

Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

SEPTEMBER 2025

Rs. 25

ELECTION THIEVES QUIT OFFICE



130th Constitution Amendment Bill: Draconian and Sinister

The 130th Constitution Amendment Bill circulated by the Union Home Ministry late in the night of 19 August to provide for automatic removal of ministers arrested and jailed on any allegation for more than thirty days is an open assault on the federal framework and parliamentary democratic system.

The weaponisation of central agencies like ED, CBI, IT, NIA and the abuse of the Constitutional office of Governors in narrow partisan interest, a trend which has been seriously condemned on several occasions even by the Supreme Court, will now gain legal validity with the enactment of this Bill.

Every state government opposed to the BJP's

politics and policies will henceforth be rendered permanently destabilised and dysfunctional. Every NDA ally will be on tenterhooks to fall in line with the BJP.

Viewed together with the ongoing systematic subversion of the electoral system starting with the appointment of Election Commissioners to the relentless push for 'One Nation, One Election' system, this amendment will sound the death knell for federalism and parliamentary democracy in India.

All who care for democracy and the constitutional foundation and functioning of our Republic must therefore squarely reject this draconian and sinister Constitutional Amendment Bill. ■

CPI(ML) Statement on Vice Presidential Election

Even as the Election Commission of India lies unmasked as a partisan organisation incapable of upholding the Constitution or holding free and fair elections, yet another institution of democracy, that of the Vice President, will go to elections on 9th September.

The Vice Presidential elections by the electoral College comprising Members of Parliament of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, will see a face-off between BJP's candidate Maharashtra Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan and the INDIA candidate, former Supreme Court judge Justice B. Sudershan Reddy. CPIML believes that this is a battle between a hand-picked yes-man from the RSS stables and one of India's most distinguished jurists and known civil liberties champions. It is a battle between two ideologies that stand at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Retired Justice B. Sudershan Reddy in his term as a Supreme Court judge cemented his reputation as an upholder of the Constitution committed to the idea of social, political and economic justice. Exemplifying this is the judgement declaring Salwa Judum as unconstitutional and resembling a vigilante group set up by the State. The judgement presents a scathing critique of the neo-liberal development model behind the rapacious exploitation of resources and decimation of the rights of Adivasis while highlighting human rights abuses by the State.

BJP nominee Maharashtra Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, enters the fray having fulfilled the sole criteria of belonging to the RSS, freshly anointed as the world's biggest NGO RSS. CPIML calls on all members of the electoral college, particularly from the NDA parties propping this Modi regime, to make this a vote of conscience. ■

LIBERATION DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Get Liberation Magazine PDF version directly to your Email or WhatsApp

Annual Subscription fee: INR 200

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



CONTENTS

COMMENTARY

Gurugram Model of Persecution Detention, Deportation, Displacement	05 06
Bihar Women Rise Against Microfinance Exploitation	09

COVER FEATURE

Election Thieves, Quit Office Voter Adhikar Yatra	13 14
--	----------

IN FOCUS

Kashmir Book Ban & 6 Years of Article 370 Abrogation	18
---	----

ENVIRONMENT WATCH

	23
--	----

INTERNATIONAL

New York & Mamdani Campaign	24
-----------------------------	----

PALESTINE WATCH

	28
--	----

REPORT

	29
--	----

TRIBUTE

Remembering Shibu Soren	34
-------------------------	----

Editor-in-chief

Dipankar Bhattacharya

Editor

Arindam Sen

Editorial Board

V. Shankar

Sanjay Sharma

Sucheta De

Ajit Patil

Clifton D' Rozario

Maitreyi Krishnan

Akash Bhattacharya

Editors' e-mail:

liberation@cpiml.org

Design: V Arun Kumar

Manager: Prabhat Kumar

Phone: 7042877713

Website: liberation.org.in

E-mail: manager.liberation@gmail.com

36 pages including covers

Annual Subscription Rates

India Rs. 300

Abroad US\$ 60

Digital Subscription Rs. 200

Online Payment: liberation.org.in

Pay By Bank transfer:

Account Name: Liberation Publications

Account No.: 90502010091855

IFSC Code: CNRB0019050

MICR Code.: 110015388

Bank: Canara Bank

Demagoguery over Demography: Demonization of Citizens into Infiltrators



Narendra Modi has now delivered his 12th Independence Day address in succession as India's Prime Minister. He is now ahead of Indira Gandhi and next only to Jawaharlal Nehru in terms of the length of his unbroken string of successive ID addresses delivered. In terms of the duration of his speeches he was already way ahead of all his predecessors, and this year he broke his own record by crossing the century mark with an address that took all of 103 minutes. But we should take note of his Independence Day address this year for reasons other than these figures. His silences and utterances both rang loudly and sent out clear messages about the forthcoming priorities of the unfolding fascist agenda of his government and his mother organisation RSS which is now in its centenary year. In fact, Modi made a special mention of the RSS calling it the world's biggest NGO! More about that later.

First about the silences. Independence Day is primarily about India's anti-colonial freedom movement and the vision of a free and modern India that propelled that movement through decades of remarkable social and political churning in what was the world's biggest colony in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While India's former colonial rulers are now in no position to treat India as a vassal state, the US imperialists, especially now under the Trump Presidency, are trying to subject India to a neo-colonial system of dependency. From imposing punitive tariffs on Indian exports and shackling undocumented Indian citizens in the US to dictating the terms of India's international trade and foreign policy, the Trump Administration is humiliating India and undermining our self-respect as a sovereign republic at every step. Modi's twelfth address from the ramparts of the historic Lal Qila remained conspicuously silent about this growing imperialist threat to India's political and economic sovereignty.

For millions of Indians, survival today is a huge challenge. Vanishing jobs, declining income and soaring prices of essential goods and services

have been eroding the livelihoods of vast sections of India's working people, worsening their living conditions as the Indian economy took one blow after another, ever since the disastrous demonetisation in November 2016. Instead of acknowledging the severity of economic crisis that has now engulfed the economy across sectors, Modi made the astounding claim of having lifted 250 million Indians out of poverty and into a 'neo middle class'.

Or take the question of governance. Manipur has been burning for months on end, Modi has not bothered to visit the state even once in this period and again remained mum about Manipur in his Independence Day address. As Adivasis across India face brutal eviction and demolition drives in forests and mineral-rich areas, Narendra Modi has the audacity to project Operation Kagar, the extra-judicial extermination campaign in Chhattisgarh, as a tribute to Birsa Munda in the 125th year of his martyrdom! The Adivasi revolts constituted a glorious chapter of our freedom movement which not only freed India from the shackles of colonial slavery but also shook the foundations of landlordism and 'loanlordism' (usury), and today Narendra Modi seeks to tarnish the memory of one of the greatest heroes of India's indigenous people, an ever-inspiring icon of our freedom movement, by offering him the 'tribute' of one of India's most bloody state-led extermination of indigenous people.

Ever since the sudden launch of the so-called Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls in Bihar, which is turning out to be a massive exercise in targeted exclusion, and Rahul Gandhi's August 7 press conference which turned the spotlight on election theft with more than one lakh fake voters added in just one Assembly segment of Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha constituency, the whole country is discussing "vote chori". The Election Commission wants us to accept the purge of 6.5 million voters as a 'purification of electoral rolls, which sounds eerily similar to an electoral version of 'ethnic cleansing', while the whole world can now see how living people have been declared dead and Bihar's own residents who are compelled to migrate to other states in search of livelihood are being dubbed outsiders and removed from the electoral rolls of Bihar. Narendra Modi's Independence Day address predictably said nothing about the SIR drive of mass disenfranchisement.

But what he said towards the end of his 103-minute-long speech put the SIR and other allied measures of the government in its strategic perspective. Modi posited infiltration as a grave challenge facing the country, blaming it as a threat to national security and a deliberate conspiracy to change India's demography.

The speech became a venomous harangue against the bogey of infiltrators - blaming them for 'snatching away the livelihoods of our youth', 'targeting our sisters and daughters', 'misleading innocent tribals and seizing their lands' and creating 'a crisis for national security'. PM Modi then announced a 'High-Powered Demographic Mission' to look into the infiltration crisis and recommend measures to make India 'infiltrator-free'.

This was also the sum and substance of the BJP's election campaign in Jharkhand Assembly elections, and the Bihar SIR drive is also sought to be justified by invoking this bogey of infiltration from Bangladesh and Myanmar. In Assam the whole agenda of NRC has of course been an offshoot of the 'save demography' campaign. It is another matter that the BJP's anti-infiltrator hysteria failed spectacularly in Jharkhand, not a single 'foreign national' has been reported so far in Bihar even as 6.5 million names have been deleted on various pretexts, and in Assam even after six years and two rounds of NRC, the BJP government is still looking for a 'perfect NRC' that suits its anti-infiltrator hysteria.

While whipping up Hindutva hysteria, Modi also gave credit to the organisation that started it all and has been relentlessly pursuing this agenda for one hundred years - the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. But in doing so, bizarrely, he described it as the world's biggest NGO! He should have also added that the biggest 'NGO' is also the world's most shadowy NGO which has never had any registration or audit. Or he could have also called it a non-state actor that now works in tandem with the state with full impunity. Independence Day for the BJP is now primarily an occasion to remember the Partition and further otherise Muslims as perpetrators of Partition in the past and terrorists or infiltrators in the present. In the name of yet another 'political drama film', the infamous maker of the film "Kashmir Files" has now come up with a sequel "The Bengal Files" to inflame communal passions ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections in West Bengal. A petroleum ministry Independence Day advertisement had Savarkar on top of Gandhi while a proposed NCERT module on Partition blames Mountbatten, Muslim League and the Congress for the bloody bifurcation of the country in the 1940s, obscuring the fact that it was Savarkar who was the first to talk of a Hindu nation.

As we enter the 79th year of India's independence, we must fight back by all means possible against the fascist threat to its basic principle of 'one person, one vote' and defeat the so-called 'High-Powered Demographic Mission' of establishing a Hindu Rashtra with a people-powered defence of the Constitution, Democracy and Freedom. ■

The Gurugram Model of Persecution of Bengali-speaking Muslim Migrant Workers

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Even as the EC launched the sinister SIR drive in Bihar to verify the citizenship of Bihar electors, Bengali-speaking migrant workers from West Bengal and Assam, primarily those who also happen to be Muslim, started experiencing a wave of attacks in state after BJP-ruled 'double engine' state. Initial reports came from Odisha and Chhattisgarh, then reports started coming in from Jai Hind Camp, a registered 'jhuggi' in south Delhi. For the last couple of weeks, the most systematic and vicious targeting is being witnessed in Delhi and its 'smart city' neighbour Gurugram, which is part of the National Capital Region located in Haryana. After the first wave of detention of several hundred labourers that lasted even a week for some, now we see an exodus of terrorised migrant workers and their families to their places of origin.

The Delhi-NCR unit of our party has been closely involved with the anti-demolition campaign in Delhi. On the basis of the regular visits and close interaction of our comrades with the affected people of Jai Hind Camp and most recently the migrant workers of Gurgaon, we can clearly see an unmistakable fear that now grips the migrant population. In the wake of the BJP's victory in Delhi Assembly elections earlier this year and following the launch of SIR in Bihar which is the first step towards a nationwide NRC, there is now a renewed targeting of people in the name of suspected foreign infiltrators.

The BJP tried to make the alleged influx of 'Bangladeshi

infiltrators' its biggest poll agenda in Jharkhand during the Assembly elections in late 2024. Even in the course of the ongoing SIR in Bihar, news was planted in the media about Booth Level Officers coming across people from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal in the villages of Bihar, even though there has been no official mention of this point in any of the EC press releases or in the voluminous affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court. What matters for the Sangh brigade is promoting the perception that there is a major influx of illegal immigrants and keeping the people in a permanent state of fear, insecurity and division.

Our investigation into the Gurugram detention complaints and extensive conversations with the affected people have revealed a very disturbing and insidious pattern at work. The administrative authorities and police personnel who agreed to speak to us made two somewhat contradictory claims. One presented it as a routine exercise of verification undertaken at regular intervals while another mentioned some specific MHA order mandating a targeted time-bound exercise. The mysterious MHA order has been widely referred to but is not in the public domain and we still do not know what kind of verification the MHA is actually trying to carry out. Whether the exercise is routine or a special one, the built-in bias was however quite glaring.

The Sector 10 police station said they had a standing order to keep a close watch on migrant workers from West Bengal and Assam. In their policing culture they

would treat every migrant worker from West Bengal and Assam as a potential criminal! As well as intensifying the long established biases against Muslims and Dalits, policing in Modi era is exhibiting an open and growing prejudice against the farmers and workers of India. Just the other day we heard an ADG of Bihar talk about increased incidence of crime in the months of May and June because farmers do not have much work in that period! Apart from this inbuilt anti-poor anti-migrant bias of policing, Bengali-speaking Muslim migrant workers face added vulnerability and insecurity because of their linguistic and religious identity. This has been the common experience of every harassed migrant worker family in Gurugram.

Almost in every case migrant workers reported having been picked up by unidentified people in unnumbered vehicles before being handed over to the police and herded into community centres turned into makeshift detention camps rechristened as holding centres. Some reported being beaten up and tortured, some were lucky to have been released the same day, but many were detained for days. Production of extensive identity documents by the detained workers was not considered sufficient, what saved them eventually was communication from police stations in their places of origin. Now migrant workers are being asked to submit verification papers with two local references and signatures of landlords and employers. For precarious migrant

workers, often technically self-employed, living in slums, this is a near impossible challenge. Equally difficult is to obtain police verification certificate from their places of origin in BJP-ruled states.

Many detained migrant workers and their families had to pay considerable sums of money to secure their release. Add to this the loss of income for the period of detention and the humiliation and trauma suffered by their families in Gurugram as well as their places of origin, and we can understand why Bengali-speaking Muslim migrant workers in Gurugram are so fear-stricken and desperate to return to their places of origin. Forced to migrate in search of a slightly better income, they built today's Gurugram city and have been serving the affluent families living in the city's high rise apartments with their sweat and tears and are now being pushed out by a cruel administration and a hostile hate-filled environment.

In the 75th anniversary of the foundation of our Republic, the constitutional character of the Republic and the rights of individual citizens who constitute the Republic are in grave danger. The plight of the terrorised Bengali-speaking migrant workers is no different from the threat of disenfranchisement facing the Hindi-speaking migrant workers of Bihar. The Constitution of India had built bridges of unity to weld India's diverse languages, religions and cultures into a vibrant framework of liberty, equality and fraternity. Today the bridges are being replaced by walls of hate and division. The fascist project of creating internal enemies and disempowered groups of second grade citizens is a recipe for disaster and must be foiled. ■

Detention, Deportation, Displacement: The MHA's Arbitrary Citizenship Verification

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

Events in Gurugram and Beyond

Citizenship is at the heart of the constitutional order. As the Supreme Court of India (SCI) put it in a 2004 judgement (In Re: Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, para 9.), citizenship grants people the right to bear rights.

On 2 May 2025 the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) sent out "secret" guidelines to all states and union territories to fast-track the verification of suspected Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. This order gives draconian powers to the state/UT authorities over Indian citizens merely "suspected" of being Bangladeshis or Rohingyas.

