the US do not have a legal status.

In 2021, 27 million immigrants were workers and they accounted for 17% of the labor force in the 19-64 age group. In a University of Michigan report from 2022, there are 1.6 million immigrant workers in the construction industry in the US constituting 20% of the total number of construction workers. In some cities like New York, they account for

63% of the construction workers out of which 40% are undocumented. In Texas, an estimated 400,000 of the construction workers are undocumented. The construction industry is highly corrupt, in order to avoid paying payroll taxes they subcontract the work and hire undocumented workers who can be paid a lot less without benefits.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2023 showed that American farms contributed to 0.8% of the GDP- \$222 billion, the combined agriculture and food related industries account for 5.5% of the GDP-\$1.53 trillion. 73% of the farm workers, who put the food on the tables, are immigrants and out of which undocumented workers make up 50% of the total workers. Per the data from Center for Migration Studies, there are 283,000 undocumented workers in the agricultural sector- 63% are male and 37% female.

The meat packing industry is a dangerous industry and is well known for the highly exploitative working conditions and high rates of injury. It employs 500,000 workers in the country. Estimates are that 40% of the workforce is undocumented. Two of the biggest companies Tyson and JBS had net incomes of 3 billion dollars in 2021. Yet their workers earn poverty wages in the poultry, beef and pork plants.

In the 'care economy' that includes nannies, cleaners, maids and personal care assistants, an estimated 300,000 are undocumented. Immigrant workers are indispensable in the care of the elderly and disabled. 42.4% of home health care aides are immigrants, some 6.4% of these workers are undocumented immigrants. 25% of nursing assistants working in the health care industry are immigrants out of which 4.2% are undocumented immigrants.

In a CNN report, David Grabowski, professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School said, "Immigrants also fill many support roles in long-term care facilities, more than 30% of non-direct care workers, such as housekeepers and dietary services staff, are foreign born. Caregivers are the backbone of long-term care, and foreign-born workers are a big part of that backbone, without them, we'd have huge staffing shortfalls and individuals' quality of care and quality of life would be worse."

Haitian immigrants who were recently verbally abused by the President account for a little more than 700,000 of the population, in addition there are close to 500,000 people of Haitian ancestry born in the US. 650,000 Haitian workers (American Community Survey Data) are employed in various sectors of the economy. Close to 22% (data from 2018-2022) are employed in the healthcare industry, they perform essential jobs as nurses, nurses aides and as hospital workers. The next category, which forms 18% of the Haitian born population, is in the retail sector working as cashiers, cooks etc. A significant percentage of Haitian Americans work in the education sector (15%), 10% work in transportation, communications and utilities. In Boston the vast majority of school bus drivers are Haitian immigrants.

Mexicans and immigrants from Latin America account for 19% of the US population- 62.5 million in 2021. Trump's vituperative rhetoric has been particularly aimed at immigrants arriving from Mexico. He has been threatening more military presence at the US-Mexico border and rebuilding and strengthening the wall at the borders. Without Latino workers, many sectors of the economy will come to a halt. 31.1% of the construction jobs are by Latino workers. Women workers from Latin America constitute 1/3rd of the

workforce in the service industry. 77% of farm workers are from Latin American countries and 61% are Mexican.

### **Trauma and Death on the job in the US**

In a previous Workers' Resistance article I wrote about researchers looking at death records from California Department of Public Health where they estimated that during the COVID pandemic there was relative excess mortality in certain professions in the working age group. When the year 2020 was compared with 2018 and 2019, mortality was extremely high in food/agriculture workers (39% increase), transportation workers (28% increase) and manufacturing sector workers (23% increase).

When they stratified the excess mortality based on race, Latino and Latina workers had experienced a 36% increase, and Black workers had experienced a 28% increase in mortality, as compared to an 18% increase among Asian workers and 6% in white workers. In all races, food/agriculture sector experienced the highest increase in mortality which largely has immigrant workers.

