

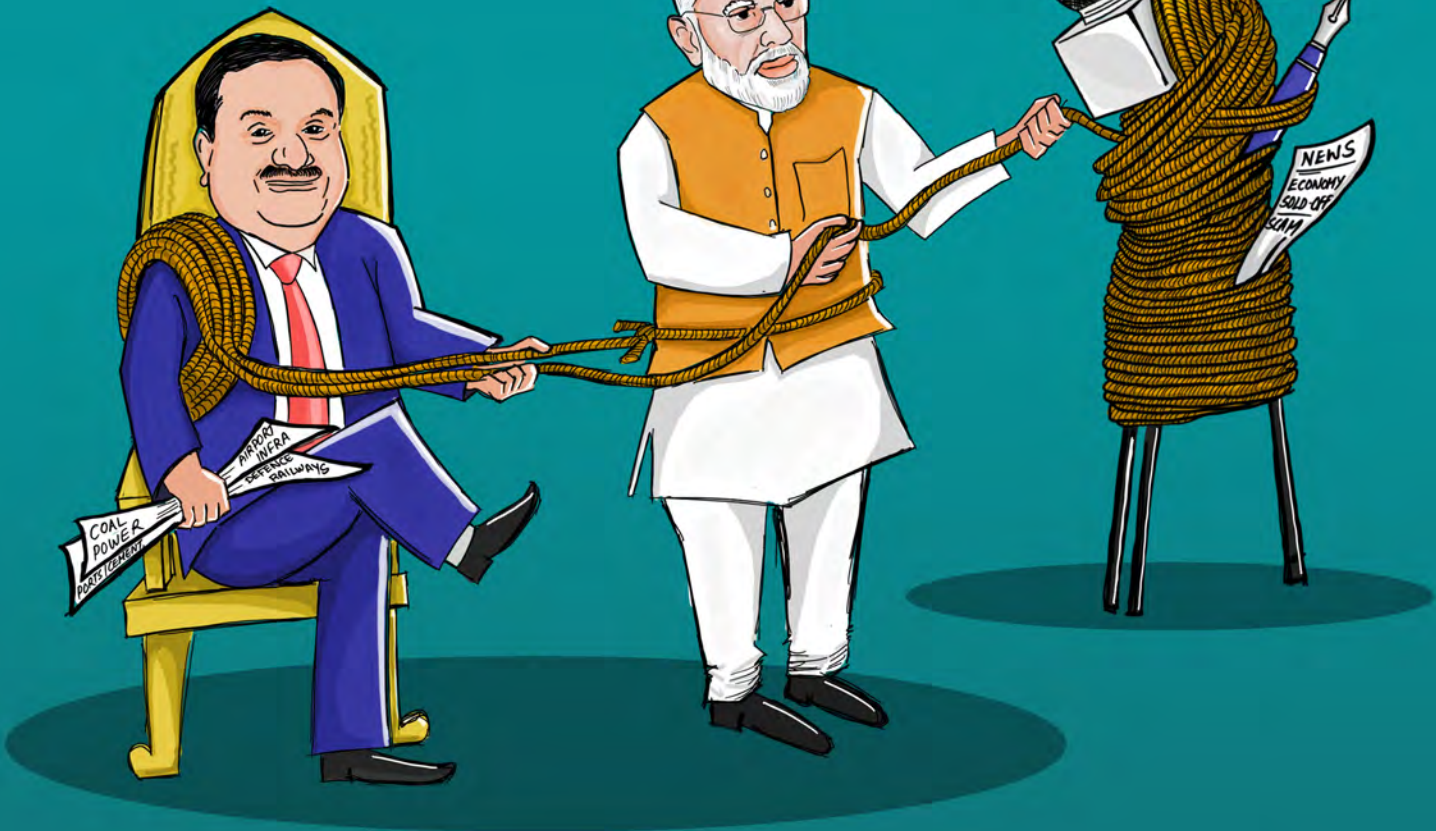
Liberation

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The Struggle for Liberation: AIMSWF Launches New Booklet on Sanitation Workers



For more than two decades, the predominantly Dalit women pourakarmikas who keep Karnataka clean and protect the health of its citizens have relentlessly fought to end the exploitative contract system. Their organising and struggle culminated in a historic victory: the abolition of the contract system and recognition of pourakarmikas permanent workers of the corporation. This victory was possible because of the organizing and relentless struggle of the pourakarmikas.

To celebrate this historic victory, a Pourakarmika Victory Conference was organised in Bengaluru on September 7. On this occasion, the All India Municipal and Sanitation Workers Federation (AIMSWF-AICCTU) released a booklet titled “Safaikaramcharis and other Sanitation Workers – The Struggle for Liberation”. The publication documents the struggles and victories of sanitation workers across the country, highlighting their fight for dignity, rights, and liberation.

At the Victory Celebration Conference, Com. Nirmala, President of BBMP Pourakarmikara Sangha, reminded the gathering that this victory was won through unrelenting struggle. Workers once earned only Rs. 2,000– Rs. 5,000 a month, often after months of delay. Today, as regular employees, they earn Rs.41,000 and live with dignity. She underlined that pourakarmikas are largely Dalit and backward community women and that this struggle broke the chains

of fear and humiliation inherent in the contract system.

Com. V. Shankar, All India President of AICCTU, said that in many states, sanitation workers have secured victory through courts, including Mumbai, Madurai, etc. Karnataka stands apart, he said, because the sanitation workers' victory came through militant street struggles. The government was forced to concede the demand of regularisation because of consistent, longterm, decade long struggles. He urged that this achievement has now become a beacon for struggles across sectors.

Similarly, the ongoing struggle under our leadership in Chennai, Tamil Nadu against the attempts to bring workers under the contract labour system is also making a bigger political impact. All political parties including the opposition and alliance partners of the ruling party are supporting the struggle and sanitation workers struggle has become a kind of a mass political movement with support from people of all walks of life, including intelligentsia and media. Inspired by women workers struggle in Chennai, sanitation workers of other districts in the state too rise up in struggles.

Com. Uday Bhat, President of AIMSFW, spoke of how the struggle of pourakarmikas is not just about wages or employment security, but is fundamentally an anti-caste struggle. He pointed out that sanitation work has historically been forced upon Dalits by the caste system, dehumanising them and confining entire communities to stigmatised occupations.

Com. Mahendra Parida, General Secretary of AIMSFW, noted that the contract labour system is a mechanism by which governments and employers wash their hands of responsibility, denying workers fair wages, dignity, and security, and the need for all municipal and sanitation workers to come together to expel this exploitative system.

Com. Maniyamma, senior leader of the union, declared: “The government must not stop with us. Regularisation must extend to all workers across sectors in the state.” She recalled how pourakarmikas were once derided as “garbage women” and “garbage men,” treated as less than human. Today, their work commands respect. She spoke of how unionising and collective struggle transformed their lives, and called for unity of all workers across the country to secure permanent status, dignity, and rights.

Com. Clifton, National Vice-President of AICCTU, termed the victory “historic.” He called for abolition of contract labour for drivers and loaders as well, demanding their absorption as permanent employees with direct payment. He also pressed for immediate implementation of pending demands, including housing, education, and the recommendations of the IPD Salappa Committee.

The victory of Karnataka’s pourakarmikas is a landmark in the national struggle against caste and class oppression. ■

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Whither Nepal?



A sudden youth revolt credited to Generation Z or the generation born between 1997 and 2012 has brought about an exceptionally rapid regime change in the Himalayan republic of Nepal. Septuagenarian Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli has had to resign, and in a transition mediated by the Army, another septuagenarian leader, former Chief Justice of Nepal, Ms Sushila Karki, has taken over as the interim Prime Minister. As of now, the interim phase is slated not to exceed a period of six months with the next elections already announced to be held on 5 March 2026.

The immediate trigger behind the explosion lay in the Oli government's decision to ban twenty six social media platforms including WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and the like. The ban appeared sudden and drastic, but it resulted from these companies' refusal to comply with the Nepal government's order for mandatory national registration of foreign companies. Popular Chinese social media platform TikTok did not attract this ban because of its compliance with the Nepali registration requirement. Be that as it may, the extensive ban not only curbed social media freedom, it also threatened to cause huge disruption in everyday communication and economy for the overwhelming majority of Nepali people. And when the government sought to suppress the peaceful protests by killing and injuring protesters, the unrest turned into a veritable explosion.

The Gen Z protesters have attributed the widespread vandalism and arson to 'outside agitators'. Indeed, the breaking of jails and attacks on the parliament building, supreme court, and several other state institutions, appear rather well-planned. Equally intriguing is the virtual retreat of the state and the entire political, military and institutional establishment in the face of the post-protest violent attacks. While the disillusionment among the Nepali youth and the simmering anger against corruption in high places and all-pervasive nepotism, the flashy lavish life style of the children of ministers and leaders that made #nepokids viral in social media provided the backdrop to the current unrest, the violent anarchic trajectory and denouement of the unrest remain an enigma.