Before examining the order let us refer to the events in Gurugram through which the "secret" order came to light.

From 18 July, there were stray reports of Bangla speaking working class people being detained by the police under the suspicion of them being Bangladeshis. Such news had been reported from various parts of Delhi as well over the last few months, especially during the weeks leading up to the recent Delhi Legislative Assembly elections. The Gurugram verification drive however seemed different from the Delhi incidents: much bigger, more draconian, and impacting migrant workers' lives and livelihoods en masse.

By 19-20 July, there were reports of detention centres in Gurugram. To verify these reports, a CPI-ML team visited Gurugram on 22 July. The team found that the community centre of Sector 10A had been converted to a makeshift detention centre. It held seventy-five (75) male workers. Sixty-five (65) of them were from Assam while ten (10) were from Nadia and Murshidabad districts of Bengal. All of them spoke Bangla as their mother tongue and were Muslims. They all worked in the informal sector – mostly as cleaners, construction workers and domestic workers. Some worked as security guards, drivers or street hawkers.

Upon further enquiry by the team, they were informed by the police officials at the Sector 10 Police Station that the detentions were pursuant to an order of the Gurugram District Magistrate (DM). The order, dated 22 July, referred to a letter by the MHA which issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to the police for deporting illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. Based on the SOP, the police opened four Special Holding Centres in Gurugram for detaining illegal migrants from among these two communities, and initiated a special search operation from 18 July – the DM's order stated. Community centres of Badshahpur, Sector 10A, Sector 40 (West Zone) and Sector-01 (Manesar) had been converted into Special Holding Centres. Together they held over 250 detainees on 22 July – all Bangla speaking migrant workers and predominantly Muslim.

The police gave us a copy of the DM's order but refused to show the letter from the MHA. CPI(ML) contacted the journalists who had reported

on the letter. We learnt that the officials at the Home Ministry had asked the journalists to take handwritten notes from the letter, and refused to share a hard copy with them or to even allow them to take a photograph of the letter. CPI(ML) subsequently obtained a copy of the letter containing the guidelines through trustworthy sources.

On 25 July, CPI(ML) GS Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya led a 15-member delegation of CPI-ML leaders, civil rights activists, lawyers, journalists and concerned citizens of Gurugram to meet the detainees and other affected residents, and to protest the administration's arbitrary acts. The delegation visited workers' colonies in four different parts of Gurugram, including two detention centres, and met with the Police Commissioner and other concerned officials.

The visit had a big impact and played an important role in halting the exercise temporarily. CPI(ML)'s interventions have also led to the creation of a Migrant Solidarity Network in Delhi-NCR which has brought together democratic minded citizens against different forms of attacks on citizenship especially in the context of migration.

Legal Analysis of the MHA Guidelines

1. The guidelines contain the first-of-its-kind instructions for detention of people on the mere suspicion of being foreign nationals.
2. The guidelines invoke the Foreigners' Act, 1946 and the Citizenship Act, 1955, with regard to the treatment of foreigners / illegal immigrants, but extends detention to Indian citizens who might be "suspected" of being nationals of Bangladesh or Myanmar. Neither of the aforesaid acts allows for

detention on mere suspicion. The guidelines are therefore illegal. Even section 3(2)(g) of the Foreigners' Act, which authorizes detention without a stated reason, applies only to foreigners and not to suspected foreigners.

3. The guidelines grant blanket adjudicatory powers to the executive without any check whatsoever. This goes against the basic structure of the constitution. While the SOP authorizes detention under suspicion and grants the police all the powers of verification, it does not provide:
 - (a) a clear basis on which suspicion can be cast on Indian nationals
 - (b) the procedure by which the verification is supposed to take place
 - (c) the documents which migrants should keep ready for verification
 - (d) an explanation as to why existing documents like Voter card, Aadhar card, PAN cards and even NRC certificates
 - (e) a verification certificate following the exercise which would grant immunity to migrants from similar drives in the future
 - (f) an explanation for the 30-day rule, by which a citizen can be adjudged to be a foreigner if the police fail to verify his citizenship within 30 days of detention
 - (g) the suspected Indian citizen a right to appeal his detention or, in case he is adjudged to be a foreigner, any such adjudication.
4. The lack of a right to appeal – a citizen's detention or his adjudged status as a foreigner – is a clear violation of the rule of fair hearing.
5. The lack of clear basis for casting suspicion makes the

exercise arbitrary and deeply racialized and class-ist. The Gurugram police openly stated that suspicion fell "naturally" on Bangla speaking migrant workers with "Muslim" names.

6. There is no provision of compensation for the loss of livelihoods of workers during the period of detention or due to the unwillingness of employers to keep them in their jobs following detention. This violates their right to livelihood under Article 21 of the constitution.
7. It violated India's obligations under international law – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as customary international law and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – which require citizenship decisions to be transparent, proportionate, and grounded in fair procedure.

Implementation in Gurugram

Speaking to the workers, the CPI(ML) teams found that the detentions were mostly performed by plain clothes people who arrived in unmarked vehicles, and bore no badges of name or identification. From various locations, multiple people were picked up and taken away to the holding centres. After holding them, they were asked to prove their citizenship, wherein documents such as Aadhar Card, voter ID card, ration cards, PAN cards etc were not considered sufficient.

The detained men were held in the police station for extended durations, the period lasting up to a week for some individuals. There have been isolated reports of police brutality, torture, and confiscation of their valid Voter, Aadhar and PAN cards, and unfounded

accusations of their documents being fake. In several instances, the detained individuals were asked to accuse some people from their colonies of being Bangladeshi, if they wanted to get released.

We understand that the authorities verified the detained peoples' addresses through the police stations in their states of origin (Bengal or Assam), but did not provide the detainees with any certificate of verification before releasing them. This makes them vulnerable to future detentions and harassment.

The authorities seem to be identifying suspects based on three parameters: speaking in Bangla, having "Muslim" names, and living in workers' jhuggis. The biased and discriminatory attitude of the officials came through clearly when we questioned them on their procedure for identification.

The arbitrary nature of the procedure has allowed anti-social elements and politically motivated groups to step in and harass migrant workers. There have been several reports of such groups beating people up and threatening workers to leave. The police, when questioned, completely denied knowledge of and responsibility for such acts.

Credible reports have emerged of the continued detention of ten (10) migrant workers who had initially been held in the Sector 40 detention centre. Government officials have stated that their detention process has been initiated. The identities of these ten people are not in the public domain.

The migrant workers have received little social support from their employers or landlords. Residents' Welfare Associations have officially asked residents to cancel the gate passes of domestic

workers who have not reported for work due to this drive and presumably fled. The CPI-ML teams met a contractor who was taken to a police station and beaten for allowing suspected Bangladeshis to live in jhuggis on his land.

The verification drive has culminated in a climate of tremendous fear among Bengali speaking migrant workers. The affected communities have expressed total confusion and uncertainty over what documents were considered "valid" and what process was being followed for verification. The climate of fear is evident, with no clarity or communication from the state machinery to allay the fear. In some areas, the police threatened the workers to leave by 1 August or face dire consequences. Thousands of families have returned to their home states fearing arbitrary detention and torture. This has had a devastating effect on their homes, their livelihoods and on the education of their children.

This was clearly not a one-off verification exercise, but part of an overall attack on citizenship and the rights of working people, of Muslims, and of linguistic groups beyond the Hindi speaking belt.

The SIR in Bihar, the Foreigners' Tribunals in Assam, the Home Ministry guideline that ravaged Bengali speaking working class communities in Gurugram, the administrative arbitrariness and judicial nonchalance in demolitions of Muslim, Dalit and backward caste homes, combined with the absence of statutory guarantees of housing and land rights in urban India, indicate the formulation of a legal-administrative architecture to institutionalise and expand disenfranchisement. ■

CPI(ML) MP Raja Ram Singh Protests Illegal Detention of Bengali Speaking Migrants in Delhi-NCR

Comrade Raja Ram Singh, Member of Parliament (Karakat, Bihar) and Floor Leader of the CPI(ML) Liberation Parliamentary Group, has written to Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah expressing serious concern over reports of illegal detention centres operating in Delhi's Jai Hind Colony and Gurugram. These centres are allegedly targeting Bengali-speaking migrants from West Bengal and Assam.

In his letter dated 31 July 2025, Comrade Raja Ram Singh demanded urgent clarification and action from the Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the legality and functioning of such centres. He questioned the legal provisions under which these detention or holding centres are being operated and asked what specific directives or statutes authorize their creation and use for prolonged detention of individuals. He further sought data on the total number of detainees, the number of verified Indian citizens released, and the number of deportations ordered.

The letter highlights disturbing accounts from detainees, including families, children, and the elderly, who report being picked up arbitrarily and denied access to legal help, food, medical assistance, and basic dignity. Reports include confiscation of valid documents such as Aadhaar and voter ID cards, forced detention, and demands for additional proof of citizenship. Comrade Raja Ram Singh also noted serious complaints of torture and extortion, particularly targeting Bengali-speaking migrants from Assam. He condemned these actions as gross violations of both fundamental rights and human rights.

He concluded his letter by urging the Home Minister to respond urgently and take immediate steps to halt these unconstitutional detentions. ■

Karza Mukti Mahila Sammelan: Bihar Women Raise Voices Against Microfinance Exploitation

▲ VANDANA PRABHA

Microfinance was promoted as a neoliberal substitute for the state's welfare responsibility. Supported by donors, international agencies, and financial institutions, it was advanced as a low-cost replacement for public investment and structural reforms. Aligned with the IMF–World Bank agenda of the 1980s and 1990s, microfinance shifted the burden of poverty alleviation from states onto individuals, particularly women. It depoliticised poverty and reinforced market-based solutions over structural change.

Context

Bihar has been facing multi-dimensional poverty for decades. According to the Bihar Caste Survey 2023, 9.4 million families, or 34.13% of households in the state, were identified as poor, earning less than Rs. 6,000 per month. More than a third of Bihar's households survive on approximately Rs. 200 a day. The poorest among them are the scheduled castes, with nearly 44% of families earning below this threshold. Around 50% of households are exposed to distress migration (IIPS, 2020). These figures highlight the economic distress faced by the poor in the state, who struggle to meet basic day-to-day expenses. In the absence of structural support, poor-quality public institutions, and social security, poor women are heavily dependent on microfinance companies for meeting basic household expenses.

Microfinance was introduced into the lives of poor women with the promise of empowerment, yet the burden of high interest rates quickly transformed it into a coercive and exploitative trap. Their perceived reliability as clients stems not

from empowerment but from their socio-cultural vulnerability. Coercive repayment practices rely on social violence and public humiliation, which anthropologist Lamia Karim terms a “local economy of shame”, ultimately reinforcing patriarchal dominance.

In Bihar, testimonies from women in Jeevika at the Sammelan revealed that loans are largely used for consumption smoothing, such as covering medical expenses, school fees, or marriage costs. Women borrowers frequently report harassment from recovery agents. Coercive recovery practices by MFI agents are widespread and deeply violate the dignity and safety of women borrowers. Multiple women reported instances of intimidation and harassment, including agents visiting the borrower's house and staying outside until midnight, confiscating household items such as gas cylinders or ceiling fans, locking women and families out of their homes and denying access to basic utilities, and intimidating family members or threatening to block Aadhaar cards and access to government schemes. There were

also multiple reports of suicide and forced migration of families to escape loan repayment.

Microfinance Story

India's microfinance system evolved from informal moneylending to early World Bank-supported Self-Help Groups (SHGs), later incorporating Grameen Bank-inspired models for women through joint liability groups, and eventually expanding through Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), with Bihar's Jeevika project (2007 onward) formalising SHGs and linking them to livelihoods and microloans.

Mohammad Yunus started Grameen Bank in 1983 to help poor women gain freedom from exploitation by moneylenders. He believed that through low-interest micro-credit, poor women could slowly come out of the trap of local moneylending feudals. The Grameen Bank model was a success because it met the huge demand for microcredit due to low interest rates. Poor women lacked collateral and were unable to access loans from formal sources. The Grameen Bank's solidarity circle or joint liability group acted as “social collateral”, resulting in a high repayment rate and making them bankable for the first time.

It soon gained the support of the international development community, and microfinance was promoted in the 1980s and 1990s as a way to empower poor women and stimulate grassroots entrepreneurship.

Over time, Grameen Bank transformed into a profit-driven financial institution. The bank was highly dependent on government subsidies and external sources. It struggled to keep interest rates low, and with the rise of neoliberalism since the 1970s, there was increasing pressure for

financial self-sustainability. Gradually, commercialisation occurred, and microfinance became a place to invest and earn under the guise of philanthropy. Interest rates rose sharply to maximise profit. The goal shifted from poverty reduction to providing financial services, creating frantic competition and a drive to obtain new clients and retain old ones, leading to “hard-selling” practices. Poor clients were encouraged to take more loans, pushing them into deeper and permanent micro-debt.

Several arguments are built in favour of microfinance that keep it relevant today. Microfinance is said to support income-generating activities, which would eventually help the poor escape poverty. However, evidence shows that microfinance does not sustainably reduce poverty, although it may provide a short-term financial cushion. Income is mostly absorbed in meeting consumption needs and does not generate enough for surplus. This pushes borrowers to take additional loans to continue meeting basic needs. Microfinance is also said to empower women by enabling access to markets through self-employment. Governments and NGOs, including the World Bank, promote self-employment and introduce microcredit to support income-generating activities. However, a Grameen Bank study in the mid-1990s found that 70% of loans were used for non-income-generating activities. The notion of self-employment as a development approach is problematic, as it romanticises survivalist struggles, informalises work, and weakens rights-based institutions like trade unions. Poor households focused on day-to-day survival have little time, energy, or knowledge to engage in collective efforts.

While the non-governmental

sector has promoted microfinance through Grameen Bank-style models and private companies, the state has advanced its own version through Self-Help Groups under the State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLM). Rather than strengthening women’s cooperatives or investing in agro-based industries, state policy has shifted toward the mass disbursement of microloans. Recently, Jeevika launched “Jeevika Banks”, offering loans of up to Rs. 3 lakhs at 12% interest, equivalent to commercial rates.

Freedom From Debt Conference

On the occasion of the birth anniversary of renowned Hindi writer Munshi Premchand, a Karza Mukti Mahila Conference (Women’s Freedom from Debt Conference) was organised at IMA Hall, Patna on July 31. The event witnessed the participation of a large number of women grappling with mounting debt burdens. The women shared their pain, anger, and determination to resist what they described as systemic exploitation.

The conference witnessed a strong turnout of women from 20 districts of Bihar, many of whom shared personal accounts of being

trapped in mounting microfinance debt. Opening the proceedings, Vandana Prabha reflected on the enduring relevance of Premchand’s novels, noting how his portrayals of rural life captured the crushing impact of indebtedness on ordinary households, particularly women. She emphasized that the current debt crisis must be understood as part of this historical continuum of exploitation. The session also included the screening of a documentary on debt produced by Priti Prabha, AIPWA. The film shows video testimonies collected from across Bihar highlighting the plight of women under microfinance debt. First session set the tone for a broader discussion on the structural nature of the debt trap and the urgent need for regulatory and policy interventions.