According to 2024 report from AFL-CIO, 5,486 workers died on the job in 2022, 1,248 were Latinos, 60% of whom were immigrants. The fatality rate for Latino workers was 4.6 per 100,000 workers, 24% higher than the national average. The industries largely affected included agriculture, mining, construction which employs large number of immigrant workers.

### **Rulers Handbook of Division and Workers' Resistance**

There are 2 important slogans in the immigrant rights movement in the US. "We Didn't Cross the Borders, the Border Crossed Us" and "No human being is illegal". Rulers all over the world use the familiar trick in their handbook to pit native workers against immigrant

workers. The US is no exception. That said, the US history is also replete with resistance from the workers both citizens and non-citizens to unitedly fight harassment and deportations. David Bacon in an informative article published in the Jacobin in December 2024 gives a detailed history spanning almost a century of resistance against deportations. In 1933, the Communist Party formed the American Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born and was active until 1982. It not only defended foreign born communists and radicals who were being persecuted by the state (in the initial years) but also defended the Latin American, Caribbean and Haitian immigrants in the 1960s and 70s against deportations, for protection of free speech and associations and successfully campaigned for the right to public education for children of undocumented immigrants. Fast forward to April 2006, hundreds of thousands of people marched in more than 100 cities against a proposed repressive anti-immigrant legislation that would have made undocumented immigrants into felons. The marches included undocumented workers, legal immigrants, union workers and others. The bill was defeated because of the militant protests.

The Trump administration has created an atmosphere of terror with the mass deportations. The Center for Immigration Studies in a recent report reported that 13 sanctuary states and 220 sanctuary cities and counties will not comply with federal enforcement to arrest and detain undocumented immigrants. These are indeed encouraging signs. US imperialist policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and military interventions across the globe have led to waves of migration. The way forward is to build multinational unity of the working class regardless of immigration status. The demands should include work



permits and legal path for citizenship to undocumented workers and families and end deportations. The larger goal should be to unite the struggle for the

undocumented immigrants with the struggles to end US sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela and wars across the world.

The rallying cry of the United Farm Workers Union – “ Si se puede” – Yes, it can be done! - should be the call of the day. ▣

## TRIBUTES

### Tarun Bhartiya

Tarun Bhartiya, a multifaceted filmmaker, poet, social activist and a fellow fighter against fascism passed away on January 27, 2025 at the age of 54. Born in 1970, Tarun was a promotional voice of India's alternative art and progress literature circle. Hailing from Bihar, he later moved to Meghalaya, which became his home for the rest of his life. Through his lens and black-and-white photography, he masterfully captured the life, rituals, and resilience of the Khasi-Jaintia people, while his Hindi poetry pulsed with raw emotion, reflecting themes of longing, belonging, and resistance.

As a documentary filmmaker and editor, Bhartiya's work was both technically brilliant and politically fearless. He edited acclaimed films like *In Camera*, *Diaries of a Documentary Cameraman*, for which he received the National Film Award for Best Editing in 2009 — an award he courageously returned in 2015 to protest rising intolerance in India.

Tarun co-founded Alt-Space, a vibrant hub in Shillong for cultural and political discussions, where artists, students, and activists could freely exchange ideas. He also ran RAIOT, a radical digital platform dedicated to amplifying voices from Northeast India and beyond.

Rest in power, Comrade Tarun. Your art, your fight, and your fearless spirit will guide us in the struggles to come.

### Tapan Bose

Tapan Bose, a veteran and renowned filmmaker known for his unwavering commitment for human rights, passed away on January 30, 2025. He was a steadfast advocate for peace and democracy in South Asia. Born on June 8, 1946, Bose began his career as a journalist before transitioning to filmmaking. His accoladed works includes *An Indian Story on Bhagalpur Bindings* (1981), *Bhopal: Beyond Genocide* (1986), *Jharkhand* (1993) and *The Expendable People* (2016). He was also a long time well-wisher of CPI(ML).