Since the fall of the monarchy in 2008, the fledgling Himalayan republic of Nepal has been marked by prolonged political instability. In 17 years Nepal has witnessed as many as 14 prime ministers and revolving coalitions with various permutations and combinations. In recent years there has been a growing discernible clamour for the restoration of the monarchy. The RSS, operating in Nepal under its overseas banner Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), has been at work trying relentlessly to turn Nepal back into a Hindu kingdom. And then there is the all-pervasive US drive for global hegemony which seeks to use Nepal as a base to serve its game plan of containing China and expanding American influence across South Asia.

The Sangh-BJP establishment's 'Hindu

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For the communist movement of Nepal, which led the country's transition from monarchy to republican democracy, the current juncture poses a crucial challenge.

Consolidation of democracy in Nepal demands close ties with the people and a socio-economic model which prioritises people's welfare and Nepal's economic sovereignty.

nationalism' in Nepal is however inseparably mixed with its 'Akhand Bharat' expansionism which envisions Nepal not as a free country but as a constituent part of greater India. In fact, commenting on the youth revolt in Nepal the BJP's Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary openly said that there would have been no anarchy, violence and unemployment in Nepal if the latter were an integral part of India. Many Godi Media reporters had to face the ire of the people of Nepal when in their live coverage from Nepal they tried to describe the present unrest as a movement for restoration of Hindu monarchy in Nepal.

Clearly, the democratic republic of Nepal has to deal with all these internal and external pulls and pressures. For the communist movement of Nepal, which led the country's transition from monarchy to republican democracy, the current juncture poses a crucial challenge. Consolidation of democracy in Nepal demands close ties with the people and a socio-economic model which prioritises people's welfare and Nepal's economic sovereignty. It is surely a matter of great concern if communists too invite allegations of corruption and nepotism like various bourgeois parties. Communists of Nepal will have to work hard to regain the trust of the people and to build a mass movement capable of defeating every design to restore the monarchy, truncate democracy and subvert the sovereignty of Nepal. ■

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Voter Adhikar Yatra and the Growing Battle against Electoral Fraud and Disenfranchisement

Ever since the sudden launch of the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral roll on June 25, Bihar has been battling the threat of mass disenfranchisement of marginalised groups and migrant workers. The people of Bihar were quick to sense the danger, and by July 9 tens of thousands of people were out on the streets against Votebandi. The arrogant Election Commission which had fixed 25 July as the last date for submission of documents along with enumeration forms was compelled to go slow on documents, extending the time limit till the end of August. In spite of delinking the house-to-house enumeration phase from mandatory submission of supporting documents, 6.5 million forms were reportedly not submitted and hence deleted from the draft rolls. It is not difficult to imagine how many more million electors would have found themselves out of the draft rolls if the EC were to stick to the original schedule of SIR.

The battle against disenfranchisement in Bihar has started receiving significant support from the independent media as well as sections of the print media. And in the wake of Rahul Gandhi's press conference exposing large-scale irregularities in the electoral roll in Mahadevpura assembly segment of Bengaluru Central constituency, the Bihar battle against disenfranchisement has also grown into a nationwide campaign against vote chori or election fraud. Meanwhile, the case against the SIR is also being



heard in the Supreme Court and the arguments in the legal arena concerning the very unconstitutional nature of the SIR and the gross errors being committed in the course of its farcical execution are all helping the public see through the design of disenfranchisement built into the SIR process. In particular, the fact that the Supreme Court had to insist on acknowledging Aadhar cards as a valid document, as the Election Commission's list of acceptable documents contained none of the proofs of identity usually accessible to the poor and marginalized, laid bare the targeted nature of the disenfranchisement drive.

Even though the Supreme Court has till now only concerned itself with the practicalities of the exercise, the scrutiny of the court and the stubborn reluctance and even refusal of the Election Commission to accept the basic tenets of reason and transparency are all helping awaken the public to the very real danger of disenfranchisement. Add to this the remarkable mass response to the Voter Adhikar Yatra launched by the INDIA alliance, the desperate attempts being made by the BJP camp to justify the SIR by invoking the bogey of foreign infiltration and the Election Commission's refusal to respond to the growing evidence of electoral fraud and attempts to evade and suppress all scrutiny by changing laws and intimidating critics, and we can see the reassuring rise of a powerful mass awakening in Bihar against the collusive alliance of the Modi government and the Election Commission.

The SIR exercise has exposed how the EC is abdicating its constitutional responsibility of ensuring an accurate and inclusive electoral roll by transferring the onus to the elector. And now when the anomalies and inaccuracies are

being exposed all too glaringly, the EC is trying to trivialise the errors and transfer the responsibility of correction to the political parties and their booth level agents (BLAs). The daily updates being issued by the EC regarding the ongoing post-enumeration phase of claims and objections (1 August - 31 August) prominently highlight the 'fact' that no complaints are being filed by the BLAs of recognised political parties in Bihar. What the EC does not tell us is that it took a Supreme Court directive to eventually force a reluctant EC to share clear lists of deleted voters which became available only on 18 August. The EC which did not consult political parties before launching the SIR and deleting names on a mass scale now accuses political parties and their BLAs of indifference and inaction!

By treating BLAs as the exclusive proxy for political parties and making the whole process of lodging complaints extremely complex and cumbersome, the EC is trying to discredit the battle against disenfranchisement as empty political rhetoric without any real supporting evidence. But the dedicated and determined teams of CPI(ML) cadres and civil society activists have refused to give in to the bureaucratic hurdles. Among all recognised political parties of Bihar, it is only the CPI(ML) team of BLAs which has succeeded in getting a dozen complaints filed against all odds, even as hundreds of BLAs appointed by the CPI(ML) are yet to be officially 'approved' and 'acknowledged' by the Election Commission. With the help of civil society activists, trade unions and various other locally active groups of citizens, we also succeeded in reaching out to nearly half a million deleted voters and migrant workers across Bihar and beyond and assisting

them in the process of filling out of forms and submission of relevant documents. In contrast, the BJP which boasts of the biggest army of BLAs numbering around 60,000 has tellingly filed not a single complaint through its network of BLAs. Are we to assume that the BJP lost not a single voter in the course of mass exclusion of electors through the SIR?

With a week left in the period earmarked for submission of documents and claims and objections, the EC has declared that 98.2% electors have submitted their documents. While the figure sounds surprisingly high, we must remember that these documents are yet to be verified. And even 2% electors whose documents are yet to be submitted would number around 1.5 million. We do not know how many of the 6.5 million voters who have been deleted in the first phase - most of them unjustly, especially those marked 'permanently shifted' - will be reinstated in the final list. Many of those who have submitted their documents may still face unjust deletion in the course of 'verification' of documents. And then there is the issue of enrolment of 'new voters' - there are already signs of the Mahadevpura pattern at work in Bihar too.

The danger of disenfranchisement and electoral fraud therefore still looms large and Bihar can only overcome this danger by exercising greater vigilance at every step of the electoral process over the next few weeks. The Voter Adhikar Yatra has sent out a loud message against electoral fraud across Bihar and beyond and now the battle has to be taken forward to dethrone the utterly discredited Modi-Nitish 'double engine' dispensation. ■

Down with the Servile CEC and His Malicious Masters! People's Power must Prevail!

▲ ARINDAM SEN

“The whole thing in democracy is to give the people the right to vote. But the right to vote will not be of much value unless you have an independent machinery to carry out elections in a fair and impartial manner. It is therefore of utmost importance that the Chief Election Commissioner should be an independent officer and should not be liable to be dismissed except on the same grounds and in the same manner as a judge of the Supreme Court. ...

“... in the interests of purity and freedom of elections... it was of the utmost importance that they [Election Commissioners] should be freed from any kind of interference from the executive of the day.”

-- B. R. Ambedkar

“If we cannot expect common honesty from persons occupying the highest positions in the discharge of their duties, the foundation for responsible government is wanting, and the outlook for the future is indeed gloomy.”

-- Hriday Nath Kunjru¹

These wise words of caution, just like Ambedkar's warning about the 'worst calamity' of 'Hindu Raj', sound eerily prescient today. The connection between the two is also very clear. Is it not during the Hindu majoritarian regime that the EC – like many other constitutional offices from Governors and Lieutenant Governors to docile Supreme Court Judges -- has been reduced to unabashed and audacious agents of the party in power? Is not the current campaign of nationwide SIR *the most devastating* among all the autocratic onslaughts Indian democracy have withstood so far, in the sense that *it seeks to strike directly at the very foundation of parliamentary democracy by arbitrary and selective disenfranchisement of the poor, the bahujans, the minorities, and women*, paving the

way for rendering them stateless in near future?