Highlights from speakers:

Jean Drèze, Development economist, highlighted that microfinance companies are charging interest rates of 35–40% with compound interest. Testimonies revealed harassment by recovery agents, humiliation, and even suicide in Bihar as well as Jharkhand. He also highlighted that many microfinance companies operate under fake names, beyond the reach of even RTI



queries, while governments remain silent spectators. 'People have been taking loans on high interest rates to fulfil their basic needs.' Unable to repay the interest on the principal amount, the companies are charging interest even on the interest that gets accumulated, which, in turn, has been pushing them into debt traps.'

Kalpna Wilson of the South Asia Solidarity Group added that women need policies guaranteeing dignified employment and fair wages, not suffocating loans. She also shared similar microfinance debt crisis faced by women of Punjab. She shared 'A strong movement by women emerged to collectively fight against this form of oppression. In the initial meeting at district level attracted 3,000-5,000 women. It soon increased to 20,000 – 30,000. The decision was taken to boycott repayments resulting in not allowing the recovery agents to enter the village.'

Meena Tiwari, AIPWA, pointed out that microfinance portfolios

ballooned from Rs. 6,000 crore (2020) to Rs. 49,500 crore (2023). This explosion coincided with shrinking state support for healthcare, education, and rural employment, pushing women to rely on predatory private credit.

Dipankar Bhattacharya, CPI(ML) General Secretary said that current policies are designed to push ordinary people into debt traps while the government remains absorbed in rituals and spectacles. "This is a cruel joke. While people are dying by suicide, struggling for jobs and food, the government is busy with disenfranchising exercises. Debt must now become the biggest issue in the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections," he said, calling for a campaign under the slogan: "Sood khoro, Bihar chhodo! Chunar chor, gaddi chhodo!" (Moneylenders Quit Bihar! Vote Thieves Quit Power!)

The conference concluded with the adoption of demand charter for further action;

- Immediate demand for Regulatory

framework for microfinance companies as strict state law.

- Compensation of Rs. 20 lakhs to families affected by debt-related suicides, and relief to those forced to flee villages due to coercive recovery by microfinance agents.
- Low-interest loans at 2% annual rate through public sector banks for women.
- Guarantees for Jeevika women including and market support and government procurement of their products.
- Independent social audits of Jeevika at the gram panchayat level, with public disclosure of findings.

Powerful testimonies with policy demands, the Karza Mukti Mahila Conference highlighted the urgency of addressing the debt crisis facing women in Bihar. AIPWA pledged to organise women at village and panchayat level on the issue to build a movement against the new 'corporate mahajani.' ■

ASHA Workers Protest in Bihar

Raising slogans for dignified wages and work, thousands of ASHA workers took to the streets of Patna on 12 August. The massive protest, organised under the banner of Bihar Rajya ASHA Karyakarta Sangh (Gope) and affiliated to AICCTU, demanded immediate steps to increase the honorarium in line with the August 2023 agreement. The 31-day indefinite strike in 2023 by around one lakh ASHA workers and ASHA facilitators across Bihar had compelled the government to agree to provide payment as "honorarium" instead of "reward" (paritoshik).

Comrade Shashi Yadav, CPIML MLC and leader of the All India Scheme Workers Federation, said that the recent increase in payment uses the derogatory term paritoshik, which devalues the vital work carried out by ASHA workers.

She further said that ASHAs, as frontline health workers and the backbone of the country's rural health and vast immunisation programmes, have played a

crucial role in ensuring proper access to healthcare and in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet in Bihar and across the country, they have been forced to work for meagre pay, with many instances of ASHAs walking several kilometres on inhospitable rural roads to meet their targets. ■



Modi 3.0: Sabotaging Justice, Compromising Sovereignty

This month, India commemorates the anniversary of its independence and the historic Quit India movement, both milestones rooted in the people's uncompromising struggle for freedom, justice, and sovereignty. But alarmingly the very values that shaped our republic are under systematic attack by the Modi regime. What we are witnessing is not mere erosion, but the deliberate bulldozing of the constitutional ethos birthed by the freedom movement.

Justice Sabotaged

A day after the Home Minister Amit Shah announced in parliament that no Hindu is a terrorist, the Special NIA Court in Mumbai acquitted all seven accused including former BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur and Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Purohit, in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case relating to the bomb explosion near a mosque that took six lives.

17 years after the blast, the Court has held that the State prosecution has failed to prove the charges of terrorist activities against the accused, marking the logical conclusion to a sustained sabotage of the trial.

The case was investigated by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) under slain cop Hemant Karkare, who uncovered a right-wing conspiracy against the Muslim community. The chargesheet filed by the ATS detailed the process from the planning meetings across the country, to procurement of explosives by Lt. Col. Purohit from army stocks, and the manner in which the accused implemented

the plan. It invoked several charges under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act (MCOCA) against the accused.

In 2011, the case was taken over by the NIA, which performed a complete u-turn in 2016 by filing a supplementary chargesheet dropping MCOCA charges and giving a clean chit to 7 accused including Pragya Thakur. The NIA also alleged that the ATS had coerced witnesses into giving statements without any formal enquiry into the allegation. Contrary to expectations, the Special Court, however, refused to discharge Thakur despite the NIA giving her a clean chit.

A year earlier, in 2015, Rohini Salian, the Special Public Prosecutor in the 2008 Malegaon case, who was abruptly dropped, went on record to say that the government, through the NIA, had urged her to go "soft" on the right-wing leaders accused in the case. Now after this verdict, she has come out stating that the true evidence has been withheld. Shockingly, key evidence has "disappeared" from the court records during the trial including the confessional statements of several key witnesses and two accused, recorded under CrPC 164 and MCOCA, and the accounts of meetings between Pragya Thakur and another accused, Ramji Kalsangra, discussing the plans for the Malegaon bomb blast. Photocopies were eventually relied upon at the end.

This series of sabotages has made justice a casualty: justice to the victims of this heinous crime, and more broadly, justice to the people who seek freedom from this right-wing terror. After 17 long

years, the families of the victims are confronted with the accused walking scot-free, just like the victims of the other right-wing bombings – the 2003 Parbhani Mosque bomb blast, 2006 Nanded Mosque bombing, 2007 Samjhauta Express Train, Mecca Masjid and the Khwaja Chishti Shrine bomb blast cases. In each of these cases, it became apparent that these were perpetrated by saffron terror outfits. Indeed, the ATS theory of the Malegaon blast being a part of a larger Hindutva terror nexus, too, was quietly shelved by the NIA. This terrorism trial marked by disappeared documents, hostile witnesses, political interference, deliberate dereliction of duty and institutional sabotage has dealt justice a huge blow.

While Hindutva terrorists are being legitimised and shielded by the regime, Amit Shah went so far as to claim in Parliament that no Hindu can be a terrorist. Yet their violence continues unchecked. In Karnataka's Hoolikatti village, members of the far-right group Sri Ram Sene conspired to poison a school's water tank in an attempt to falsely implicate the Muslim principal. Several students were hospitalised. This was not an isolated act of hate, but part of a wider campaign to demonise minorities and create fear.

At the same time, Bengali-speaking Muslim migrant workers are facing heightened persecution in state after BJP-ruled state. Hundreds of workers were detained recently in Gurugram and subjected to tremendous humiliation, harassment and even violence. As part of this nefarious campaign, BJP leader Amit Malviya and the Delhi Police have now gone so far as to label Bengali, a language officially recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, as a "Bangladeshi" language.

Modi's MIGA Silence & Surrendering of India's Sovereignty

While justice bleeds at home, India's sovereignty is auctioned abroad. In a recent insulting move, Donald Trump slapped a 25% punitive tariff on Indian goods, publicly mocking India's economy as "dead." Trump also threatened India with more tariffs as India is purchasing oil, but beyond the oil the tariff is also imposed due to India being part of BRICS. All this comes after Modi went out of his way to appease Trump, famously chanting "Abki baar, Trump Sarkar" in 2020 and mimicking Trump's "MAGA" slogan with his own catchphrase, "Make India Great Again."

Modi's foreign policy, paraded with the pomp of photo-ops and hollow slogans, has proven to be nothing but a series of humiliating surrenders. His much-hyped friendship with Donald Trump has yielded nothing but threats of tariffs and trade penalties. The relentless pursuit of Western approval has come at the cost of India's historical leadership in the Global South. SAARC has been rendered comatose. BRICS is treated as an afterthought. NAM, the very platform that once allowed India to stand tall among postcolonial nations is all but abandoned.

This dilution of sovereignty is also reflected in India's deafening silence in the face of the genocidal war in Gaza. As thousands of Palestinians, including children, are massacred in a campaign of ethnic cleansing by Israel, the Modi government has chosen silence and complicity over solidarity. India's growing closeness to the murderous Israel-US axis, is now shamelessly flaunted. The Modi regime has chosen to align itself with the very colonial powers our freedom movement fought against.

The result? India stands isolated in its region and alienated from the global South it once helped to lead. From diluting our anti-colonial legacy to selling off national resources and economic autonomy in the service of a neoliberal agenda and for the profit of cronies like Adani and Ambani, Modi has driven India into a corner on the world stage.

As we remember the Quit India movement and the birth of our freedom, we must renew our resolve to resist the Modi regime's betrayal of our fundamental values, our constitutional ethos, and the sacrifices of those who gave their lives for justice, solidarity, and independence. We owe it to the martyrs of our freedom struggle, to the victims of violence and dispossession, and to future generations to reclaim the soul of republic and build a just, sovereign, socialist, secular, and free India. ■

Election Thieves, Quit Office

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The sinister SIR strike has now entered its second month in Bihar. At the end of the so-called house-to-house enumeration phase, the Election Commission of India has produced a draft electoral roll which has deleted nearly 6.6 million names from the revised voter list published in January 2025. The election commission has finally assigned three reasons for this massive exclusion exercise - 36 lakh voters who have allegedly permanently shifted from Bihar or have been found 'untraceable', 22 lakh voters who have reportedly passed away, and 7 lakh voters who are enrolled elsewhere. Intriguingly, these figures have been provided not in absolute numbers but as percentages, and the EC has also refused to share lists of deleted names with specified cause of deletion.

Three other very significant points need to be noted about this large-scale deletion of names. The figures recorded a massive jump in the concluding few days of enumeration. On 19 July, the 'total number of electors not found at their addresses' stood at 41,64,814 or a little over four million. A week later, the corresponding numbers had jumped to 6.6 million - a leap of nearly 2.5 million over a period of seven days. Secondly, amidst this massive deletion of names, there was not a single reported case of deletion on the grounds of foreign nationality. But just a few days ago in the middle of the enumeration campaign there were widespread media reports quoting unnamed 'ECI sources' about large-scale infiltration of foreign nationals from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal in Bihar's electoral rolls.

Equally striking is the sudden last-minute decline in the number of identified cases of multiple/duplicate entries from 7.5 lakh to 7 lakh. No wonder we now find investigative reports about five thousand dubious voters from UP in the 'SIR-purified' draft rolls of Bihar in one single constituency of West Champaran district. Or take the sensational case of Bihar's deputy CM and BJP leader Vijay Sinha, whose name continues in two places despite his own claim to have appealed for deletion in one case. If the Deputy CM of Bihar is a 'victim' of the SIR fraud in Bihar, one can easily imagine how fraudulent and farcical the entire exercise has been.

Yet we must never forget that the fraud has only begun. Even assuming the figures of death and duplication to be reasonably accurate, at least 4 million of the 6.6 million names that have been eliminated from the January 2025 rolls are surely victims of the SIR fraud. SIR for them has

become an exercise in Special Intensive Removal. In the second phase of scrutiny of documents, the fate of several millions more will be decided by concerned Electoral Registration Officers or EROs. The kind of social and political bias that will creep in at this discretionary stage is not difficult to imagine. And these selective deletions will perhaps be complemented by Mahadevpurastyle inclusion of 'new' voters on a scale that we have already witnessed in Maharashtra. If the SIR is not stayed, the electoral roll in Bihar is bound to become significantly even more flawed and skewed.

Our intervention in the SIR process from the very beginning has been aimed at exposing and challenging it in practice and generating awareness and alertness about the danger of mass disenfranchisement. The delinking of submission of enumeration forms from submission of supporting documents did lull many electors into a false sense of security, and the Sangh-BJP campaign against so called infiltrators - a veiled hate campaign against Muslims - also sought to prejudice the average voter's mind. But with the focus now shifting to the sword of deletion which has already affected large numbers of migrant workers and the entire spectrum of Bahujan communities, the communal narrative has failed to have much impact.

Meanwhile, the anti-disenfranchisement campaign in Bihar has received a big boost from the expose of the massive Mahadevpura vote theft by Rahul Gandhi. The sudden launch of the SIR which conflates the issue of the electoral roll with the contentious idea of a nationwide citizenship register, and the stubborn arrogance with which the EC is pushing this campaign, blatantly rejecting even the advice of the Supreme Court, has bolstered the people's resolve to intensify the battle to defend the Constitution and resist the fascist offensive. The Election Commission of India has never been this discredited in the history of the Indian Republic. Regardless of the future of the SIR hearing in the Supreme Court, the electors of Bihar and the people of India will have to summon all their strength and determination to foil the conspiracy to disenfranchise migrant workers and other marginalised sections and minorities and steal the Bihar elections. The people united shall never be defeated. ■

INDIA Alliance's Voter Adhikar Yatra Turns into Mass Movement Across Bihar



The INDIA alliance's Voter Adhikar Yatra (Right to Vote March) was launched on 17 August 2025 from Sasaram, Bihar, with the aim of strengthening people's voices against electoral fraud and raising struggles over employment, education, health, agriculture and social justice. With its central theme of defending the universal adult franchise, the Yatra will traverse several districts of the state before concluding with a mass rally in Patna on 1 September.

Day One: Historic Beginning in Sasaram

The Yatra was flagged off at a massive public meeting in Sasaram by CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, VIP leader Mukesh Sahani, and other INDIA alliance leaders.

In his address, Comrade Dipankar declared that the Yatra was "not merely a march but the beginning of a movement", with the slogan "Change the government, change Bihar" resonating across the state.

CPI(ML) leaders including State Secretary Kunal, MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad, MLAs Arun Singh, Ajit Kumar Singh and Shiv Prakash Ranjan, MLC Shashi Yadav, former MLA Manoj Manzil, Polit Bureau member Amar Singh, Central Committee members Santosh Sahar and Raju Yadav, former MLA Chandradeep Singh, and others were also present.



Day Two: From Aurangabad to Gaya

On 18 August, the Yatra resumed from Devkriti Marriage Hall, Aurangabad. Before setting out, Comrade Dipankar said that the march reflected the people's anger at attempts during the State Intensive Revision (SIR) to disenfranchise voters—by declaring living citizens as “dead” and migrant workers as “outsiders”. He said the Nitish Kumar government had become a burden on the people, and they were determined to throw it off.