His political journey began during the Emergency era in the 1970s, and later he was instrumental in founding

several civil society initiatives, including the Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy, the South Asia Forum for Human Rights, and the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative. He was deeply involved in campaigns for protection of human rights and peace during Punjab disappearances in the 1980s and 1990s, the Kashmir peace initiatives, and the Indo-Naga peace process. In the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and the Gujarat pogrom in 2002, he stood on the frontlines, amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging the narrative of communal hatred.

Tapan alongside Prof. Dinesh Mohan, Gautam Navlakha and Sumanta Banerjee, were among the first to visit Kashmir after the Gaw Kadal massacre in 1990. They documented human rights violations in the landmark report *India's Kashmir War*, which exposed state violence and called for a political resolution to the conflict.

His legacy as a fearless filmmaker, human right defender and peace activist continues to inspire those striving for a more just and peaceful world.

### Zakia Jafri

Zakia Jafri, a tireless advocate for justice who turned personal tragedy into a decades-long legal battle against state complicity in 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom passed away on February 2, 2025, at her daughter's home in Ahmedabad, India. She was 86.

Her husband, Ehsan Jafri, a lawyer and former Congress MP, was butchered during the Gujarat pogrom. As bloodthirsty mobs descended on Gulberg Society, Ehsan Jafri made over 200 desperate calls to police and government officials, pleading for help. No help came. He was hacked to death, and 70 others were slaughtered while the state watched in silence.

In the aftermath of the pogrom, she filed legal cases against then-Gujarat Chief Minister, now Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and top state officials of conspiracy and abetment. Her struggle became a symbol of resistance against impunity and state complicity. She led this battle for justice until her last breath.

Zakia's legacy lies in her defiance, her refusal to let power erase truth. May she rest in power.

## Comrade Sher Singh

Comrade Sher Singh, a veteran labour rights activist and founder of 'Faridabad Majdoor Samachar' passed away on January 25, 2025 at the age of 75. The Faridabad Majdoor Samachar is a monthly workers' newspaper published from Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, Faridabad since 1982.

During the June 2011 Maruti workers strike in Manesar, while mainstream media framed the event as workers "occupying" the factory, Sher Singh and Faridabad Majdoor Samachar spearheaded the campaign to amplify the voices of struggling workers and their cause. His loss is immeasurable, but his legacy endures in the countless lives he touched. Red Salute to Comrade Sher Singh.

## Comrade Dashrath Yadav

Comrade Dashrath Yadav, 86, passed away on 10 Feb 2025 at his residence in Purnia. He played a significant role in expanding the party during its underground days and later as a leader of Indian People's Front in 80s. He organised milk vendors into a robust union in Purnia and Katihar districts. This union later became associated with the IPF.

Along with martyred comrade Brijesh Mohan Thakur, he was instrumental in developing the party and IPF as a strong organisation of struggling masses in this part of Seemanchal. A revered leader, he remained the district president of the milk vendors' union till his last.

He remained loyal to the people and the party even in the most difficult moments, always ready to help other comrades in their needs. For some time he was suffering from age related illnesses which eventually took him away from us. We pay our condolences to his bereaved family and pledge to carry forward his dream by following his exemplary life of activism. Red Salute Comrade Dashrath Yadav!

## Pratul Mukhopadhyay

(1942- 2025)

The singer-composer and a maestro extraordinaire of Mass Songs Pratul Mukhopadhyay passed away on 15 February 2025. He was 83. He was admitted at SSKM hospital, Kolkata with lung infection, underwent emergency surgery and later was detected to have had cancer. Following his pledge his eyes and body were donated to the hospital for research and teaching purposes. Comrade Kartick Pal, member, Politburo of CPIML along with other state members

paid revolutionary tribute to the memory of Pratulda. He was a council member of Gana Sanskriti Parishad at its initial days. Both the GSP and its cultural organ Nabanna paid red salute to his mortal remains.