Well, before we come to such festering and stinking wounds on our body politic, for a proper perspective let us have a quick look at how the Constituent Assembly (CA) grappled with the crucial issue of independence and impartiality, integrity and credibility of the Election Commission (EC).

EC “under the Thumb of the Government”?

While introducing Article 289 of the Draft Constitution (which would evolve into Article 324 in the final form) in the CA, Ambedkar highlighted the importance of free and fair elections, declaring that initially the Committee on Fundamental Rights of the CA opined that “the independence of the elections and the avoidance of

any interference by the executive in the elections to the Legislatures, should be regarded as a fundamental right and provided for in the chapter dealing with Fundamental Rights”. However, later the CA, while fully endorsing this viewpoint, observed that it should find place in a more suitable chapter in the Constitution, rather than in the chapter on Fundamental Rights.

In course of an animated discussion that followed, Professor Shibban Lal Saksena said, “it is quite possible that some party in power who [sic!] wants to win next elections may appoint a staunch party man as Chief Commissioner”. He also opined that the Government's choice of a Chief Election Commissioner should be subject to the approval of the Parliament by a two-thirds majority. Shri Kunjru alerted the assembly by saying,

[1] These comments, and the other one by Shri Kunjru below, were made during debates in the CA on June 15–16, 1949.

“We are going in for democracy based on adult franchise. ...if the electoral machinery is defective or is not efficient or is worked by people whose integrity cannot be depended upon, **democracy will be poisoned at the source.**” Ambedkar

did not deny this possibility, rather he admitted to a gap in the Constitution itself: “there is no provision in the Constitution to prevent the appointing of either a fool or a knave or a person who is likely to be under the thumb of the executive.”

But why then didn't they introduce necessary safeguards to preempt such a situation? Because there were opposite voices also. For example, K.M. Munshi, a Congress member of the Drafting Committee, opposed this concept of insulating the appointment and functioning of EC from away from the Executive's sway. He argued that elections, being a massive administrative exercise, must be conducted through government machinery, and therefore the Election Commission should remain closely linked to the government. It was difficult to reconcile the divergent views. Ultimately, on Ambedkar's proposal a simple addition was made to this Article, to the effect that the President shall appoint Election Commissioners “subject to the provisions of any law made in this behalf by Parliament.”

Thus, in course of an enlightened exchange of diverse opinions, the wise parents of our Constitution laid out a clear scheme of appointment, responsibility and independent functioning of the EC as the fulcrum of parliamentary democracy. They also took serious note of the gaping hole mentioned by Ambedkar and others and entrusted the parliament to plug it by passing a suitable law.

The Role Model: Padmabhusan Sukumar Sen

Where the Constitution gave India the vision, the soul of democracy, Sen built the necessary infrastructure and work culture to realize that vision, to embody the soul. Taking Ambedkar's vision (see Box) as his guideline, he and his team set to work in real earnest. They had to build an electoral system from scratch, and that too in a backward country with extremely bad communications, too many social divisions and logistical challenges. Under his encouraging leadership, the entire staff put in their best efforts with total devotion to the cause and made possible what the New York Times called ‘a miracle’.

The tasks were daunting: preparing rolls for 176 million voters, most of whom had never voted before; devising casting methods suitable for an 85% illiterate electorate (this was solved by using pictorial symbols on separate ballot boxes for easy recognition by the illiterate, door-to-door enumeration of rolls by the EC staff themselves, and other innovations); ensuring secrecy and fairness in 224,000 polling stations, many of which had to be set up across almost inaccessible terrain; and so on. It was indeed “a great and fateful experiment unique in the world in its stupendousness and complexities”, as he described it. What is more, Sen conducted the whole exercise from a modern progressive standpoint. For example, he rejected the antiquated custom for women to be entered on the rolls only as “wife of” or “daughter of” someone, and insisted on individual names at par with men. In those days, this counted as a bold social reformist stance.

On successful conclusion of the grand festival of the masses, abundant accolades were pouring

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“Whatever precautions we may take, the success of this vast experiment in democracy will ultimately depend on the manner in which everybody concerned conducts himself. The government in power, the officials, the political parties, the candidates and their agents, the Press and lastly, the individual voter will each have important parts to play in the coming elections, which will set the pattern of our political life for years to come. Each one will have to put forth his best efforts in order to make a complete success of this tremendous venture.”

-Ambedkar in a broadcast on All India Radio, April 4, 1951.

in from all quarters. The national and international press shifted from skepticism to lavish praise, even as Sudan invited Sen to conduct their first elections in 1953. Nevertheless, the Election Commissioner said he and his team were only doing their duty and passed on all the credit to the ordinary people of India:

“The main argument leveled in the past against adult suffrage... was the illiteracy of the voters which would render an election a farce unless an electoral system could be devised under which even an illiterate voter could cast his vote intelligently and in secret.” He affirmed: “Experience demonstrates... that... however backward and ignorant the common man in an ‘undeveloped’ country may

be, he possesses in his way enough common sense to know what is good for him.”

It was in the same spirit that in a broadcast on the eve of the Second General Election² Sen painted a vivid picture of the forthcoming grand event:

“Men and women, sophisticated city-dwellers and simple village folk, high and low, the rich and the poor, the tribals, the hill-men and the plains people – all citizens of this great country – will make their way shoulder to shoulder to the hundreds of thousands of polling stations to participate in this great venture – that of democratically electing the men and women who will guide the destiny of the nation and form the governments for the next five years.”

The EC published a 325-page Report on the Second General Elections, which provided a vivid account of the elections and became the template for later elections. The Commission's eye for minute details could be evaluated from just one of many decisions – the removal of railway engine as an election symbol after complaints reached its doorsteps that rural population in some remote areas were not familiar with railway engine and they could not, therefore, easily recognize it. Sen on his part expressed satisfaction that despite predictions of chaos, the voters proved remarkably enthusiastic and disciplined. He took special note of the high turnout among the poor and marginalized, calling it the true triumph of universal suffrage.

Putrefaction sets in, Supreme Court intervenes

Apart from the personal qualities of Sen, the overall political milieu of the young Republic as an

inheritor of our glorious freedom movement was also an important inspiration behind the great work done by the first EC. That ambience, represented by personalities like Nehru, Ambedkar, Azad and many others, did not last very long. With an all-pervasive rot setting in, the EC also started losing its shine, though at a slower pace than many other institutions, gathering speed since 2014.

One of the reasons why the EC became a pawn of the ruling party was that the Parliament, in effect the parties or coalitions that took their turns in forming governments, did not legislate the Act suggested by the CA. They were happy to remain free from any legal bindings in this matter. So, the Supreme Court stepped in.

In a landmark judgment of 2 March 2023 in Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India, it ruled that until Parliament passed a law on this matter, appointments to the posts of CEC and ECs must be made from a panel of names recommended by a committee of three persons: the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of the largest opposition party in case no LoP is formally recognized), and the Chief Justice of India.

This directive was widely applauded. People hoped that the new arrangement would ensure a proper democratic consultation for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.

Modi overrules Top Court's wise Directive

But democratic consultation was anathema to the Fascist Government; it pressed for monopoly control over the vital institution of EC. So it hurriedly enacted The Chief Election

Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, which replaced the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister, thereby ensuring permanent two-thirds majority of the Executive in the committee. Thus, the judiciary's role was rolled back and the Executive's complete sway over appointment of the EC was established. No law was violated, but constitutional morality – something the chief architect of our Constitution saw as the core value of the foundational document – took a heavy beating.

From Zenith of Reverence to Nadir of Disdain

Citizens of India will always remember the first CEC for his spotless credibility and pro-people, inclusive approach. The incumbent 26th CEC Gyanesh Kumar goes down in history as one who overturned the traditional inclusiveness. He replaced *Citizenship based on presumption* (every adult Indian presumed to be citizen unless proved foreigner) with its *opposite* (everyone will be presumed to be foreigner until *she proves herself to be a citizen*, i.e., citizenship conditional on strict proof). By shifting the onus of recording and proving citizenship to the *aam admi*, the EC has willfully arranged for crores of poor people across the country to be *automatically* disenfranchised.

An antithesis of the first CEC, the incumbent one suffers from huge trust deficit, and is widely seen as an agent of the ruling party. He has earned lots of infamy from day one for his brazen behavior. His angry outburst against Rahul Gandhi over the ‘*vote-chori*’

[2] This was the last one to be held under his stewardship; he was seriously ill at the time of the Third General Election and died soon after.

allegation drew sharp reactions from national and international press and dignitaries like ex-ECs and ex-CECs. Ex-CEC Qureshi for example said that Gandhi being the LoP, was not just voicing his own opinion, he was voicing the opinion of millions of people. “Therefore, if he makes this comment, the Commission getting angry is not in its grain.” If he were the CEC now, Quraishi said, “We would have ordered an inquiry and taken it seriously... Daring the Leader of the Opposition in this tone and with this anger has not done any credit to the Election Commission.”