The Yatra passed through Rafi Ganj, Guraru, Khaira, Ahiyapur, Sultanpur, Panchananpur and Gaya, greeted by massive crowds. At Dev, Comrade Dipankar and MLC Shashi Yadav joined Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav in addressing lakhs

of people.

Thousands of people raised spirited slogans of “Vote Chor, Gaddi Chhod” (Election thieves, quit office) and “Inquilab Zindabad” in Guraru, Panchananpur and other centres, with active participation from peasant leaders, women's groups and student activists. The day ended with an overnight halt at Rasalpur Cricket Ground, Gaya.

Day Three: Gaya to Nawada

On 19 August, Comrade Dipankar, Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav led the Yatra from Rasalpur, Gaya. Addressing the gathering before departure, Comrade Dipankar said the march had already turned into a “mass movement”, pointing to the overwhelming response in Aurangabad and Gaya where people

of all ages waited for hours to greet the procession.

At Manaini village (Gaya), leaders held a dialogue with residents, hearing grievances over smart meters, microfinance loan harassment, and exclusion from ration, pensions and welfare schemes.

Tens of thousands lined the roads as the Yatra advanced towards Nawada via Hisua, Laloonagar and Chhoti Pali. In Nawada town, the procession was welcomed up to Democracy Chowk, followed by a major public meeting at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chowk addressed jointly by Comrade Dipankar, Rahul Gandhi, Tejashwi Yadav and Mukesh Sahani.

Later, at a press conference on the IIT campus, Nawada, Comrade Dipankar—speaking alongside Congress leader Alka Lamba—recalled his week-long padyatra from Gaya to Nawada last year. He said that “Twenty years of Nitish-BJP rule has reduced Bihar to poverty, feudal oppression, unemployment, suicides under debt, and mass migration.” The ongoing wave of popular anger, he said, would defeat electoral fraud through the SIR and oust the “vote thieves.”

At a rally in Barbigha, Comrade Dipankar called upon the people to ensure the defeat of the BJP-JD(U) regime in the forthcoming Assembly elections and defend the rights of the people of Bihar.

Day Four: Sheikhpura

On 21 August, the Voter Adhikar Yatra was warmly welcomed by hundreds of ASHA workers under the banner of the Bihar Rajya ASHA Karyakarta Sangh. Comrade Shashi Yadav, CPI(ML) MLC and also the leader of the All India Scheme Workers Federation, led the ASHA workers and greeted the Yatra.



The ASHA workers, rejecting attempts at mass disenfranchisement, strengthened the call for dignified jobs and wages for all. It is pertinent to note that just a few days earlier, on 12 August, thousands of ASHA workers had taken to the streets of Patna demanding immediate steps to increase their honorarium in line with the August 2023 agreement. The 31-day indefinite strike in 2023 by around one lakh ASHA workers and facilitators across Bihar had compelled the government to agree to pay them as “honorarium” rather than as a “reward” (paritoshik).

The Yatra, embodying Bihar’s hunger for change and determination to defend universal adult franchise, passed through the streets of Sheikhpura as thousands of people from all walks of life welcomed the convoy led by Comrade Dipankar and Tejashwi Yadav.

Day Five: Munger to Naugachhia

On 22 August, the Yatra covered the stretch from Munger to Naugachhia. Before setting out, local comrades in Munger gave a warm send-off, reminding the leaders of the core demands of women scheme workers and the restoration of the old pension scheme for all sections of government employees. A memorandum by the National Movement for Old Pension Scheme,

Bihar, was handed to Comrade Dipankar.

As the Yatra progressed, it also engaged with victims of the BPSC paper leak and the teacher recruitment scam, who have endured police repression and imprisonment, and who continue their struggle for justice..

Day Six: Naugachhia to Purnea

On 23 August, the Yatra proceeded from Naugachhia to Purnea via Kursela and Katihar. Despite floods in the region, people gathered across the route to greet the Yatra and express their desire and resolve for change. In a couple of places, INDIA alliance leaders also interacted with makhana growers and workers, who earn a pittance after months of hard labour while profits go to food processing industry owners and exporters outside Bihar. CPI(ML) MLA and Leader of the Party Legislative Group, Mahboob Alam, also joined the Yatra during this stretch.

Comrade Dipankar, exposing the lies being spread by Prime Minister Modi in Gaya, said that under the ongoing SIR in Bihar, not a single Bangladeshi infiltrator has been caught so far. Yet the Prime Minister continues to lie repeatedly in an attempt to mislead the people. While in the name of SIR, the names



of migrant workers, women, and minorities are being struck off the voter list, Modi is making a failed attempt—just like in the Jharkhand elections—to raise the bogey of “Bangladeshi infiltration.”

He added that the reality is that not a single piece of evidence of infiltration has surfaced so far. Despite this, the government remains engaged in disinformation. This entire exercise is a conspiracy to disenfranchise people of their voting rights. In this situation, the people of Bihar must remain vigilant and fight for every vote.

The Voter Adhikar Yatra will cover 1,300 km in three phases, passing through Supaul, Darbhanga, Sitamarhi, Bettiah, Chapra, Arrah, and finally reaching Patna on 1 September for a grand concluding rally. ■

Aryabhata and the Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India (ECI) seems to be a devout disciple of Aryabhata, particularly enamoured with his celebrated contribution to mathematics, the invention of the number zero. Aryabhata is believed to have lived in Pataliputra, and the ECI appears to be honouring him by deploying the number “0” liberally in the Bihar State Intensive Revision (SIR).

At least 2,92,000 entries in the draft electoral rolls carry house number “0”. The other major application of “0” concerns objections submitted by Booth Level Agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties regarding the draft rolls. For three whole weeks, despite persistent efforts by CPI(ML) BLAs, the ECI refused to acknowledge any of these objections. Finally, on 22 August, it admitted to receiving two complaints from the party.

This claim by the ECI is puzzling. CPI(ML) BLAs have been actively submitting complaints and facilitating the filling of Form 6 by first-time voters, as well as for electors who were wrongly deleted from the rolls. (Form 6 is intended for the inclusion of new voters, while Form 7 is meant to raise objections to names wrongly included.) In Bihar, however, the bulk of complaints concern erroneous deletions, deliberate or otherwise. Yet there has never been a specific form for such complaints, nor even a column for BLAs to record their names when submitting them.

For weeks the ECI had no prescribed format for political parties or their BLAs to file objections. Only recently did it introduce one, as noted in its daily press release of 18 August 2025. In practice, the Commission demands a ‘declaration form’ signed by the BLA and duly acknowledged by the concerned BLO before treating a Form 6 as an official complaint. It was only after navigating this elaborate ‘complaint challenge’ that Viswakarma Paswan, one of the CPI(ML) BLAs in Ara, finally succeeded in getting two cases formally recorded, those of Mintu Paswan and Munna Paswan, both wrongfully struck off the rolls, the former declared “dead” and the latter marked as “permanently shifted.”

According to the ECI, CPI(ML) has around 1,500 BLAs. Yet the Bihar CEO’s own dashboard puts the “approved number” at 2,265, with a further 1,168 still pending approval, two months after the SIR began on 25 June.

During the Supreme Court hearing on the Bihar SIR case on 22 August, political parties were criticised for their supposed “inaction”. The ECI claimed that, apart from two CPI(ML) complaints, not a single one of the more than 1.6 lakh BLAs appointed by recognised parties in Bihar had lodged objections.

If it has taken a committed party like CPI(ML), with its team of dedicated activists, nearly three weeks to get just two complaints “officially acknowledged”, the issue lies not with party inaction but with the opacity and lack of clarity in the functioning of the Election Commission. ■

Protest Against Bihar SIR and Vote Chori

On 11 August, CPIML MP Sudama Prasad joined the INDIA bloc MPs’ march from Parliament to the Election Commission of India to protest against vote theft and voter suppression. The march, which began from the Parliament premises, was stopped by the police before it could reach the ECI office, which had been turned into a heavily barricaded fortress. Later, as the MPs intensified their protest on the streets, they were taken into custody and detained at Parliament Street police station until the evening.

CPI(ML) Campaign

CPIML carried out the Chunav Chor, Gaddi Chhor [Election Thieves, Quit Office] campaign from 9 to 11 August. On 15 August, a “Save Independence, Save Constitution, Save Democracy” march was organised across the country.

In Bihar, a protest march was organised in Patna, where CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, along with party leaders and activists, held a rally against the Election Commission’s disenfranchisement campaign and the SIR fraud. With the slogan ‘Vote Thieves, Vacate the Chair’, the march began at Buddha Smriti Park and proceeded to the Seven Martyrs Memorial.

After paying homage at Satmurti Golambar to the seven students martyred on 11 August 1942 and hoisting the tricolour, Comrade Bhattacharya addressed the gathering, stating that the country was witnessing the biggest attack on the Constitution, democracy and voting rights since independence. He said that on 11 August, the martyrs who faced bullets and imprisonment for freedom were remembered, and a pledge was taken. The martyrs never wanted the tricolour to bow before anyone. Today, that same tricolour, Constitution and vote were in danger.

As part of the campaign against voter suppression, protests were held across Bihar. In Andhra Pradesh, a protest programme took place on 11 August at the Vizianagaram collectorate. In West Bengal, demonstrations were held in several districts, including Nadia, Hooghly, Howrah, Siliguri and Burdwan. ■

The Book Ban Reflects Kashmir's Dystopian Reality

▲ ANURADHA BHASIN

Twenty-five books on Kashmir suddenly suffered an enforced disappearance, striking at the very foundation of democratic discourse and freedom of expression. The recent blanket ban, signaling an unprecedented mass censorship, by Jammu and Kashmir's Home Department, targeting scholarly works including my own 'A Dismantled State: The Untold Story of Kashmir After 370', reveals that the government is so insecure about its narrative that it cannot tolerate even academic scrutiny.

The banned list reads like a who's who of Kashmir scholarship and includes works by A.G. Noorani, Sumantra Bose, Christopher Snedden, and Victoria Schofield. They authors are all known authorities on Kashmir. These are not fringe publications but rigorously researched academic works that enrich studies on Kashmir.

If such books are to be pushed into a black hole, it would be impossible to grasp a comprehensive, layered and nuanced understanding of one of the most troubled regions in the world.

This is not the first time that books have been banned in India, but this case is egregious. 25 books have been targeted on vague, insubstantial grounds at an unprecedented scale. This is not only a shocking testament to the brazen censorship of the government, but it also reflects Kashmir's dystopian reality.

According to the official notification, the banned books are "playing a critical role in misguiding

the youth, glorifying terrorism and inciting violence against Indian State". It adds that the identified books have been found to "incite secessionism and endanger sovereignty and integrity of India". The claims are misleading and based on whims, not evidence.

The notification mentions nebulous accusations of promoting "false narrative" and "secessionism" without providing specific evidence or clear definitions of what constitutes such violations. It justifies the ban on basis of investigations but neither offers a detailed analysis, nor concrete examples of how these books in full, some passages from them or some words were promoting the said objectives. This is substituted by bureaucratic doublespeak that criminalises critical thinking totally.

None of these works glorify terrorism or peddle any hidden agenda, as is being claimed by the government. Most of these books are published by reputed publishing houses who certainly do not publish random stuff without ensuring that the research and evidence provided for every assertion is thorough. Particularly in the case of Kashmir, which has been the most contested space, the publishers are extremely cautious and often add a double layer of scrutiny

My own work is an outcome of over two years of research, authenticating and writing. A journalistic narrative on Jammu and Kashmir after it lost its special status and statehood in 2019, it is based on sources in the public domain, interviews and field work, beside

analysis of the new laws and policies, historical context, and how these impact people on the ground.

Since it was critical of the state and was written in times when Indian government had begun to exacerbate its high-handed control in Kashmir showcasing the state's intolerance to any dissent or counter narrative, Harper Collins India, my publisher, treated the region as even more sensitive. The editors implemented rigorous fact-checking protocols and multiple review stages with every assertion thoroughly documented and verified.

My book survived three tedious legal vettings, with publishers verifying every claim against evidence before approving the publication.

The book was written to put into the public domain the truth about the government claims on Kashmir while silencing all voices of dissent, targeting journalists, eliminating civil society spaces and crushing political activism. This was implemented by turning Jammu and Kashmir, geographically truncated and politically demoted to a Union Territory, into a police state and surveillance state.

Like many other books on the list which formed a significant archive on Kashmir's history and politics, my book documented the contemporary period filling in the vacuum on information and knowledge about the region in the absence of media reportage.

This ban, even as it is unprecedented, is not a case aberration. It's part of a systematic dismantling of intellectual freedom across India—curriculum changes in universities, control over academic appointments, the muzzling of dissenting voices in media and civil society. Kashmir, already transformed into a surveillance state, now serves

as the laboratory for this broader authoritarian experiment.

It highlights two ironies. One, the government is contradicting its own narrative of normalcy and peace by banning literature it deems as glorifying terrorism and a source of potential disruptor to peace. Second, a government that proclaims India as the "mother of democracy" while simultaneously destroying the very institutions that make democracy possible.

The real damage of the ban notification extends far beyond the 25 banned titles.

When governments can arbitrarily criminalise academic work, it creates a chilling effect. Researchers and scholars may be scared to research sensitive topics. Publishers may not risk going ahead with critical scholarship? Students will not choose to study regions deemed too "seditious" for honest inquiry.

This creates a feedback loop of ignorance. Without rigorous academic engagement, public understanding becomes shallow and polarised. Policy decisions get made in information vacuums.

But that probably is the intended purpose behind the ban - to send a chilling message, to make it clear that only the version of history and politics stamped and endorsed by the government is acceptable, that no dissent or counter narrative is legitimate, and that all knowledge and information must be dispensed with.

The notification that calls for ban and forfeiture of all the banned books is as much a threat for those who read and keep books to quench their thirst for knowledge as it is for the writers and scholars yearning to research and write.

Such bans may seem senseless in today's hi-tech digital world when absolute erasure of the written and spoken word is impossible. Yet, they have far-reaching and damaging consequences as they instill a fear of scholarship, research, academics and knowledge, resulting in generations that will hesitate to write, read, and thus think.

No great nations are formed by reducing its citizens to ill-informed entities without the ability to think.

(Anuradha Bhasin is the Managing Editor of Kashmir Times and author of 'A Dismantled State: The Untold Story of Kashmir After 370'.)

This is a slightly altered version of an article previously published in TRT Global on August 10, 2025. ■

The Many Normalcies and Narratives of "New Kashmir"

6 Years of Article 370 Abrogation

▲ SAIYED

5th August 2025 marked the 6th anniversary of the illegal abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir by the BJP government and the beginning of months of communication shutdown and over a year without high-speed internet for the people of Kashmir. The state assembly was arbitrarily dissolved, and an undemocratic, unelected authority was imposed upon the people. This was not only a blatant and shameful violation of the asymmetrical federal structure of the Indian constitution but also of the democratic rights, will, and consent of the people of J&K who were locked in their homes and cut off from the rest of the world. A people, already filled with scars and wounds, were again divided, disempowered, and downgraded without even considering the opinion of its people. To date, despite all hue and cry of "normalcy" by the BJP government, the atmosphere in Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh remains turbulent. Democratic rights remain suspended in J&K with continuous security lapses despite the heavy militarisation for which the LG Manoj Sinha has taken "responsibility". The students of Kashmir have been protesting again and again on the streets for a rationalisation into the unfair reservation policy in J&K that is not at all in line with the population demography and has only been used as a political tool pitting the students against each other amidst raging unemployment in the region.