Revolutionary mass songs discovered a new doyen way back in the tempestuous 70's. In those potent days of political ferment one of Pratul Mukhopadhyay's popular songs was a Bengali adaptation of Mao's poem, The days are not far away, when our beloved motherland would be free/ Look! How the lights of the Red Sun turns the red eastern sea so gloriously ablaze. This song used to reverberate the prison walls, sung severally by the Naxalite inmates across Bengal jails. Mukhopadhyay studied at Presidency College and was involved with the Naxalite movement. Another inspiring song adaptation from the days of Chinese Long March was May there be thousands of obstacles on a long journey/ What fear does the brave minds of the Red Army have?

Pratul Da, as he was known across the national frontiers, only became a name among the aficionados of Bengali modern songs much later at the beginning of the new millennium when he earned immense fame by composing the iconic number I sing in Bengali/I sing about Bengal. This song, though a tribute to Bengali ethnicity, was in no way parochial or provincial. It speaks of assimilation in a language of humility, devoid of arrogance.

While rendering any song at any place or moment, his thin body would be electrified by his absorption in the moment, a spectacle to behold even in retrospect. His entire body with inimitable movements of hands and facial expressions would reflect a total absorption, mesmerizing the listeners by his magical perfection. And this aural perfection used to be achieved by unique voice modulation as he shunned any accompanying musical instruments.

Pratulda amazed his audience as always with a slice of endearment and his total lack of vanity.

Its quite apt to quote from the words of the singer-songwriter-archivist Moushumi Bhowmik, "Pratulda was so naturally gifted as a singer he could make anything into a song. He had turned so many poems of Sankha Ghosh, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Arun Mitra and Birendra Chattopadhyay into songs."

His demise left a huge vacuum in Bengal's cultural space.

The Central Committee of CPIML remembers with pride our close association for decades and pays revolutionary tribute to Pratul Mukhopadhyay's unique contribution to revolutionary culture.



**Tarun Bhartiya**



**Pratul Mukhopadhyay**



**Zakia Jafri**



**Tapan Bose**



**Dashrath Yadav**



**Sher Singh**





## Jamia Students Rise to Reclaim Their Voice and Legacy

Under the banner of "Reclaim Jamia," students strongly condemned the brutal crackdown students unleashed by Jamia administration and Delhi police on February 14. On that day, at 5 in the morning the administration along with varsity's security guards and Delhi police illegally picked up around 20 students from the protest site and taken to undisclosed location. Both male and female students were dragged from their sleeping spaces by their legs and hair, forcibly removed from the premises, and shoved into police vehicles. These students, including several AISA activists were part of the on-going protest movement in the campus against the disciplinary actions against university students-activists Saurabh and Jyoti. These two students, along with several others were targeted by the university administration for organising an event in December last year to commemorating the violent state-crackdown on anti-CAA movement in 2019. Since then, the protests had been ongoing in campus condemning the Jamia administration's attack on campus democracy.

The whereabouts of twenty students taken away by Delhi police were only known in the evening after sustained student and civil society pressure. Later, in the evening the students were released from detention. On the very next day, in an attempt to intimidate protesting students, the administration publicly pasted the names, photos, phone numbers and addresses of these students in the campus.

The students presented a memorandum outlining their key demands, which include:

- Revocation of the FIR, suspensions, and proceedings of the disciplinary committee against all dissenting students.
- An immediate end to the issuance of show-cause notices to students exercising their fundamental rights to protest, organize, and express themselves peacefully.
- Revocation of all show-cause notices issued to students for raising their voices.
- Repeal of the Office Memoranda dated August 29, 2022, and November 29, 2024.
- An end to the witch-hunt against students for expressing dissent.
- For withdrawal of the notice penalizing postering and graffiti on Jamia walls.



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