Sen always held himself accountable to the people; he had nothing to hide from them. By contrast, Kumar is known for ducking pertinent questions in his pressers. The EC even had no qualms about bluntly declaring in court that voters whose names were deleted from the rolls had no right to ask for the reasons. Even as allegations of EVM fraud persist, under Kumar’s half-closed eyes hi-tech undercover manipulation of electoral rolls is reportedly spreading from Maharashtra and Karnataka to other parts of the country. In a first, the CEC has lately earned the dubious distinction of being charged as a protector of ‘vote-chors’ because he refused to share information about those behind vote theft in Karnataka with the CID of that state, despite repeated requests from the latter.

EC Challenges Jurisdiction of Apex Court

In mid-September, the story started getting curiouser and curiouser. Advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, a founder member of AAP who landed in BJP in 2014 and is now a BJP leader in Delhi, filed a Public Interest Litigation seeking directions to mandate regular nationwide

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“In a democracy, the purity of election must be maintained, or else it would spell disaster. The Election Commission cannot claim independence and at the same time act in an unfair manner.”

-- Supreme Court in Anup Baranwal v. Union of India (2023)

SIRs, particularly before every election. In its counter-affidavit, the EC submitted that Article 324 of the Constitution confers on it “superintendence, direction and control” over elections and rolls. It claimed that supplemented by the Representation of People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, this framework leaves to the Commission alone the choice of when and how to revise rolls. In other words, the EC asserted that the top court has no powers to issue instructions on these matters.

The EC’s arrogant assertion goes directly against the recent ruling of the top court. How, on what basis do they dare say this? Because they are appointed by, and work at the pleasure of, the PM and his chosen minister? Well, that may be their notional or psychological framework, but apparently, there is also a legal basis to this claim.

While the constitutional position cited by the EC does not seem to be strong enough, Section 16 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 explicitly extended

a legal immunity to all Election Commissioners (CEC and ECs alike). This was something new and very crucial. Earlier the *Constitution* (Article 324(5)) gave only removal-related immunity, and that too *only to the CEC* (i.e., the CEC could be removed only by the procedure followed in the case of removal of a SC judge, meaning impeachment by Parliament). The 2023 Act extended a clever *roundabout protection* to all commissioners, by barring courts from entertaining civil or criminal cases for anything they said or did in their official capacity.

Unite to Fight, Fight to Win

Two years ago, this was how the Modi-Shah regime planned to get the EC out of judicial oversight, thereby ensuring exclusive authority of the Executive. With the aforementioned counter affidavit, the regime’s henchman has taken a step further ahead, and we will have to wait for a while to see how the clash between two constitutional authorities unfolds.

But one thing is certain. As we confront the Fascist dispensation that has meticulously and successfully corroded the entire constitutional architecture of checks and balances and substantially weakened the Judiciary in many ways, only the direct and powerful intervention of the masses can overpower the enemy and thereby protect not only the precious right to choose our own governments, but the entire spectrum of fundamental rights available to citizens of India. If our sisters and brothers in Bihar could put up such a valorous struggle at such a short notice and achieve a fair measure of success, why can’t we the people of the entire country join forces to force the enemy bite the dust? ■

Resist SIR: Convention in Kolkata

On 17 September 2025, the CPI(ML) Liberation West Bengal State Committee organized a people's convention titled "SIR: An Assault on Voting Rights, Citizenship and the Constitution" at the Moulali Yuba Kendra in Kolkata. The convention was inaugurated by anti fascist songs by the Paschim Banga Ganasanskriti Parishad. Introducing the session, CPIML State Secretary Com. Abhijit Majumdar, highlighted the dangers of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process.

Addressing the convention, CPI(ML) GS Dipankar Bhattacharya said that the Election Commission is now claiming that only citizens can vote. But to decide who can vote, it first seeks to determine who is a citizen — a role never meant for it. The Supreme Court has not yet ruled on this claim. Such actions mark a break from India's eight-decade-old electoral tradition, globally admired for ensuring universal suffrage.

Migrant workers are one of the main targets. In Bihar, 3.5 million migrant workers were excluded by redefining "ordinary resident." They were told to vote only where they work, not in their native villages, though in reality they always return home to vote during elections, during covid, demonetization, crises, or any family needs. Requiring employers' signatures and local references makes registration nearly impossible. Anyone suspected risks being pushed into detention camps, as seen in Assam. If Bengal ever comes under BJP rule, local police will stop certifying migrant workers, leading to the disenfranchisement of huge numbers, especially minorities.

Elections exist, and people still believe in electoral democracy. But fascism does not abolish elections overnight, even Mussolini and Hitler came to power through elections. Fascism gradually makes elections

meaningless. We must fight for the rights of all.

Manoj Bhattacharya, GS of RSP (GS) said that a new form of fascism is rising globally; the Modi government is advancing it in India to serve capital.

Addressing the convention Mohammad Salim, CPI(M) WB Secretary thanked CPI(ML) Liberation for organizing the convention and said Bihar's experience will help Bengal. He warned that since coming to power, the Modi government has undermined independent institutions, turned the Election Commission into a BJP tool, and is using the SIR to harass citizens by branding them fake or Bangladeshi voters. Salim argued that SIR distracts from real issues like education, health, and jobs, and threatens universal franchise. He urged all left forces to unite, build a mass movement, and defend voters from being excluded. He condemned the BJP-RSS attempt to portray Bengali Muslims and migrant workers as outsiders, calling it a dangerous move towards statelessness that must be resisted.

Swapan Banerjee (State Secretary, CPI) said that by subjugating the Election Commission, SIR is being imposed, this is the latest assault on democracy, the Constitution, and voting rights. The Left must take the lead in resisting it. State Secretary of SUCI(C), Chandidas Bhattacharya added that the EC has no mandate to judge citizenship, yet is doing so under BJP pressure. The right to citizenship is being stripped away to intimidate people. The fight against the SIR must be seen as part of the broader struggle against fascism.

CPIML CC member, Com. Indrani Dutta introduced the resolutions, emphasizing that the poor, working people, and women would be the worst affected by SIR. Party's state organ Aiker Deshbrati released a booklet on the subject. ■

Chandigarh Convention on SIR

The All India People's Forum (AIPF) organized the Comrade Swapna Mukherjee Memorial Lecture Series on the theme "Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar: An Assault on the Electoral Process" on 7 September in Chandigarh. The event was addressed by CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, with Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla, General Secretary of RMPI and Prof. Kuldeep Singh of Guru Nanak Dev University in the presidium. Comrade Kanwaljeet Singh conducted the proceedings.

In his keynote address, Comrade Dipankar warned that the SIR exercise in Bihar marks the beginning of an organised attempt to strip people of their rights. He noted that when opposition parties raised concerns with the Election Commission, the Commission's response echoed the BJP's position. "In Bihar, nearly 65 lakh voters are being targeted for deletion from the rolls ahead of elections," he said. Drawing parallels with Maharashtra, where large-scale voter suppression had already taken place, he stressed: "Vote thieves must be removed from power. If not, they will use the Constitution itself to deny the poor and minorities their citizenship and their right to vote."

Addressing the gathering, Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla pointed out that the BJP government at the Centre has captured constitutional institutions and is seeking to push the country back into an era where Dalits and oppressed communities are reduced to bondage. He announced that a campaign would also be launched in Punjab to expose this dangerous conspiracy.

The seminar also featured contributions from senior comrades Inderjit Singh Grewal of RMPI, Purshottam Sharma of the AIKM, Ruldu Singh Mansa of the Punjab Kisan Union, Prof. Lallan Baghel from Panjab University, Chandigarh, veteran comrade Ajai Singh Tiwana, Advocate Vipin Kumar, and Comrade Lal Bahadur, Secretary, CPI(ML), Chandigarh. ■

Message of Greetings to the 25th Congress of the CPI

(Message delivered by CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya at the inaugural session of the 25th Congress of the CPI in Chandigarh on September 22.)

Comrade D Raja and other members of the National Council of the CPI, leaders of various Left parties, delegates to the 25th Congress of the CPI, veterans of the communist movement, and comrades and friends,

It is my great pleasure and honour to get this opportunity to greet you all in this inaugural session of the 25th Congress of India's oldest communist party. What makes me especially happy is the fact that this congress is happening in the centenary year of the foundation of the Communist Party of India. I take this opportunity to pay my deepest respects to the great martyrs and all the departed leaders of the communist movement over this long period comprising a glorious chapter of India's freedom movement in the colonial era and protracted battles for the deepening of democracy and actualization of freedom in every sphere of life in post-colonial India.