In Ladakh, which was promised development, not a single gazetted officer post has been released for the local population since the abrogation. The people who earlier had 4 elected representatives in the state assembly, along with representation in the Lok Sabha, have now been reduced to only 1 MP in the parliament. Sajjad Kargili, an important leader of the Kargil Democratic Alliance, while addressing a public meeting demanding immediate restoration of statehood, had rightly remarked that Ladakh, the largest constituency in the entire territory of J&K, has been reduced to a place with the least representation. The demand for a 6th schedule has to date not been fulfilled, and the people of Ladakh suffer while the BJP refuses to fulfill any of its promises to them.

In the first session of the parliament, where discussions roared with chauvinism hailing Operation Sindoor and many political statements were made, the speeches of the two

Kashmiri MPs, Agha Ruhullah Mehdi and Engineer Rasheed, got minimal coverage. The speeches did not ask for anything radical; the content was a watered-down appeal for the will of the Kashmiri people and their lives to be taken into account. But the tyranny of numbers, once again, overpowered the voices from the very grounds where the mighty battles were fought, where blood was shed, where tears had fallen.

On the night of 7th August 2025, the LG of J&K issued a notification banning around 25 books, which included academic and historical literature, citing "secessionism" as the reason behind the ban. The authors of these books include Booker prize-winning author Arundhati Roy and Professor A.G.Noorani. The timing of the book ban was quite interesting, since at the same time in Srinagar, a government-mandated "Chinar Book Festival" was in full swing, showing pictures of literary engagement and development. Just days after the book ban, Narendra Modi also launched a book that was published by the acclaimed Penguin publishers, titled "370: Undoing the unjust". There is now a very clear and open attempt at rewriting the history, redrawing the boundaries, reshaping the imagination, and the idea of J&K in the continuation of an integrationism that is left unchallenged even by the majority of the parliamentary opposition. Everything has been made justifiable and above the line length of ethics and laws when it comes to integrating Kashmir - demographic change, cultural/historical erasure, extreme militarisation, and with all of this, an unflinching iron fist, all has been deemed not only acceptable but also necessary in this new normal.

Fascists have always seen intellectuals and history as their enemies; the act of banning books

is not a new occurrence in history. The order to ban the 25 books states "promotion of alienation" amongst many other reasons as the justification behind the move. The only problem is that alienation is neither caused nor promoted by words written on papers, but rather by the checkpoints, the barbed wires, the stifling of dissent, and the militarisation that the people of Kashmir live as an experience every day. Banning academic literature and history books does not answer the question of alienation, but further deepens the wounds. Collective memories and oral histories have survived longer than the existence of books and papers.

The solution to this alienation lies not in police raids but dialogue, not in book bans, but in the freedom to a dignified life and choice for the people of Kashmir. The call for a human approach aside, what does this anxiety of banning books, this continuous failed attempt at constructing "normalcy," indicate? It indicates the failure of a model of military integrationism, the painful silence of threats and coercion, the fragility of a house of cards that is named peace in Kashmir. It also indicates the utter failure of the Sangh's agenda on the ground level in J&K despite the success of its narratives on TV channels, newspapers, etc. Perhaps the greatest example of this was the period that immediately followed the Pahalgam attack, while the IT cell and media channels were blazing with the narrative of "local involvement", the streets of Kashmir were filled with common people denouncing the attack and proclaiming en masse that Kashmir has for long stood against targeting innocent civilians.

This year also marked an extremely important intervention through the completion of the rail

line connecting Kashmir now to Delhi by the Vande Bharat train. The very imagination and basis advertised of this connection has been solely "integration" and "tourism" by the government. Roads, buildings, railways and even education in Kashmir exist in service only for the purpose of "Indianisation" and smooth functioning of the military and tourism institutions. Very recently a video had created a stir where a mother was pleading in front of army personnel for being allowed to take her sick child to the hospital but they were stopped due to the Amarnath Yatra, right there and then a car filled with yatis was allowed to pass from the very same road in the video. The above issue was also mentioned by one of the elected MPs through his social media, but again received no coverage at all except some local Kashmiri newspapers.

Manto, in his acclaimed article "Surkh Inqilab" had written, "the winds of tyranny may be able to extinguish flickering lamps, but against the flames of revolution they hold no might". A forced normalcy that's built upon barbed wires and censorship, propaganda and plain denial that anything is wrong at all is not eternal, has never been in the history of humanity. Its eventual fall against the will of the people is a matter of time. But till then what must not be forgotten is that everyday, every notice, every order in Kashmir is a laboratory of the fascist offensive. What is happening in Kashmir, is the blueprint for what will happen tomorrow outside and must be nipped in the bud through solidarity and resistance. The six years of the abrogation of Article 370 only marks the continuation of the fight of a people against one of the most repressive crackdowns in the history of postcolonial world. ■

Another Nail in the Kashmir Coffin

▲ SOMENATH GUHA

On January 13, 2025 inaugurating a strategic tunnel in Sonmarg area Prime Minister Narendra Modi dwelled on the issue of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir and said, 'When Modi makes a promise, he fulfils it.....Right things will take place in the right time.' Even six years after the abrogation of Article 370 evidently that time is yet to come, instead it's time to further tighten the screws and strangle all possible forms of expression in the union territory. Almost seven months later 25 books written by luminaries across the world were banned under section 98 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. For five years and more the central government has been proclaiming that it's all normal in the valley. In the space of just four months from the dastardly Pahalgam attack in April to the Book Ban, that claim has been proved to be as hollow as all the jumlas that has been peddled by the ruling dispensation since 2014.

Reasons given for this banning are : these books were misguiding the youth; instigating their participation in violence and terrorism; impacting youth by cultivating a culture of grievance, victimhood and terrorist heroism. Are these allegations true? For this let us have a cursory glance at some of the books, credibility of their authors, authenticity of whatever they have written. Among the list of books there is Azadi , by Arundhati Roy, Booker prize winner, perennially recognised as the ultimate anti-national; The Kashmir Dispute (1947-2012) by AG Noorani, former supreme court

advocate and constitution expert; A Dismantled State: The Untold Story of Kashmir after Article 370 by Anuradha Bhasin, Editor of Kashmir Times, long acknowledged as the most authentic voice of J & K; Contested Lands by Sumantra Bose, political scientist, great grandnephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Besides there are books by acclaimed international academics like Victoria Schofield, Christopher Snedden etc. All of them have impeccable credentials and a look at their books will reveal that they have only elaborated upon the complicated history of Kashmir, the ways to unravel it and depicted the ground realities prevalent there from time to time. What's very strange is most of these books have been in public domain for last 30-40 years! In Noorani's book there is an article written in 1964; Hafsa Kanjwal's book Colonising Kashmir dwells on the 1950s and 60s when India consolidated its grip in the area; Muhammad Yusuf Saraf's Kashmiris Fight for Freedom was published in two volumes in the 1970s, first volume describes events of 1819-1946 and is part of J & K's historical archive! So why suddenly ban these books now? Have the youth in Kashmir suddenly become wary of instagram, reels and become bookworms?

Harassment of the media, communication blackout is nothing new in Kashmir: in 2010 SMS services were stopped for 3 years, in 2016 Kashmir Reader was forced to close shop and there have been numerous internet shutdowns since 2012. But after August, 2019, attack on journalists, curtailment of freedom of expression, censorship, surveillance

has reached unprecedented heights. Besides, as Arundhati Roy writes, Kashmir is the most militarized zone in the world, with half a million security personnel posted there. Various agencies besides the Army, BSF, CRPF does intelligence gathering. "People live in terror of informers, double agents, and triple agents who could be anybody from old classmates to family members." People in the valley always lived under a veil of fear but in the last six years that fear has become dense, ubiquitous, threatening, physically numbing. In the initial days even mobile network, broadband, landline, cable were shutdown. After 20 days landline was restored in selected districts. Internet was blocked for 145 days, longest in history. Even after that 2G was restored, high-speed net was restored almost after year and a half. Social Media, Facebook, Twitter (now X) et al simply vanished.

Most blatant attacks were launched on the Press and the Media. But it was done in a most subtle way, not the smash and kill style that the Israelis are following in Gaza. A situation has been created such that all communication channels have been choked, revenue has dried up leading to staff shortage and forcing proprietors to carry 'all is well' government ads, whole archives have been scrapped to erase previous protests, resistance, websites hauled down, and in a brazen show of power, even the Kashmir Press Club taken over by the police. The more intransigent ones have been hauled up, charged under stringent laws and incarcerated for unspecified period.

After the completion of the tunnel in Sonmarg the central government claims that Dilki Doori and Delhi ki Doori, two out of Delhi's three promises, has now been achieved. With improved communications it is

being said that now one can travel from Delhi to Srinagar in only eight hours. And supposedly another promise of holding assembly elections and installing an elected government has also been fulfilled. Upgraded communications with road and rail bridges and shining metallic roads in remote areas of the country is now a priority for the government, be it in Chhattisgarh or Kashmir. Better communication means better business, opening up uncharted areas in the country to big business. By tinkering of existing laws that opened up land and residency rights and by abolishing Article 35A, land has been opened up for outsiders. Military camps are becoming ubiquitous and a big land hunt has been launched for industry and development. Large mining companies are making forays in the UT exploiting riverbeds and there has been a massive jump in stone quarrying. As regards the state government elected in October, 2024, the less said the better. The new chief minister Omar Abdullah promised press freedom and vowed to revive the old press club. However his power has been drastically curtailed and he has turned out to be a mere figurehead, a glorified Mayor or village head. He has also criticised the ban of books, but hardly anyone listens to him. The UT is basically run by Delhi and its man in Srinagar Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Many are saying that in this age of PDF files, pirated books, e-books, massive net connectivity, every written word is available digitally and thus any attempt to ban books is a futile exercise. But they disregard the fear factor further strengthened by yet another coercive measure which will now discourage anyone from researching on the ground realities existing in the valley. Media has been strangled, rights suppressed, people silenced and now the attack has spread to the academic sphere erasing memories and histories. It's unbelievable that works of Agha Shahid Ali, considered the leading poet in post-1947 Kashmir, and another distinguished bard, Bashrat Peer, have been dropped from Kashmir university curriculum. In the so-called 'mainland' they have already established that there was a temple in Ayodhya and not a mosque and Rana Pratap won the Battle of Haldighati and not Emperor Akbar! With heightened censorship and silencing of dissent more such falsehoods will now proliferate J & K. ■

Journalism is Not Seditious



The CPI(ML) strongly condemns the Assam Police's move to slap charges under sedition in a new guise (Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) against The Wire journalists Siddharth Varadarajan and Karan Thapar. The targeting of two of India's most respected journalists is a deliberate attempt by the BJP regime to criminalize journalism and intimidate the press. The two journalists have been summoned to appear before the Guwahati Crime Branch without being informed of the specific complaints or the details of the charges against them.

This is the second FIR against The Wire in just two months. The fact that the Guwahati Crime Branch issued fresh sedition summons on 12 August 2025, the very same day the Supreme Court issued notice on The Wire's petition challenging Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and granted protection from "coercive action" by the Assam Police, makes these actions especially brazen and contemptuous of judicial authority.

Another case of sedition on trumped-up charges was also filed against journalist Abhishar Sharma on 21 August 2025 by the Guwahati Crime Branch.

The cases against The Wire journalists and Abhishar Sharma reflect an eerie pattern of repression, with Assam being turned into a laboratory for communal-corporate fascist offensives on people's rights and democratic ethos. They come at a time when the BJP Government in the state is waging a large-scale campaign of evicting tribals and Bengali-speaking migrants from their homes, handing over vast tracts of land to corporates and big business, and enforcing this dispossession through brutal police repression.

The CPI(ML) demands the immediate withdrawal of the summons and the sedition cases against the journalists. We also reiterate that Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita is nothing but a dangerous reincarnation of the colonial sedition law and must be scrapped. ■

Dharali Disaster: Rising Calamities in Fragile Himalayas

On 11 August, Atul Sati, Convenor of the Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti and member of the CPI(ML) State Committee, wrote to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Dhami regarding the Dharali disaster, describing it as further proof of the government's failure to ensure the safety of the people. On 5 August, a massive flash flood in Uttarkashi engulfed and destroyed the entire Dharali village, which lies on the pilgrim route to Gangotri Dham.

The letter noted that disasters linked to recurring calamities in the Himalayas have repeatedly demonstrated the vulnerability of the region, yet neither the state nor the central government has taken adequate preventive measures. The recent disaster in Dharali caused loss of life and property, and the government has failed to issue clear information on the number of casualties and the scale of damage.

Atul Sati pointed out that in March 2024, the Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority submitted

a report to the National Disaster Management Authority confirming the risk of such a flood in the area and recommending preventive steps, yet no action was taken. He blamed negligence in early warning systems, disaster preparedness, rescue and relief measures.

The letter also raised concerns over inadequate rehabilitation and compensation arrangements for affected residents, urging the state government to act immediately to prevent further tragedies.

In the letter six demands were given to the Chief Minister:

1. Immediate presentation of a detailed report on the Dharali disaster, with clear government statements on casualties and damage.
2. Announcement of a special permanent policy for disaster-prone areas, specifying rehabilitation locations in advance.
3. Compensation for losses in business and agriculture sectors, along with assessment



of damage and provision of adequate compensation. An Uttarakhand-level committee should be formed to oversee post-disaster relief.

4. Deployment of adequate personnel for debris clearance to ensure proper rehabilitation before the monsoon ends.
5. Provision of disaster shelters and relief materials in advance in disaster-prone areas.
6. Establishment of at least one government relief camp in each affected area for a minimum of one month, providing food, essential items and necessities.

Atul Sati concluded by stating that the Dharali disaster once again highlights the urgent need for preventive and safety measures at the state level. ■

Kishtwar (J&K) Cloudburst Tragedy

The CPI(ML) expresses its deep sorrow at the loss of lives in the devastating cloudburst in Kishtwar district of Jammu & Kashmir. We stand in solidarity with the bereaved families and all those suffering from this calamity.

This tragedy comes just days after the catastrophic disaster in Dharali, Uttarakhand, once again exposing the extreme fragility of the Himalayan regions. These recurring disasters are a grave reminder of the dangers posed by unchecked and poorly planned development projects that are straining fragile mountain ecosystems and putting countless lives at risk. The climate crisis has further exacerbated these dangers — the Central

Water Commission (CWC) has itself recently reported that 34 out of 100 monitored glacial lakes in India show an increasing trend in water spread area, raising serious concerns about the heightened risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

We call upon the Central Government to immediately declare a national disaster and to mobilise all possible resources for urgent rescue, relief, and long-term rehabilitation of affected communities. A high-level scientific commission must be constituted to ensure preparedness for, and mitigation of, such disasters in the future.

- issued by CC, CPI(ML) on 15 August ■

Left Turn New York: Dignity, Socialism and the Mamdani Campaign

▲ AMIT K.S

On May 18th, just five weeks before the New York City Democratic mayoral primary, I found myself in the Manhattan field office of Zohran Mamdani's campaign. It was a Sunday—technically a day off—but about 15 young staffers were deep in work, peering into laptops or huddled in intense conversations. I felt like an outsider, not because I didn't support Mamdani, but because I had little hope that he could actually beat Andrew Cuomo—the ultimate Democratic Party insider and ex-governor of New York. Ten weeks prior, I'd spoken with Zohran himself as the campaign hustled for donations to unlock city matching funds. I helped raise some money, not out of real optimism, but because of his strategically concrete promises that directly spoke to the working class: a rent freeze, city-owned grocery stores, free buses, and universal child-care. At best, I thought his campaign would force these issues into the debate, creating a “left pole” in the race. Just four months earlier, Mamdani was barely noticeable in the crowded field, with less than 1% support. By May 18th, he had climbed close to 20%. His proposals were now part of daily conversation in New York, but Cuomo still held 37%—a daunting 20-point margin with just a month to go. Yet the campaign staff were undeterred. “Cuomo just has name recognition and Zohran does not. But what he has is a program. We just have to knock a million doors and we can turn this election around,” one

staffer told me. By the time I had left the campaign office that afternoon, I had a new bounce in my step.

By early June, the momentum was shifting. The first mayoral debate on June 4th saw Mamdani hold his ground against a hostile Cuomo, and his ratings soared. Within days, Cuomo stagnated at 38% and Mamdani surged into the high 20s. Ranked-choice voting—where voters rank up to five candidates, with votes redistributed until someone crosses 50%—suddenly became pivotal. Mamdani, often the second or third choice among progressives, was closing the gap. By June 9th, pollsters were openly questioning whether Cuomo's campaign had peaked too early. The second debate on June 12th brought more progressive candidates into Mamdani's corner. Michael Blake urged his supporters to rank Mamdani second, and by June 21st, city comptroller Brad Lander and Mamdani had cross-endorsed,

consolidating the progressive vote. Lander, the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in New York, inoculated Mamdani from a fierce Zionist attack that had gone as far as to suggest that if Mamdani were to win, the Jewish communities of New York might be forced to evacuate. On June 22nd, just two days before the primary, an Emerson College poll showed for the first time, Mamdani winning in the eighth round of counting against Cuomo.

This remarkable surge in the last four weeks before poll date was produced through an exponential growth of Mamdani's volunteer base. Towards the end of May, Mamdani's volunteer army was just a little more than 15,000 which within just a span of three weeks had reached a little over 40,000. It was this volunteer base that is the most significant evidence of a remarkable mood-swing within the very fabric of New York City, making knocking on over a million doors possible. When the results came in on election day, Mamdani had pulled off a historic upset, winning by 12 points—56% to 44%—over Cuomo, New York's most established Democrat. He is now the official Democratic party candidate.

What made this remarkable



Zohran Mamdani with fellow lawmakers and activists ends a five-day hunger strike outside the White House in December 2023, demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

victory possible? How did Mamdani overcome a twenty point deficit in a month? Clearly, his victory lay at the centre of many converging trajectories. In much of the analysis of the results that have followed, including from within Mamdani's camp, one of the clearest statements that have emerged is that neighbourhoods that had voted Trump in the 2024 elections had turned around and voted Mamdani in this primary. This indeed points to a popular surge of support for Mamdani's economic program, from deep inside the working class of New York City that was struggling to stay afloat under conditions of high inflation and deep price-gouging. It also points to the fact that the democratic party's establishment is deeply out of touch with the popular mood as it failed to course-correct even as it saw the Mamdani campaign succeed. And instead depended on the party machines and some of the mainstream unions to deliver alongside the deployment of the worst of Islamophobic tropes and a campaign war chest of over 32 million dollars. In the end, the Mamdani victory is probably just as significant as the victory of Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (AOC) in the US Congressional Primary in 2012 where she defeated a well established democratic party neoliberal. Both represent at specific moments, the left flank of the Democratic party, smashing into its neoliberal core. Nobody could've been more establishment than Andrew Cuomo.

What is the establishment within the Democratic Party—and why is Andrew Cuomo its key figure in New York City? For over three decades, the Democratic party has functioned as a coalition of three clear blocs. At its center lies the Keynesian-Welfare bloc, rooted in the New Deal era under Franklin Delano Roosevelt and

later figures like Truman, Johnson and Carter. This bloc built a welfare compact—from the 1930s to the 1970s—where capital paid its share to fund programs like Social Security, Medicaid, unemployment insurance, and child-support.

In the 1980s, as the capitalist class rallied behind Ronald Reagan's neoliberal assault on the welfare state, Democrats shifted right. By the 1990s, the neoliberal bloc had taken control, embodied by Bill Clinton, followed by Barack Obama, and candidates like Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris. Bernie Sanders remained a lone progressive voice until the 2008 financial crash sparked a new left flank, represented by AOC, Rashida Tlaib, Ayanna Pressley, and Ilhan Omar.

By the mid-2010s, the three blocs were firmly defined, with neoliberals dominant and often allying with centrists. Bill Clinton built the bloc; Al Gore, his VP, was the centrist compromise. Obama cemented neoliberal control over the party after posing as a centrist in his campaign; Biden, as his VP, reassured the middle. In Obama's second term, it became increasingly clear that the neoliberal assault was fueling both the growth of the ultra-right (Tea Party white supremacists and the christian nationalists) and the new left flank both inside and outside the Democratic Party. Andrew Cuomo became governor of New York State in 2011, as a true representative of the complete control of the neoliberals bloc over the Democratic party and it took a sexual harassment scandal ten years later to force him to resign. The hegemonic neoliberals held onto the party and kept their blinders on. In 2016, they backed Hillary Clinton, an arch neoliberal like her husband, who failed to stop the rise of right-wing populism. Sanders, her main primary challenger, was sidelined

again in 2020 when the party pushed Biden out of retirement, pairing him with Kamala Harris to block a leftward shift.

In 2024, Biden's declining health gave the neoliberals an opening—they installed Kamala Harris as their candidate. This four-decade arc helps explain what unfolded in New York last month. Andrew Cuomo is the neoliberal torchbearer of the New York Democratic Party—the local Clinton and Obama rolled into one.

Mamdani's improbable victory, however, is only the beginning. Early reactions suggest that the neoliberal bloc within the Democratic Party remains unwilling to concede—despite Mamdani's remarkable success in mobilizing young voters and energizing New York City's working class. The ideological hold of neoliberalism is strong; even as Mamdani pulled Trump voters leftward—exactly the shift the Democratic Party needs—figures like Hakeem Jeffries and Kirsten Gillibrand, heirs to the Clinton legacy, show no signs of shifting course.

Wall Street was already uneasy during Mamdani's surge, funnelling millions into Cuomo's super PAC. Now, the capitalist bloc appears not only to be consolidating against Mamdani but actively seeking a more "winnable" centrist figure. Hedge fund billionaire Bill Ackman tweeted shortly after the primary, urging the public to nominate "your best centrist candidate."

The November race is crowded. Mamdani is the nominee of both the Democratic Party and the Working Families Party. Curtis Silwa is the Republican candidate. Cuomo and the current mayor, Eric Adams—running under the cloud of corruption scandals—are both running as independents. There's even speculation that Ackman and

the Wall Street bloc may fund a centrist write-in. While a split field could favor Mamdani, the Democratic establishment may negotiate a withdrawal by either Cuomo or Adams to consolidate the race.

To win, Mamdani must broaden his support, especially among Black and Latino communities. Early signs point to a targeted effort to mobilize young voters in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan. His campaign has so far remained rooted in an unwavering commitment to improve life for working-class New Yorkers. If he maintains that focus—and compels opponents to address the underlying problems his proposals confront—his chances remain strong.

The opposition will likely fall back on the deadly and toxic combination of Islamophobia and charges of anti-semitism and keep attempting to create a wave of fear. But these attacks are losing traction. The more Mamdani demands specifics from Cuomo and Adams on affordability and exposes their ties to billionaire (and Trump) donors, the more difficult it will be to counter his rise. Unlike the establishment's belief that billionaires ought to be objects of inspiration and awe, Mamdani's campaign has clearly framed class antagonism in a way that many New Yorkers are ready to engage. The question of class and dignity have been brought together in his package of solutions—each solution from rent freezes to child support—clearly being connected to an urban working-class life with dignity. What else is a socialist aspiration under conditions of neoliberalism, but dignity in the life of the working-class?

The fight is on.

(Amit K S is an union organizer with over 25 years Of experience in the immigrant labor movement in New York and New Jersey.) ■

New York's 'Redmare' & Some Lessons for the Indian Left

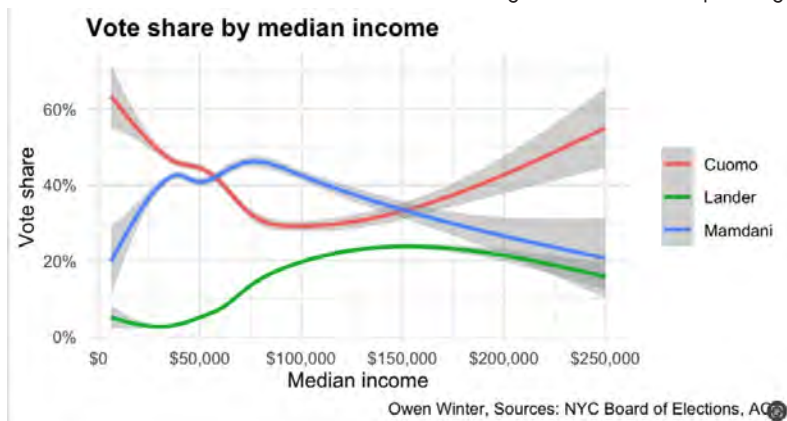
▲ SIKANDAR

Zohran Mamdani's rise has proven wrong the old conservative adage that 'the more the things change, the more they remain the same.' A lot has changed in American politics after his victory in the Democratic party primaries for New York city's mayorship. What has remained unchanged is the Democratic party's hatred for the Left. Despite Trump's trouncing of whatever remains of American democracy, the mainstream Democrats are still hobnobbing with him to sabotage Mamdani's chances to become New York city's Mayor.

Recently reports emerged that Andrew Cuomo, the ex-governor of New York who lost big time to Mamdani, has decided to contest as an independent. Reports have suggested that he met Trump and the latter advised him to contest independently. It is needless to say that federal administrative help and shady financial assistance by Trump's coterie will be on Cuomo's side. The history of Cuomo's association with Trump runs deep. Andrew Cuomo's father was a close friend of Fred Trump, Donald's father. Andrew also carries the distinction of working for a law firm that represented Donald Trump in corporate law suits. During the frantic presidential campaign of 2016, Andrew Cuomo did not campaign aggressively for Hillary Clinton. The latter's contestant, Donald Trump had then said about Cuomo "we get along very well."

Another interesting thing that has unfolded in this period is Barack Obama's phone call to Mamdani. The last time Obama's phone call had become famous was during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. He had phoned LeBron James (the black basketball star) and his colleagues to give up the idea of a strike in support of BLM. It is not clear what Obama said to Mamdani, however the fact that he did not endorse him publicly yet speaks volumes about the Democratic party's 'extreme center' (an apt expression used by Tariq Ali to describe centrist parties in the west after the neoliberal counter-revolution). In short, the Democratic party establishment is happy to fall in line with Trump rather than support Mamdani and honour their voters mandate.

New York city is not new to hot mayoral contests. In 1886, Henry George, economist and an enigmatic figure ran for the Mayor of the city as candidate of the United Labour Party. The party was a curious mix of communists, Catholics and 'Georgists', followers of Henry George who believed in free-trade and a single tax on land. Abram Hewitt won the contest but George finished second pushing



the Republican candidate Theodore Roosevelt (the future President of the United States of America) to the third spot. George was defeated by the great commercial and industrial capitalists of the city who had paid bribes to stuff ballots and engaged in other forms of brazen cheating. The contest got the attention of Friedrich Engels. He, despite his reservations for George, declared the result to be an 'epoch making day'. George entered the mayoral race as the star author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879), a radical essay which argued that 'the first went hand in hand with the second due to the monopolization of land, whose owners reaped most of the rewards of progress in the form of rising land values.' Bearing a similar message about inequality in New York City, Mamdani has made rent affordability and living standards a blazing issue.

The difference between Mamdani and George's campaign is that Mamdani has utilized the Democratic party apparatus, and in doing so, radicalized it like never before. Like many DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) cadres, he relied on the Working Families Party, founded in 1998 by disillusioned Democratic operatives and labour and non-profit organizers, to launch his bid in the Democratic primaries. Today, the 'Mamdani corps', which includes civilians, party affiliates and sympathizers who knocked at the doors of New Yorkers, number a staggering 50,000 volunteers. The latter went knocking on the doors of millions of New Yorkers. In class terms, Mamdani succeeded in banding together the middle classes in his favour. 47% college graduates, 48% Hispanics, 52% Asians, voted for Mamdani. However, Mamdani failed to cut ice with black and poor voters. Among the black voters, Cuomo polled 51% votes whilst Mamdani secured 34% votes. Even if we add Brad Lander's

progressive votes, there would be an uptick of just 3% points in Mamdani's favour. The reason behind this paradox is not Mamdani's failure to posit himself as the ally and spokesman of the city's poor, but the sheer distrust that the most marginalized have developed for the political establishment. Any promises, lofty or otherwise, appear to them as wishful and far-fetched. This is the result of years of distrust and disillusionment that the American political establishment has meted out to them. Under neoliberalism, this is true for the whole world.

In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party has succeeded in building a coalition of non-dominant OBCs and non-dominant scheduled castes with its traditional upper-caste votes. The economic abandonment that the former two groups faced at the hands of neoliberal policies coupled with the sectarian apathy shown towards them by the existing leaders of the dominant OBC and scheduled castes, delivered them into the hands of the ugly gargoyle—RSS-BJP. In 2024 general elections, it took a frantic campaign by the INDIA coalition regarding the danger(s) posed to the Constitution by the RSS-BJP for affecting a little change in their favour. Scheduled caste votes dropped by 3% points for the BJP. The BJP received 31% of scheduled caste votes in 2024, against 34% in 2019.

Mamdani's rise has had another major impact. It has enthused a huge section of American socialists and progressives who were hitherto enervated by the presence of Scylla (Democratic party establishment) and Charybdis (Trump and the MAGA movement) on both their sides. Last weekend, they organized the annual Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) national convention in Chicago, which welcomed tens of thousands of politically minded individuals from across the country to the unionized

McCormick Place convention center. Many DSA-endorsed candidates like Jake Ephros, running for Jersey City council; Kelsea Bond, running for Atlanta city council; Jorge Defendini, running for Ithaca common council; and others who attended this convention are looking to replicate Mamdani's success. Capitalism and its economic and ecological unviability are being questioned in these circles like never before. Chic social media clips of Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others have also done well to challenge the MAGA digital warriors.