My list of communist martyrs of India is not limited to formal members of the communist party, it also includes the great martyrs of the early years of the twentieth century like Ashfaqullah Khan and Bhagat Singh who were greatly inspired by the Russian revolution and integrated India's freedom movement with the emancipatory vision of socialism. I pay my heartfelt homage to Comrade Sudhakar Reddy, former General Secretary of CPI whom we sadly lost just on the eve of this Congress. I humbly remember Comrades Indrajit Gupta, AB Bardhan, Chaturanan Mishra, Bhogendra Jha, Jagannath Sarkar, Nripen Bandyopadhyay and many other

leaders and scholars of the CPI I had the opportunity to interact with since my younger days in the communist movement. Today's generations of communists in India are deeply indebted to all of them.

As we observe the centenary of the CPI we cannot but be aware of the other centenary that is being observed today with so much fanfare and the fullest backing of the current regime. It is the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which has been lauded as the biggest global NGO by Narendra Modi in his latest Independence Day address. At the time of the adoption of India's Constitution and the consequent proclamation of the Republic of India, the RSS had explicitly rejected the Constitution instead advocating the Manusmriti, the code of slavery that Babasaheb Ambedkar had burnt publicly three decades before he went on to chair the drafting panel of the Constituent Assembly, as modern India's ideal constitution.

If the founding generations of India's communist movement were inspired by the Russian revolution, the RSS was founded in 1925 drawing inspiration from the fascist model of Mussolini in Italy and then Hitler in Germany. Since then it has been relentlessly at work looking for opportunities to inflict its fascist imagination on India in stark contrast and outright opposition to the constitutional vision of modern democratic India, socialist, secular and inclusive. After decades of groundwork and piecemeal opportunities, with the Modi regime's ascent to power in 2014 the RSS-BJP brigade has been trying to redefine India wholesale. From education to economy, and climate to culture, India is facing disaster and destruction on all fronts.

The battle today is between the concentrated power of all that has been rotten and regressive in Indian history and the continuing quest of we the people of India for an emancipatory and egalitarian social and political order. It is a battle that has to be waged and won on all fronts and as communists we therefore need to forge closer unity not just among ourselves but with the entire ideological-political spectrum that fought for India's freedom and for the development of a modern democratic India. We need to harness the full energy of India's fighting millions in every sphere - for the rights of all sections of India's oppressed and exploited people and for comprehensive justice - social, economic, political and environmental.

Nothing short of a second freedom movement is going to save democracy in India today from the clutches of fascism. Indeed, democracy and diversity are the key to India's survival as a united country. If fascism gets to consolidate itself, it will not only dismantle democracy, it will also disintegrate India. The freedom movement which had ended the British colonial rule had also given us a constitutional democratic platform for India's post-colonial advance. But today that constitution is facing its gravest challenge. Also at stake is the anti-imperialist legacy of our freedom movement which produced the Constitution. Bhagat Singh had called upon the youth to guard against the danger of the rulers of independent India degenerating into brown inheritors of white colonialism. Never before has this danger been so real as today when the Modi government abjectly surrenders to the imperialist aggression and arrogance of the Trump Administration.

As the Modi government mortgages India's economic and strategic sovereignty to the US-Israel axis, India faces its worst ever

isolation in the international arena and growing alienation from all our South Asian neighbours. The shocking remarks made by BJP leaders in the wake of the recent youth revolt in Nepal questioning the very independence and sovereignty of the Himalayan republic and the desperation shown by the dominant Indian media to project the youth unrest as a movement for restoration of a Hindu monarchy starkly illustrate the disaster the Modi government has brought to India's foreign policy. Add to this the rapid erosion of electoral democracy and alarming corporate plunder of India's natural and human resources and we know how prophetic Ambedkar was when he had warned us against the calamity we are facing today.

Till the early 1960s, there was essentially only one united communist party of India. Historical circumstances have led to the emergence of different streams of the once unified flow of the communist movement. History has also shown that the diversity in the Indian communist camp has not necessarily weakened the communist movement, perhaps it has helped the movement spread wider and grow deeper. But diversity must not mean disunity, and today, more than ever before we should close ranks against the fascist offensive.

Even if we have to march separately at times, we must strike together by all means. The energy and unity of the Left ranks has contributed significantly to the historic struggle of India's farmers against the pro-corporate farm laws which compelled the Modi government to repeal those sinister laws. We must play a similarly energetic and effective role in the ongoing working class struggles against the four labour codes of slavery, in the student-youth movement for education and employment for all, in the struggle for equal rights for women, equal citizenship for India's minorities and full liberties for dissenting voices

We wish the 25th Congress of the CPI every success. The CPI(ML) will stand with you in every struggle for the common cause of the communist movement and the Indian people. ■

Land, Wage & Livelihood Crisis for Workers in West Bengal's Tea Industry

▲ ABHIJIT MAZUMDAR

Tea cultivation in West Bengal's Darjeeling district began in 1840, when Dr. Archibald Campbell, a botanist and civil administrator, introduced Chinese tea plants from Kumaon for experimental cultivation. By 1856, tea gardens such as Takvar, Hope Town, Alubari, Dhuteria, Ging, Ambutia, Takda, Badamtam, and Phubshering were established in the hills, while New Champpta, Sukna, Dagapur, and Mohergaon-Gulma emerged in the plains. For 167 years, Darjeeling's tea industry has thrived, with some gardens in the Dooars region operating even longer.

Despite being India's second-largest labor-intensive, agricultural-based organized sector, tea workers remain deprived of their legitimate minimum wages. While the industry generates significant foreign exchange and amasses wealth for its leaders, tea workers—semi-employed yet hardworking—see no improvement in their living conditions. Since 2014, the West Bengal government has failed to establish a minimum wage structure, increase wages in line with rising costs, or secure land titles for permanent plantation workers, largely due to opposition from the garden owners' organization, the Consultative Committee of Planters Association (CCPA).

On June 15, 2022, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce and Industry presented its 171st report, titled Issues Affecting the Indian Tea Industry, Especially in the Darjeeling Region, to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The report highlights critical challenges facing the industry and its workers, offering recommendations to address them.

Key Observations and Recommendations

1. Low-Quality Tea Imports from Nepal

The report notes that low-quality tea from Nepal is entering India and being marketed domestically and internationally as premium Darjeeling tea, undermining the region's Geographical Indication (GI) status, awarded in 2004 for its high-quality tea. This illegal practice devalues Darjeeling tea and reduces its market exchange rate. The Committee recommends:

- Revising the 68-year-old India-Nepal trade agreement to strengthen oversight of imported tea.
- Establishing a NABL-approved tea quality laboratory in Darjeeling.
- Directing the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) to investigate and impose anti-dumping duties on Nepalese tea, whether imported legally or illegally.

2. Subsidies and Tea Board Challenges

The tea industry's development has stalled due to delays in subsidies from the Tea Board, exacerbated by the Union Commerce and Industry Department's decision to withhold arrears for gardens lacking legal clearance. The Committee urges the Tea Board to streamline clearance processes. Notably, the report omits mention of the Rs 1,000 crore announced in the 2021-22 Union Budget for the welfare of women tea workers and their families, none of which has reached them.

3. Land Rights for Tea Workers

For the first time, a government report acknowledges tea workers' settlements as their hereditary lands. Tea garden owners, operating on 30-year leased land, often claim workers' homesteads as part of their holdings, denying workers land titles and access to schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana due to withheld No-Objection Certificates (NOCs). The Committee also notes owners' resistance to designating land for workers' cremation grounds or graveyards. It strongly recommends:

- Enacting land reform laws to grant permanent land titles (patta-parcha) to tea workers for their traditional residential lands.

4. Wage Disparities

Tea workers in North Bengal earn far below the national minimum wage, leading to a poor standard of living and a declining development index for the industry. While the report initially references a "living wage," it ultimately recommends establishing a minimum wage structure through tripartite negotiations involving workers' organizations, employers, and the government. It also calls for immediate implementation of the Code on Wages (2019) to ensure workers receive in-kind wage components and other dues. However, the report overlooks the Code's provision to extend daily working hours from 8 to 12, which could further burden workers.

5. Modernization and Welfare

The Committee proposes modernizing the Tea Board by replacing its bureaucratic hierarchy with an executive director to enhance autonomy and efficiency. It also recommends:

- Mechanization and financial packages through NABARD to revive the Darjeeling tea industry.
- Ensuring workers' access to welfare schemes, health services, housing, and fair working conditions, as the Tea Garden Act (1951) remains inadequately enforced.

- Creating a databank to streamline workers' access to government schemes and implementing the Labour Code (2020).
- Supporting small tea gardens, which produce over 50% of India's tea, through incentive schemes, GI tags for their produce, and organizing them into producer organizations.
- Establishing an e-Auction Centre in Darjeeling to improve marketing benefits for small producers.

The Wage Struggle

For nine years, the Tripartite Advisory Committee, formed in 2015 under pressure from workers' movements, has failed to establish a minimum wage structure for the tea industry. Despite submissions of wage calculations based on the commodity price index, the state government claims it has not received these accounts, delaying action. The labor minister's repeated false statements and the government's alignment with employers reveal a deliberate effort to suppress this demand. On August 1, 2023, the Calcutta High Court ordered the state to announce a minimum wage structure within six months, a deadline that expired on February 1, 2024, without progress. The Minimum Wage Demand Committee, comprising trade union leaders and civil society, launched a widespread poster campaign in 2025, labeling the government's inaction as "10 years of fraud."