Does Mamdani's victory hold any lesson(s) for the Indian left? America is a de facto two-party democracy, India is a de jure and de facto multi-party democracy. The unabashed nakedness of the rich in influencing the political system is a new thing that is being systematically crafted and drafted by the BJP, in America it is the hallmark of its political system. Mamdani has succeeded in cutting these two Gordian knots, albeit in a limited way. The modern industrial-capitalist city in South Asia is a tinderbox containing a combustible mix of class and caste oppression. And it is the big cities in India where the communists are the weakest. Historically, this was not the case. During the mid-1920s, the influence of the communists was such in the city of Bombay that during the Simon Commission protests the city's police commissioner noted in his diary that without the communists "the Congress Party would not have been able to stage any demonstration in Bombay against the Simon Commission." In a newly independent India, Delhi's first Mayor, Aruna Asaf Ali, was a communist. Can the communists in India draw necessary lessons and inspiration from the Mamdani campaign in New York to strengthen the Left presence and impact in India's big cities? ■

Famine Declared in Gaza as Israel Launches New Genocidal Campaign

On August 22, 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the foremost authority on global food security, confirmed that famine is ongoing in Gaza. The UN-backed body reported that more than half a million people in the Gaza Governorate, including Gaza City, are already starving. The IPC warned that famine will soon spread to Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis by the end of September. According to the IPC, 514,000 people, nearly a quarter of Gaza's population, are in famine. The number is expected to rise to 641,000 in weeks.

This famine comes as Israel intensifies its genocidal war of extermination against Gaza, aimed at seizing the entire territory and displacing its people. The new campaign, called Operation Gideon's Chariots II, has already begun with Israeli forces ordering hospitals in Gaza City to evacuate hundreds of injured patients, including children, women, and the elderly, many of whom are already starving and near death.

More than 62,000 Palestinians have been killed in the genocidal campaign, with hundreds more slaughtered daily in Israeli bombings, including near the US and Israeli backed "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation" aid sites. These GHF sites have become death traps, where starving Palestinians are lured with food only to be massacred by Israeli forces. The real death toll is far higher than reported, with bodies lying scattered on roads, entire families buried under rubble, and countless victims never registered due to constant bombardment.

Israel's war of extermination targets not only civilians but also civil defense workers, hospitals, and journalists with complete impunity. On August 10, Israeli forces bombed tents outside the main gate of al-Shifa Hospital where Al Jazeera journalists were reporting. The strike wiped out the entire media team in Gaza City, including the prominent journalist Anas al-Sharif, along with several other reporters.

The Israel's assault on Gaza is part of a broader settler-colonial project. In the occupied West Bank, Israel is fast-tracking new settlements to seize more Palestinian land. A new settlement plan aims to cut the West Bank in two around the E1 corridor. The E1 zone is of strategic importance as it connects Ramallah in the north with Bethlehem in the south. By bisecting the West Bank, Israel seeks to destroy the last geographical continuity of Palestinian territory.

What is unfolding today is genocide before the eyes of the world. Israel, backed and armed by US imperialism and with European complicity, is using famine, bombing, and displacement to annihilate the Palestinian people. Yet the steadfastness of Gaza's people, resisting in the face of death, continues to expose the brutality of Zionism and the bankruptcy of imperialism. ■

CPIML Condemns Israeli Attack on Freedom Flotilla Ship Handala Amid Gaza Genocide

Israeli forces have attacked the Handala, a humanitarian ship part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, carrying unarmed international volunteers to break the siege and deliver aid to the people of Gaza. The ship was intercepted in international waters on intervening night of July 26–27 (IST), in a blatant violation of international law. This is clearly an act of piracy and a war crime.

This is the third assault in recent months on international humanitarian ships, following the attack on Madleen in June and a drone strike on Handala's earlier attempt in May.

The assault on Handala comes amid a catastrophic famine and genocide in Gaza. Hundreds of children have died in just the past week from starvation under the blockade imposed by the Israeli's Netanyahu regime. Israeli forces, backed by the United States, continue to shoot unarmed civilians searching for food and are carrying out a systematic campaign of extermination against the civilian population of Gaza.

CPI(ML) strongly condemns this latest act of state piracy and stands in unwavering solidarity with the people of Gaza and the courageous volunteers aboard Handala.

Break the siege.

End the genocide and occupation.

Free Palestine. ■

Uttarakhand: Indefinite Sit-in Begins in Bagjala to Save Homes, Fields and Livelihoods

An indefinite sit-in protest began today in Bagjala village to save homes, fields, farming and animal husbandry. The protest is part of the pre-announced movement of the All India Kisan Mahasabha (AIKM). Villagers are demanding the lifting of restrictions on drinking water supply, road works, development works and construction activities, the start of the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme, restoration of the right to elect panchayat representatives, grant of ownership rights, and other basic civic facilities. The Mahasabha has declared that the protest will continue until all demands are met.

Addressing the convention as the main speaker, All India Kisan Mahasabha state president Anand Singh Negi said that when the MLA of Lalkuan had visited Bagjala, AIKM had given him a memorandum to pass a proposal in the monsoon session of the assembly beginning 19 August to declare Bagjala a revenue village. Instead of solving the problems, it appeared that the MLA had come after three years of his tenure only to create obstacles in today's sit-in through BJP leaders. Attempts were made overnight to stop villagers from joining the protest, but people came out in large numbers, showing unity which is commendable. Negi said that the government is afraid and is trying to intimidate the people, but unity is the answer.

He further said that the Chief Minister of the state is bent on uprooting the poor. From the hills to the plains, the BJP government is driving people off their lands. People are being pushed into the fire of communal division, which is

taking the state towards destruction and must be stopped.

Clifton D'Rozario, national president of the All India Lawyers Association for Justice, said that the policy of uprooting the poor, Dalits, minorities and Adivasis is being pursued across the country. But the real owners of the country are not the government or big corporates, it is the common people, and they must be given land rights. He said that excluding Bagjala from panchayat elections amounts to vote theft, which is unconstitutional and wrong. The right to vote is guaranteed by the Constitution, and the Lawyers Association will take up the issue at its platform and pursue all legal avenues against the denial of voting rights to Bagjala residents.

State vice president of the AIKM Bahadur Singh Jangi said that for decades people have lived in Bagjala, but now the government wants to take away their land for big projects like stadiums, a zoo, bus stand and High Court, and hand it to corporate builders. This will not be allowed to succeed, and the fight will be taken to its conclusion.

CPI(ML) Nainital district secretary Dr Kailash Pandey said that large numbers of people in the district live on forest and nazul land, and face eviction threats under the BJP government. Justice demands that people settled for decades must be granted ownership rights. No one should be evicted, and ownership rights must be given to Bagjala and all other poor residents of the district.

In her presidential address, Comrade Vimla Devi said that the people of Bagjala have chosen the path of struggle through unity, and



this fight will continue until victory.

It is noteworthy that Bagjala finds mention in the forest plans of 1925 to 1935 during the British period, which establishes the village's existence from before. Residents were allotted leases in 1978, due for renewal in 2008, but the then BJP government blocked renewal under the pretext of granting revenue village status. Nothing was done, and since 2017 BJP has again been in power but has not passed any bill for ownership rights. Instead, communal divisions have been promoted while Bagjala residents, earning their livelihood for generations, have faced bulldozer action. In 2023, under the pretext of removing encroachments, eight under-construction houses were demolished and all construction was halted. In response, residents organised with the All India Kisan Mahasabha and held a Kisan Mahapanchayat.

Earlier, on 27 May 2025, in defiance of police attempts to suppress the mobilisation, hundreds of farmers, workers, agricultural labourers and concerned citizens had organised a "Vishal Chetavni Rally" (Mass Warning Rally) in support of Bagjala's struggle at at Budh Park in Haldwani. Notices were then withdrawn, but basic rights and

civic facilities have not been restored, forcing villagers into indefinite protest.

The protest is based on an eight-point charter of demands:

1. Cancel all notices served to villagers under the pretext of encroachment removal.
2. Lift restrictions on construction works.
3. Repair damaged roads and construct pucca roads in place of kutcha roads.
4. Immediately resume the Jal Jeevan Mission's Har Ghar Nal, Har Ghar Jal scheme.
5. Restore the right of Bagjala residents to participate in panchayat elections and include them in the voter list.
6. Pass a proposal in the assembly to grant ownership rights to Bagjala residents on existing possession and declare it a revenue village without delay.
7. Ensure government purchase of cattle at fixed prices under the Cow Protection Act to stop losses faced by farmers, cattle rearers and commuters.
8. Grant ownership rights to all residents of forest and nazul land in Nainital district, including Bagjala. ■

AISA Releases NEP@FIVE Report on the Dismantling of Public Education

On August 5, All India Students' Association (AISA) released the NEP@Five, a critical ground report examining the disastrous effects of the National Education Policy (NEP) over the previous five years. The report was released at the Student Convention organised at CPI(M) Parliamentary Office in New Delhi. The NEP@Five report, which was put together using testimonies and in-depth fieldwork from more than 20 central and state universities in 12 states, emphasises how NEP has exacerbated caste and class divisions, accelerated the decline of public education, and placed the onus of affordability and access on students. Academics and student leaders from JNU, DU, AUD, and AMU—the universities most affected by and therefore at the centre of the resistance—spoke at the convention.

Nitish Kumar, JNUSU President and PhD Scholar, underlined the massive dropout crisis in JNU's undergraduate programs in the School of Languages due to the hectic FYUP schedule under NEP. He cited JNU's introduction of self-financed engineering and MBA programs, which are frequently unstructured and inaccessible to the marginalized, as a solution to fee increases that had been thwarted by student dissent. In order to further institutionalise caste and class segregation in Indian education, he underlined that the admission of foreign universities would further exclude underprivileged students who cannot afford elite-level tuition.

Purna, a PhD Scholar at AUD, talked about how the implementation of AUD has coincided with the taking over of the office by the current vice chancellor Anu Singh Lather. Being the costliest public university in India, AUD has seen a regular annual fee hike by 10%, a change of reservation policy to make it exclusionary, and alterations in the syllabus to slowly let NEP trickle in and become

solidified by way of MOOC courses or Bharatiya Knowledge Systems. In the last five years, the faculty and students alike have sustained several attacks in terms of clamping down of voices but also managing to continue to teach and be taught amongst dilapidated and crumbling infrastructure. With a student council that is mostly powerless, the gathering was urged to take the NEP@Five Report to further public and make AUD a case study to prevent further regression of education in India.

Com. Shams from Jamia Millia Islamia's Comrade drew attention to the increasing repression on campuses, where students are expelled for dissent, and the fact that neither academic quality nor infrastructure has improved despite the university having acquired a hefty ₹532 crore loan from HEFA.

Former DU professor Laxman Yadav gave a forceful critique of the NEP as "No Education for the Poor," pointing out that 27,000 public schools were closed between 2019 and 2024 while public funds were used for liquor stores and temple renovations. He brought up tragic examples of how educational negligence disproportionately affects marginalised communities, such as the roof collapse of a school in Jhalawar, Rajasthan, which saw the saddening demise of dalit and adivasi students. Professor Yadav further reiterated that "the destruction of education doesn't happen overnight— it's a slow, deliberate process. And now, five years into the implementation of the NEP, I can say with absolute certainty, our public education system has been completely and systematically dismantled."

Professor Atul Sood of JNU raised the question of NEP's success despite its glaring shortcomings. He maintained that the policy is a component of a broader state propaganda effort that aims to promote jingoistic narratives and create consent. India ranks fourth in terms of quantity

of publications, but 19th in terms of quality, indicating a decline in academic rigour as a result of a system that is becoming more and more reliant on foreign models. He referenced research from the RBI and Chrysalis that demonstrated private universities rely on real estate speculation rather than student tuition to stay afloat.

Using data from the World Economic Forum and the Berstein Report, Sandhya Devesan (DU) pointed out that although 1% of households own 60% of the nation's GDP, 14 million jobs are expected to be lost by 2027. According to her, the NEP is a modern-day Manusmriti in which privileged students flourish in "safe" academic environments while underprivileged students are forced into "detention centres" of deprivation and exclusion based on the multiple exit points propagated by the FYUP model. Instead of encouraging students to pursue intellectual or research endeavours, the multiple exit policy is a casteist tool that forces them into low-wage, newer forms of slave labour.

It is evident from the NEP@Five Report that India's educational system is in dire straits. The speakers urged immediate, group opposition to the NEP's exclusive and polarising structure. In order to protect education as a democratic right and not a privilege, they underlined the necessity of fostering unity among students, teachers, and underrepresented groups. ■

Protest Against Trump's Tariffs & Modi Govt's Silence

In response to a All India call by the CPI(ML), protest demonstrations were held across the country on 1 August against the imperialist bullying of U.S. President Donald Trump and the shameful complicity of the Modi government.

In Parliament, CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad staged a protest within the premises, condemning the Modi regime's capitulation to U.S. pressure. Holding banners and addressing the press, the MPs declared that the government's inaction was an affront to the Indian people. Comrade Raja Ram Singh said that "this government has quietly surrendered to American diktats. We are here to tell both Trump and Modi: India will not be bullied, India is not for sale!"

In West Bengal, large-scale protests were organised in several locations, where demonstrators

opposed the imposition of 25% tariffs on Indian exports by the United States. CPI(ML) activists and citizens denounced the Modi government's failure to respond, calling it a betrayal of India's sovereignty and economic self-reliance.

Protesters carried placards and banners bearing the slogans "India is Not for Sale" and "Reject Trump's Tariff Tyranny", asserting that the silence of the Indian government in the face of such foreign aggression reflects dangerous submission to imperialist interests.

Similar protests were witnessed in several other states. In Jharkhand, demonstrators gathered in Ranchi, while in Bihar, districts such as Rohtas, Arwal, and Jehanabad saw mobilisations. Demonstrations also took place in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and other states. ■

CPIML Demands Halt on School Mergers in UP

CPI(ML) has welcomed the recent order of the Allahabad High Court's Lucknow bench, which stayed the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to merge certain government primary schools in Sitapur and called for the same relief to be extended across the entire state.

In its response to the court's directive, the CPI(ML) Uttar Pradesh unit stated that the state government's arbitrary decision to merge schools has caused significant difficulties for school-going children, especially in rural areas. In many places, nearby schools have been merged with far-off ones, forcing children to cross highways, railway tracks and travel long distance. This has led to many dropping out, with girl students being disproportionately affected. The party emphasized that closing thousands of schools in the name of mergers is a violation of the Right to Education and an attack on the education of poor children.

CPI(ML) noted that the situation in Sitapur is not unique, and similar issues are being reported from other districts as well. The party urged the court to take suo motu cognizance of the widespread impact of school mergers and to impose a stay on the government's decision throughout the state, in order to protect the constitutional right to accessible education.