The Land Grabbing Crisis

Over the past two to three decades, tea plantation lands have increasingly been repurposed for commercial ventures, particularly near urban centers like Siliguri and Darjeeling. Since the eviction of workers from Chandmani Tea Garden in 2003, illegal construction has proliferated. A 2019 law permits 15% of tea garden land to be used for "tea tourism" and related commercial activities, with leases

extended from 30 to 99 years. Up to 150 acres of land are now used for non-tea purposes, including hotels, resorts, private schools, and hospitals. For example:

- A multinational luxury hotel chain built a five-star hotel on 24 acres of New Chamta Tea Garden (1867), far exceeding the allocated 5 acres, with local complicity. Other gardens, such as Bagdogra (5 acres), Matigara (40 acres), Kamala (50 acres), Singhijhora (22.26 acres), Okai (10 acres), Takvar (0.18 acres), and Mohorgaon-Gulma (145.86 acres), have been repurposed for similar ventures.

The state government's recent decision to convert unused leasehold lands into freehold properties for corporate sale threatens further land alienation. Luxury hotels and resorts are also under construction in Makaibari and Jangpana tea estates, while housing projects dominate Matigara and Nishchintapur gardens.

Workers' families, traditionally allowed to cultivate unused garden land, face eviction by government-backed promoters and officials. In the Dooars, lands near the Teesta Irrigation Project are exploited for illegal sand and dolomite mining, except in Totapara, where workers resistance halted such activities. Tribal and Nepali temporary workers are also being evicted from forest settlements near tea gardens, reclassified as national parks or wildlife reserves.

Workers' Resistance

The Joint Forum, representing 26 trade unions, has spearheaded resistance against land grabs and wage suppression. On January 13, 2023, it resolved to oppose all attempts to seize tea garden land, whether through the Tea Tourism Act or other means. Workers' conventions in Darjeeling (January 29, 2024), Bagdogra (February 11, 2024), and Chalsa (February 12, 2024)

sustained this movement, demanding minimum wages and land titles.

The state's Cha Sundari housing scheme, offering one-room, 358-square-foot houses, was rejected by workers, who value their traditional, open-air habitats for livestock, vegetable cultivation, and communal living. A new Rs 1.2 lakh grant for house construction has also failed to gain traction, as workers lack land ownership. The Joint Forum demands that workers receive titles to their existing labor-line lands, prompting the government to reconsider its approach.

On March 30, 2025, the Land-Livelihood-Save Environment Movement convention in Siliguri united tea workers, farmers, forest dwellers, and hill communities to demand protection for their land, livelihoods, and environment. Key demands included freeing North Bengal's river basins from sand and stone mafias and halting low-lying dams on the Teesta. The Joint Forum's emergency meeting in June 2025 outlined a movement-oriented program for June, July, and August, signaling intensified protests.

The tea industry in West Bengal faces a deepening crisis, marked by wage suppression, land alienation, and inadequate government action. Tea workers, particularly women, endure conditions reminiscent of the British colonial era, with their rights to fair wages, land, and dignity systematically denied. The Parliamentary Standing Committee's recommendations offer hope, but their implementation remains uncertain. The workers' resolute movement, led by the Joint Forum and supported by civil society, signals a powerful resistance against the primitive accumulation of capital. As the tea belt buzzes with protests in June and July 2025, the struggle for justice in North Bengal's tea gardens continues to gain momentum.

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Modi Government's GST Reforms: Intensify the Battle for Reorientation of India's Economic and Foreign Policies

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

As indicated in Narendra Modi's 103-minute-long August 15 address, the Modi government has now come up with what it calls GST 2.0 or Next-Generation GST Reforms. Spokespersons and apologists of the government are of course trying to delink the GST reforms from Trump's tariff onslaught, presenting it as a reform package that emerged from the government's own policy planning. But the adverse implications of Trump's tariff war for India's foreign trade have clearly forced the government to look inwards at the domestic economy. Hence the renewed invocation of the long-forgotten 'swadeshi' rhetoric by both BJP and RSS leaders and the accompanying buzz around India's domestic market with this supposed booster dose of GST reforms.

Ever since its ill-prepared launch in 2017, close on the heels of the disastrous demonetisation adventure, GST has been a lethal blow to India's marginal and small enterprises, the livelihood and consumption expenditure of the common people and the balance of fiscal federalism. The inherently regressive nature of an indirect tax which disproportionately affects the poor was compounded by multiple slabs and excessive tax rates that spared almost no item of essential consumption and public service. The demands for lowering of tax rates for items of essential consumption, rationalisation of the multi-slab system, simplification of the complex compliance procedure and restoration of the federal balance by giving states a better share and more autonomy are being raised from day one, but the government has never paid any heed.

Under GST 2.0 the government has finally eliminated the 12% and 28% slabs, making the system now essentially two-tiered with two levels of taxation - 5% and 18%. There is of course a prohibitive 40% slab for a few luxury items or items like cigarettes and tobacco whose consumption is considered injurious to health. The new version thus makes GST somewhat simpler compared to its previous version, and there is also a certain effective lowering of the tax rate for quite a few items. This is a belated partial vindication of a widely felt popular demand and hence certainly welcome. The question however remains as to how far the benefits of tax reduction will be passed on to the consumer. Any simultaneous increase in the prices of the items which will now attract lower tax rates will nullify the tax advantage to the consumer.

The government has assessed the GST reforms to result in a revenue loss of about Rs 48,000 crore. Even if this entire amount returns to the market as enhanced domestic consumption, it will be no match for the decline in India's exports as a result of the aggressive Trump tariffs, which is estimated at Rs 4.4 lakh crore. In fact the tariffs will not

just affect exports, there will be a cascading effect on India's domestic economy by way of job losses in the labour-intensive export sector and depressed income and consumption of the affected workers. A real boost to the domestic economy can only come from enhanced job-generating productive investment, enhanced public spending, especially in the social sectors, and increased purchasing power of the poor and middle classes.

This demands a fundamental reorientation of India's revenue collection strategy away from taxing the poor and middle classes to taxing the rich. Why does the government continue to shy away from any kind of wealth tax in an economy where the top 1% controls 40% of the country's wealth and the bottom half accounts for only 3%? Why does the government continue to lower corporate tax over and above the huge tax exemptions and loan write-offs granted to the corporate sector? In 2014, personal income tax accounted for 38% of India's direct tax revenue while corporate taxes contributed 62%. In a decade of the Modi era, the ratio has reversed with personal income tax now contributing 53% and the share of corporate tax down to 47%.

Trump's tariff war has also forced the Modi government to make some drastic foreign policy readjustment. Under American pressure, the Modi government had earlier begun to downgrade India's involvement in groupings like BRICS and SCO. But in the wake of the unprecedented imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian exports by the Trump administration, Narendra Modi made it a point to attend the SCO summit in Tianjin, his first visit to China in seven years, and also use the opportunity for a renewed bilateral engagement with China for the first time since the China-India military stand-off of 2020. However, just after Modi signed the Tianjin Declaration condemning the continuing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the US-Israel military strikes on Iran, India hosted the far-right Israeli finance minister Bezael Smotrich who has been banned by countries including the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway for his open calls for ethnic cleansing.

India cannot have a flip-flop foreign policy revolving essentially around a surrender to the US-Israel axis while making ad-hoc adjustments with Russia and China to attempt to balance the American pressure. What India needs is a truly independent foreign policy with a clear anti-imperialist thrust and consistent emphasis on cooperation with countries of the Global South. The current juncture has forced the Modi government to make partial adjustments in its economic and foreign policies. Progressive democratic forces of India must seize this moment to intensify the struggle for rejection of the pro-imperialist pro-corporate policy trajectory and reorientation of India's policies in favour of the needs and rights of the Indian people. ■

GST 2.0: Why Tax Cuts Alone Cannot Boost the Economy

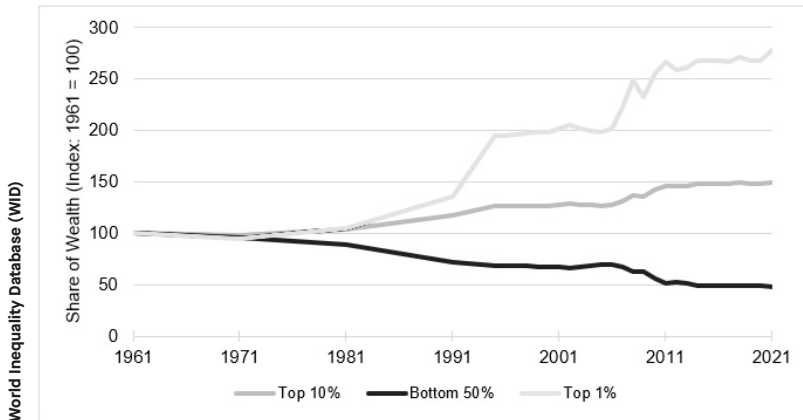
▲ SAURABH NARUKA

P rime Minister Modi's 19-minute speech on September 20, calling for the celebration of a "bachat utsav" (festival of savings) just hours before the rollout of new GST rates, is an example of how to weaken an economy and then claim to rescue it. Behind such rhetoric, the Indian economy is showing clear signs of stress, while the global environment too points towards an impending slowdown. This will further harm the livelihoods of Indians already struggling under strained economic conditions.

After years of policies that eroded people's purchasing power, the Prime Minister now wants citizens to celebrate savings. The new two-slab GST regime comes soon after fresh tariffs and trade measures imposed on India by none other than Modi's "dear friend" US President Donald Trump.

While the nature of growth of Indian economy, despite tall claims of growth of GDP numbers over substantial period of time, was already considered by many as unable to provide dignified employment to majority of youth entering job market in crores every year with opposition raising the battle cry that promise of 2 Crore Jobs per year of Modi has become a Jumla.

Increased unemployment and stagnant income have pushed inequalities of income to a level where aggregate demand in economy was taking a hit. According to Piketty and colleagues' data by 2022-23, the top 1% captured 22.6% of national income and a staggering 40.1% of national wealth, the levels unprecedented in Indian history. It was about 10% share of national income for top 1% in 1991 and top 10% share increased from 35% to 59% while the bottom 50% which had 20% share of national income in 1991 declined to

Figure 1: Wealth Inequality in India (1961-2021)

13% of income and 3% of wealth. NSSO data shows that in rural areas, only the top decile saw meaningful consumption growth, while lower deciles stagnated despite rapid GDP growth. In urban areas too the top decile far outpaced all other groups, while the bottom 20% barely saw any increase.

In his speech, Modi shifted the responsibility of building an “Atmanirbhar Bharat” onto Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Yet, it was demonetisation in 2016 and the flawed GST rollout in 2017 that devastated MSMEs. Government data show that small industries fell from 6.25 crore units in 2016 to 3.25 crore units in 2024, a decline of 48%. The 2024–25 period even witnessed closures doubling.

But the question is can the new GST regime mitigate the damage done?

GST Reform, but Where Is the Income?

Indirect taxes such as GST are inherently regressive, meaning they take a larger proportion of income from the poor than the rich. A small cut in GST rates may marginally benefit consumers, but for low-income households facing stagnant wages and rising costs of living, the

relief is negligible. By contrast, the affluent classes, who already have higher purchasing power, capture more of the benefit. Lowering tax rates may reduce the price of goods, but demand is ultimately a function of disposable income.

If incomes remain low, even cheaper goods will not boost consumption. The problem is not only the price level but also the distribution of income between labour and capital, urban and rural households, and across regions and classes. Since the wealthy spend a smaller proportion of their income on consumption compared to the poor, this skewed distribution reduces overall demand in the economy. Businesses invest when they expect demand to grow. If consumers do not have the purchasing power to buy goods and services, even lower tax rates cannot convince investors to expand capacity. Without stronger domestic demand, India risks falling into a low-investment trap.

The government itself admits that GST 2.0 relief is only Rs. 93,000 crore. Even ignoring Rs 45,000 crore recouped through higher GST on luxury and sin goods, the net concession is just 3.16% of total indirect tax collections of Rs. 29.48 lakh crore in 2024–25. These

collections include both GST and taxes on the Petroleum sector, since most petroleum products are still taxed separately. This meagre relief, though celebrated loudly, can hardly boost people’s purchasing power.

Reviving Demand

To genuinely revive demand, the government must move beyond token GST cuts. Tackling inequality is central. This requires raising household incomes and wages, improving social security, and ensuring affordable essential services, including healthcare, education, transportation, and basic utilities.

In a country where half the working people are still employed in agricultural sectors, farmers remain vulnerable to price fluctuations. Expanding procurement systems, ensuring remunerative minimum support prices (MSP), and reducing dependence on exploitative intermediaries can stabilize rural incomes. Push towards encouraging crop diversification, agro-processing industries, and better supply chains will not only raise farmer incomes but also reduce rural underemployment. More public investments for better irrigation, storage facilities, and rural connectivity can reduce wastage and improve farm profitability.

Calling the new GST rates a “festival of savings” is a cruel joke. Token tax cuts cannot revive demand or protect livelihoods. Unless the government raises wages, strengthens social security, generates dignified employment, increases corporate taxes, and implements wealth and inheritance taxes on the super-rich, India risks a prolonged slowdown that will hit the majority of its citizens while the wealthy continue to prosper. ■

Countering Trump's Tariff War on India

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



Protesters in Kolkata rally against Trump tariffs on 1 September, marking the International Day of Peace and Solidarity against War.

On 27 August, the Trump Presidency levied 50% tariffs on key Indian exports to the US. This meant a doubling of the 25% tariff rate that was already imposed on India as part of Trump's aggressive tariff war. The added 25% tariff has been invoked as a 'penalty' for India's purchase of oil and gas from Russia. The key export items to be directly affected by these punitive tariffs include textile, gems and jewellery, seafood, footwear, furniture and industrial chemicals. In value terms, this covers 55 percent of India's \$87bn merchandise exports to the US. Among exempted items, the pharmaceutical industry remains the most prominent sector as the US depends crucially on generic medication imports from India.

These punitive tariffs are going to hit India hard in several ways. With such exorbitantly high tariffs Indian exports will be adversely affected by exports from countries like China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh all of which will now have a lower tariff advantage. Garments, footwear,

seafood, gems and jewellery - these are all labour-intensive sectors and declining export orders will immediately lead to retrenchments and job losses across the chain. For example, at least 150,000 jobs are likely to be lost in Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, the capital of India's garment exports which accounts for nearly a third of India's \$16bn ready-to-wear garments exports. And this in turn will set off a chain reaction - lowering the domestic demand and consumption with adverse implications for India's home market and domestic manufacturing in other sectors too.

Ironically, the Ambani group which reaped massive windfall gains from the discounted oil purchase from Russia and thus provided the pretext for the punitive tariffs, has escaped unhurt in this tariff attack. Energy products which dominate the Reliance exports are exempted from the Trump tariffs. The actual quantum of gains made by Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries from discounted oil purchase from Russia is not known but the import

and export figures from Ambani's Jamnagar refinery give us some idea. In June 2025, the Jamnagar refinery imported Russian crude oil at the rate of 746,000 bpd (barrels per day), more than half of the refinery's 1.36 million bpd capacity. And at 914,000 bpd, Reliance accounted for 71% of India's oil product exports.

Before Russia's war on Ukraine, Russian crude oil accounted for only two percent of India's crude imports, but over the last 42 months, the share has gone up to as high as 32 percent. The benefits of this discounted purchase have not been passed on to India's consumers, the cheaper imports have only swelled the profits of the Reliance Industries, which mostly resold the refined Russian crude to Europe. Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump attended the wedding of Ambani's youngest son while Mukesh Ambani was among the select club of invitees at Trump's swearing-in. While India pays the price of Trump's tariff war, and India's export economy and workers bear the brunt of the attack, Mukesh Ambani makes merry and counts his windfall gains. India's biggest crony capitalists, Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, are not just plundering India's natural resources to satisfy their corporate greed, they are also responsible for much of India's crisis in the arena of international trade.

The Modi government and the RSS do not have the guts to confront Trump's tariff war with any kind of retaliatory response. If anything, the government's response is primarily one of shameless acquiescence to Trump's aggression. The government has indeed abolished the eleven percent tariff on cotton imports from the US, a move which will only push India's domestic cotton growers deeper into crisis. India's dairy industry and peasant agriculture will also have to face similar existential

threats if the Modi government makes further concessions in response to the pressures being exerted by the American agribusiness lobby. Having neither the courage nor the vision to stand up to the tariff terrorism of the Trump Administration, Narendra Modi and the RSS are busy brushing up their long forgotten rhetoric of swadeshi and self-reliance. But when every policy of the government breaks the backbone of the domestic economy and the productive forces, shrinks the purchasing power of the common people and subjects the natural public resources and public services of the country to private control and corporate loot, economic nationalism is bound to get reduced to a cruel joke.