Improving education quality should not mean shutting down schools, CPI(ML) said. Instead, the focus must be on upgrading infrastructure and facilities in existing schools to ensure better access and quality of education for all. ■

Bihar: Institutionalised Corruption and the Vicious Cycle of Poverty Continue Unabated

Dhirendra Jha, General Secretary of All India Agricultural Rural Labour Association (AIARLA) said that the report released by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India for the year 2023–24 has exposed the functioning of the Bihar government and the reality of its so-called development model. The findings of the report are shocking and present a grim picture of institutionalised corruption, administrative failure, and economic mismanagement in the state.

He said that the statement made yesterday in the Assembly by Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, claiming that only 26 lakh workers from Bihar are outside the state, is a complete lie. The Labour Ministry of the central government itself has accepted that 2.9 crore people from Bihar are present in other states of the country.

He pointed out that there has been no significant increase in basic infrastructure and service systems. In 2019–20 it stood at 21.66 percent,

which has risen to only 22.30 percent in 2023–24. The state government has been able to spend only 80 percent of its total budget. Out of Rs.3.26 lakh crore, only Rs.2.61 lakh crore has been spent. Utilisation certificates worth Rs.49,649 crore have not been submitted to the office of the Accountant General, which is a clear indication of deep-rooted institutional corruption.

He further noted that due to the lack of a proper legal framework for the SC/ST Sub Plan, there has been rampant misuse of funds. In some cases, funds meant for these sections were used to finance visits of the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister. The fiscal deficit has breached the legally prescribed limit of 3.5 percent and has reached 4.17 percent. The growing debt burden on the state is leading to a sharp rise in interest payments, which is diverting funds away from essential services and development.

He also said that the practice of bringing supplementary budgets has been rendered meaningless

as the government has failed to even utilise the original allocations in several sectors. In terms of per capita income, Bihar today stands at 33rd place among Indian states, a significant drop from its position at 28th in the 1990s. Meanwhile, 34 percent of families in the state are living in conditions of extreme poverty.

“The quality and durability of construction work carried out under various government schemes is constantly under suspicion, while looting of public funds has become the norm in the implementation of so-called development projects,” added Dhirendra Jha.

He recalled that the socio-economic survey earlier released by the Mahagathbandhan government had already exposed the scale of underdevelopment and entrenched inequality in Bihar. But instead of acting on that data and adopting people-oriented policies, Nitish Kumar once again betrayed the people and joined hands with anti-people forces. ■

Retrenched West Bengal School Teachers Hold Press Conference in Delhi

A press conference held in the New Delhi on 24 July by the Joggo Shikshak Shikshika Mancha witnessed testimonies from thousands of retrenched school teachers from West Bengal. The presser highlighted the deepening crisis in public education as a result of policies shaped by the National Education Policy and a judiciary that appears increasingly indifferent to the lives of working-class educators.

The retrenchment of over 16,000 teachers in West Bengal, despite their unblemished service records, has sent shockwaves through the academic and political landscape. The teachers, whose appointments were invalidated following a disputed verdict of the Calcutta

High Court dated 22 April 2024, decried the decision as a massive injustice that targets the innocent while shielding systemic corruption.

“Where will students in rural areas, in small towns, from poor and lower-middle-class backgrounds go?” asked one of the affected teachers. “How can the retrenchment of 16,000 innocent teachers be called justice? We ask the Supreme Court.”

Mahboob Mandal, a teacher at Dosa Chandaneswar High School in South 24 Parganas, said, “Many among us are first-generation teachers who are teaching first-generation learners. Many have taken loans to build a house in the hope of bettering our lives. Are we not

entitled to jobs that we earned through massive hard work? Why are we being made scapegoats in the power tussle between the Central and the State Government?"

The judgment, which cancelled the entire 2016 School Service Commission recruitment panel, has been widely criticised as unprecedented in its sweeping attack on working people's livelihoods. Observers point to the irony of punishing those who toiled to educate the marginalised, while those responsible for the corruption remain largely untouched. Many view the verdict as yet another attack on the constitutional right to livelihood guaranteed under Article 21.

Academics and members of the civil society present at the press conference condemned the ruling and the broader policies that have enabled such a situation. Debaditya Bhattacharya, faculty at Jamia Millia Islamia and author of *The Indian University: A Critical History*, said, "School teachers are being punished for corruption done by those sitting in power. No one in the system cares because this goes well with the National Education Policy that prescribes closing down government schools and colleges. Thousands of schools have been closed in UP, Haryana and Jharkhand."

Gopal Pradhan, Vice President of the AUD Faculty Association, added, "This is a direct outcome of a policy regime that has targeted the destruction of publicly funded education in the country. It is the same attitude we see even in our universities, where publicly funded institutions are facing concrete funding cuts in times of increasing inflation."

Renowned economist and JNU faculty Atul Sood remarked, "This is an assault on working people. We know that government-funded schools are accessible to the children of working-class families, in both rural and urban areas. The attack on government schools is part of the same policy that also imposes the rules of business owners on working people, like the labour codes. These are anti-worker, anti-people policies."

Uma Gupta, faculty at Delhi University and a leader of the DTI, said, "It is the same place where we spoke about the arrest of Ali Khan Mahmudabad because of a Facebook post written with deep academic knowledge about the current polity. The attack on education is real. The present regime is anti-education."

Even as the press conference proceeded, several teachers were barred by Delhi Police from reaching the venue. Several retrenched teachers have been sitting on a dharna at Delhi's Ramleela Maidan since 23 July, demanding the reversal of the High Court verdict. The teachers have also appealed to the Supreme Court to review the judgment and uphold the right to livelihood and public education. ■

CPIML General Secretary Writes to CM Stalin on TN Sanitation Workers' Struggle

CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya has written to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, urging urgent intervention in support of the sanitation workers of Chennai Corporation.

The workers, organised under the banner of Uzhaippor Urimai Iyakkam, affiliated to LTUC and AICCTU, are demanding permanent jobs and an end to the outsourcing of sanitary work to private contractors. They are predominantly women from the most oppressed and deprived sections of society, whose labour is indispensable yet undervalued.

In his letter dated 17 August 2025, Dipankar Bhattacharya reminded the Chief Minister that the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), affiliated with CPI(ML) Liberation, has a long record of fighting for unorganised and precarious workers, and is also a committed participant in the nationwide Save Constitution, Save Democracy campaign. He emphasised that on Independence Day, sanitation workers themselves had pledged to defend India's independence, Constitution, and democracy, thereby linking their struggle for livelihood with the broader democratic struggle against fascist assaults.

Appealing directly to the Chief Minister, the letter noted that his government enjoys considerable goodwill for its professed ideals of social justice and welfarism, and therefore, as a part of the INDIA alliance, CPI(ML) Liberation has requested his urgent personal intervention for an amicable resolution of the issues in consultation with the sanitation workers and their union, Uzhaippor Urimai Iyakkam, affiliated to LTUC and AICCTU.

The party underlined that the sanitation workers' struggle is not merely about wages or contracts, but about dignity, social justice, and democracy. ■

From Land Struggles to Statehood: Remembering Shibu Soren

▲ MANOJ BHAKT

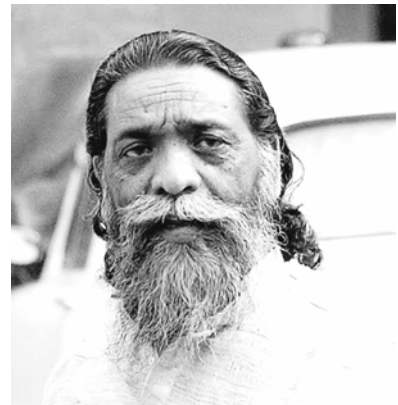
Shibu Soren breathed his last on 4 August after being admitted to Sir Gangaram Hospital on 19 June for a serious ailment. His death unleashed a wave of grief and anguish in the entire Jharkhand state. Barring some occasional and symbolic appearances on the public stage, old age and disease had rendered him inactive for a long time. He was a leader who was organically intertwined with the people of Jharkhand through the various movements that he had launched. The sound of drums in the northern Chotanagpur region had become synonymous with the movement he had launched for the right of Adivasis to land and crop. The attack by the corporates on water-forest-land and minerals of that region is a harsh reality of the present time. The saffron threat to the autonomy and existence of the Adivasis is looming large. A question that is troubling all in Jharkhand is that how Shibu Soren's absence will affect the assertion of the Adivasis to build a powerful movement.

Much before he entered electoral politics, Shibu Soren during the 70s had emerged as a hero among the Adivasis. The adivasis of Jharkhand had entered into a phase of struggle to free their land from the clutches of the moneylenders. Armed goons and the state administration sided with the moneylenders. A young Shibu was the public face of this movement. The people had affectionately named him 'Guruji'. The Adivasi men and women were distancing themselves from the country liquor shops run by the money lenders and the state. But this quest for land for not the only reason for the

upsurge in the Jharkhand movement.

The Naxalbari movement had given a fillip to the left movement and was spreading all around. In spite of facing brutal repression, the echo of the movement spread far and wide with Jharkhand being no exception. Under a red flag, Com. A.K.Roy had begun mobilizing the Adivasis, Dalits and other backward castes in the coal rich areas of the region against the oppression of the money lenders, mafia, companies and the police. Vinod Bihari Mahato had given a slogan for education and struggle to awaken the masses and even Shibu Soren was influenced by left ideas. In the buildup to the Jharkhand movement, the issues of land along with social issues of the working class and an awakening of the oppressed masses played a major role in defining the contours of the movement. Undoubtedly, the adivasis formed the backbone of the movement and on 4 February 1973, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) was founded, with Shibu Soren as its tallest leader.

The adivasis address the money lenders and land owners as 'Diku' while their own brethren are called 'Hod'. The militant struggles of the adivasis in the north Chotanagpur and Santhal pargana drastically altered the equation of land ownership there. The left movement in Jharkhand and the assertion of the local workers in Dhanbad unleashed new dynamism. All forms of manipulations were employed to suppress the rising movement. Shibu Soren had to face the brunt of these manipulations. His differences with Com. A.K.Roy were the result of these. In spite of serving as a MP,



president of Jharkhand autonomous council, a central cabinet minister and the chief minister of Jharkhand, he was considered as a stubborn leader fighting for the interests of the adivasis by the 'Dikus'. Even the bureaucracy remained uncooperative.

Soren was framed as the prime accused in the twin murder case in 1974 in Kudko village of Giridih district and the 1975 murder in Jamtada where 11 people were killed. This was a big conspiracy hatched by the 'Dikus' to terminate the political career of Soren but he remained undeterred. These cases were used to act as a leash on him. Eventually, he was absolved of all the charges.

In 1993, Soren voted in favour of the PV Narasimha Rao government in lieu of money. This episode was a blot on his political life. In 1998, the supreme court revoked his sentence in this case but on 7 January, 2025 it again revoked its earlier decision. Soren served as the chief minister of Jharkhand thrice- twice with the support of BJP and once by the support of non-BJP parties. In all, his tenure lasted six months. He was a part of the NDA alliance briefly but because of the strong anti-advansi bias of BJP, their bonhomie could not last long.

The most militant phase of the Jharkhand movement centered around the agenda of control over the minerals of the state. This involved

providing a direct challenge to the central government. The government of PV Narasimha Rao had made plans to crush this challenge. A section of the activists of the Jharkhand movement was ready to negotiate with the centre to get the status of a centrally administered state while Shibu and CPI(ML) were adamant for getting a separate state. A phase of movements and negotiations began.

On 15 March, 1993, an economic blockade was announced with the slogan - Declare the formation of the state of Jharkhand or face stoppage of supply of iron and coal. A violent round of repression consisting of raids, arrests and repression followed. As a constituent of the Jharkhand Coordination Committee, Indian people's front (IPF), the mass political organization of CPI(ML) always participated in the statehood movement. Moreover, through Jhamkis (Jharkhand Mazdoor Kisan Samiti), the CPI(ML) ensured its direct participation in the statehood movement. In the initial phase of the statewide rallies organized as part

of the economic blockade, Shibu shared the dais with Com. A.K. Roy and Com. Mahendra Singh. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha along with other Jharkhandi organizations and CPI(ML) spearheaded the economic blockade. The number of arrests made in 1993 bear testimony to the fact that the unity of the green and red flags made the economic blockage a success and eventually paved the way for the creation of a separate state.

At the time of Shibu Soren's death, Jharkhand is being ruled by his party under the leadership of his son. One can presume that Guruji would not have been unaware of the machinations of the Modi government to tighten the noose via Adani or the attempts to split the unity of the adivasis. The JMM has ousted the BJP from power there and is running the third term of their government. The two main factors that contributed to the recent victory of their party were a continuation and emphasis of the movement of the adivasis for their right to water-forest-land and implementation of the fifth schedule.

Additionally, the mobilization of the scheme workers and youth played a pivotal role in forming a political force against the BJP. The CPI(ML) also played a major role in this mobilization.

These issues are still a challenge before the present state government. Large scale privatisation of iron and coal sector by the Modi government has resulted in a drastic reduction in the availability of jobs. After Godda, Adani is eyeing Hazaribagh and other regions of Jharkhand to capture land and minerals. Adivasis are being eliminated in the name of fighting Naxalism. The PESA act and domicile-based employment policy is yet to be implemented. Land acquisition is going on in full swing. In such a challenging situation, the question does not remain confined to running a government but gets focussed to the larger canvas of the legacy of the Jharkhand movement. In these times, a revolutionary left force like CPI(ML) will have to again accept this challenge and march forward by forming a coalition of fighting forces. ■

OBITUARY

Comrade S. Sudhakar Reddy

CPI(ML) mourns the passing of Comrade S. Sudhakar Reddy, former General Secretary of the Communist Party of India. Twice elected to the Lok Sabha from Nalgonda (1998 and 2004), Comrade Sudhakar Reddy, was a steadfast voice of the working class and peasantry. As Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, he consistently raised issues of workers' rights, social security, and the dignity of labour.

From his student days he emerged as a revolutionary leader, serving twice as General Secretary of the All India Students' Federation (AISF) in the late 1960s.

We convey our heartfelt condolences to his family members, comrades, friends, and admirers. He will remain a role model for younger generations of communists.

Red Salute to Comrade Sudhakar Reddy.

Comrade Sumit Chakravartty

CPI(ML) expresses its deep sorrow at the passing of eminent journalist and steadfast progressive voice Comrade Sumit Chakravartty, who died in Kolkata on July 26. He was the son of CPI leader and parliamentarian Renu Chakravorty and renowned journalist Nikhil Chakravartty.

As the Editor of Mainstream Weekly, he upheld the legacy of principled journalism, never compromising on editorial integrity or democratic ideals. He is survived by his spouse, Dr. Gargi Chakravartty, historian and leader of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), and their son. His passing leaves a deep void in India's progressive and journalistic community.

Adieu, Comrade Sumit Chakravartty.





Protest by Greater Chennai Corporation Sanitation Workers Against Outsourcing and for Permanent Status, Under the Banner of LTUC and AICCTU, Ongoing Since August 1.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

PUBLISHED BY:

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

EDITOR: Arindam Sen

PRINTED BY: Lekhranj Singh Chauhan at Graphic Print,
383, F&E, GF, Patparganj Industrial Area, Delhi - 110 092

liberation@cpiml.org
www.liberation.org.in
PH.: 91-11-42785864