The US-centric foreign policy of the government has been no less responsible for the current crisis. Closer bilateral and regional ties of economic cooperation with countries of the Global South and a serious quest for de-dollarisation, for conducting trade using currencies defying and denting the hegemony of the US dollar can alone provide a conducive international economic and political environment for self-reliant economic development. Such an orientation also needs to be sustained by the steady growth of a powerful and resilient home market that can withstand the vagaries of the global market and financial flows, and promotion of policies of distributive justice that can counter the concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands and ensure efficient use of public funds for the greater common good of the people. The tariff aggression of the Trump Administration is a wake-up call for India to wholeheartedly reject the subserviently pro-imperialist foreign policies and crony capitalist, predatory economic policies of the current regime. ■

Inside Tiruppur: The Human Cost of Trump Tariffs

▲ SHANKAR V

Tiruppur felt the shock of the Trump tariff of 50% on Indian exports to the US. Tiruppur has long been a hub of the apparel and knitwear industry in the country. Tamil Nadu alone contributed \$8 billion — 26.8% of India's total textile exports worth \$37 billion — in FY25.

K.M. Subramanian, President of the Tiruppur Exporters Association (TEA), said: "Nearly 60% of knitwear exports come from Tiruppur. Last year, our exports were worth Rs. 45,000 crore. With the new tariff, business worth Rs. 12,000 crore is immediately at risk. We urgently need the Union government to intervene with the US and provide financial support to exporters and manufacturers."

Tiruppur employs over 8–9 lakh people across 2,500 factories in the district, more than 60% of whom are women. India has set a target of \$100 billion in textile and apparel exports by 2030. But exporters and trade experts are sceptical. With India's current exports at \$37 billion, the additional 50% tariff makes the target difficult to achieve in the next five years. Some estimates suggest the tariff could impact 28–40% of India's overall textile business with the US.

The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry has demanded a moratorium on the payment of principal and interest on loans for up to one year, credit support, and other relief measures. The Free Trade Agreement with the UK, recently signed, is welcomed by industrial bodies. While these measures may help the industry, they cannot compensate for the loss of employment and livelihoods of workers.

A worker, Rajini Sankar, said that Best Garments, one of the export companies, closed down two of its units, leading to job losses for more than 1,000 workers. Arora Garments closed down, affecting the lives of 200 workers. "These are only some examples," he said.

Another migrant worker, Ganesh, said they have no option but to go back home if their company shuts down. More than 8–9 lakh people work in 2,500 knitwear and garment factories in Tiruppur, with migrant workers from Bihar and other northern states forming a sizeable majority.

Another tailor, Kumar, said that workers' wages have decreased significantly. The first round of wage reductions occurred during COVID-19, but the Trump tariff has had the worst impact. Even those still employed are unable to lead a decent life. "We are not even paid statutory minimum wages. With the piece-rate system and reduced overseas orders, we are unable to earn enough to meet even our bare minimum necessities," he said.

Muthu Krishnan, Tiruppur District Secretary of AICCTU, said that the overwhelming majority of companies have already shifted from time-rate to piece-rate systems. With stoppages and reduced production, workers no longer achieve the number of pieces they used to, and consequently, their wages have drastically reduced. Even before the full impact of the Trump tariff is felt by most workers, companies have already started reducing their

workforce, particularly in American export-oriented jobs.

He added that companies are looking to the Modi government to renegotiate the trade deal and hope, against hope, that the shock and crisis may be short-lived. As more than 33% of the textile industry in Tiruppur depends on exports to the US, workers' employment and wages are the worst casualties. Job losses and wage reductions are the biggest impacts of the Trump tariff on workers.

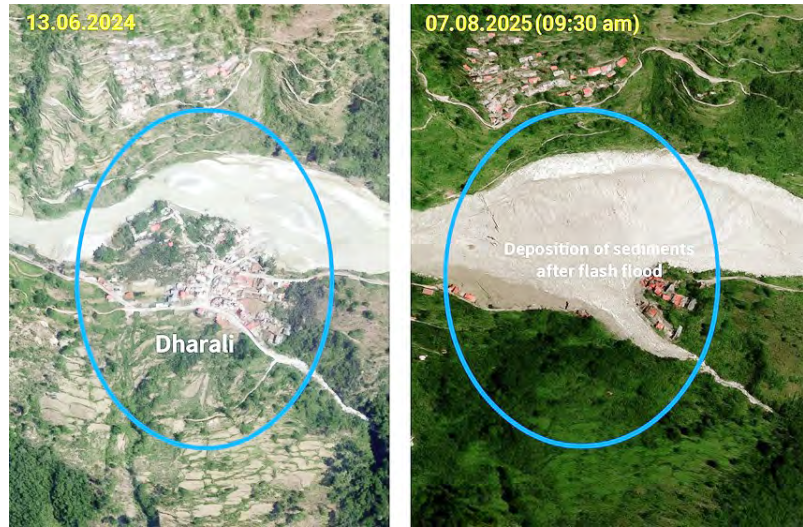
He also mentioned that the cotton and ginning industries in the Coimbatore–Tiruppur belt are facing a ripple effect, with production falling drastically. He said that the recent reduction of an 11% import tax offers no real relief to the industry, as it is limited to only 40 days.

Ravindran, the president of Coimbatore Compressor Industries Association (COCIA) said that the Trump tariff should be necessarily opposed because it is an imperialist dictate and a reciprocal action against India for buying oil from Russia.

Textile is the worst affected industry in India, particularly Tiruppur and Coimbatore based companies which are export-dependent, in addition to industries like sea food, gems, leather and others. India should work more towards generating domestic demand for apparel and textile industries. We are only seeing the direct impact of the Trump tariff now, but its potential ripple effect on other industries could be substantial in the near future.

Many workers said that the impact of the American tariff is the worst economic challenge they have faced in their lifetimes, surpassing the 2008 global economic depression, the 2016 demonetisation, the rollout of GST, and COVID-19. ■

Himalayan Tragedy



Satellite images comparing Dharali in June 2024 and on Aug. 7, 2025, after the flash flood.
Photo: National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad.

Relentless rains pounding the foothills of the Himalayas in August and September have unleashed unprecedented destruction, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured. Catastrophic incidents occurred in Dharali in Uttarakhand and Kishtwar in Jammu and Kashmir in August. From late August to September, the sub-Himalayan region experienced widespread cloudbursts, landslides, and flash floods.

In Uttarakhand, areas including Tharali and other parts of Chamoli district, Sanji, Buransi, and Bankuda in Pauri, Chenagad in Rudraprayag, vast sections of Dehradun, and Ghat (Nandanagar) in the Chamoli mountains were devastated, with roads washed away and homes buried under debris. Himachal Pradesh witnessed similar heart-wrenching destruction, as flash floods and landslides swept through Mandi, Kinnaur, Kullu, Manali, and surrounding areas, destroying roads, bridges and homes. Jammu and Kashmir was battered by relentless cloudbursts and flash floods, causing widespread devastation in Kishtwar, Reasi, Ramban, and nearby districts. The combined impact caused rivers such as the Chenab, Jhelum, Tawi, Beas, and Sutlej to overflow, with flooding felt downstream in Punjab and across the border.

These catastrophes have claimed hundreds of lives, left thousands injured, and caused massive destruction of homes, roads and infrastructure. However, these were not merely national disasters; they are a stark manifestation of the dangerous convergence of climate change, unplanned development and the relentless pursuit of profit over people's safety and environmental sustainability. While incessant rains, triggered by western disturbances interacting with monsoon systems, provided the immediate trigger, the magnitude of the disaster has been amplified by years of unscientific infrastructure development, environmental degradation, and the prioritization of corporate interests over ecological and human concerns.

Uttarakhand: Ignored Warnings and Criminal Complicity

Warnings of such catastrophic disasters were clear but ignored by both the BJP-led state and central governments. Rules are bent, and violations are legalized or pushed under the carpet to advance rampant, unplanned, and unscientific infrastructure projects across the region.

“Fragile Himalayan geology and its resources have been opened to exploitation by large corporates. It was the limitless greed of profiteering that magnified the scale of the disaster”, said Indresh Maikhuri, CPI(ML) Uttarakhand State Secretary.

The Himalayan foothills are inherently susceptible to disasters due to their unique geological and ecological characteristics. The young, fragile mountain ranges are still tectonically active, making them prone to earthquakes and landslides. Steep slopes, combined with loose soil and fractured rocks, create a natural predisposition to slope failures during intense rainfall.

Indresh Maikhuri notes:

“Riverbanks, critical water catchment areas, and natural floodplains, designed to absorb excess water, have been ruthlessly encroached upon for heavy construction. Hotels, resorts, private educational institutions like D.I.T. in Dehradun, and luxury complexes such as the Sparsa Farm and Resort in Maldevta, where the Saung river was illegally diverted for an approach road, exemplify this plunder. When floods came, these structures collapsed, becoming lethal debris traps that amplified the flood’s destructive power.”

The disregard for the region’s fragility by companies and contractors is part of a broader, targeted destruction enabled by

state and central governments. Large hydropower projects and rapid construction of so called “all-weather roads” have further exacerbated the crisis.

The Rs. 12,000 crore Char Dham project, announced by Prime Minister Modi in 2016, epitomizes this destructive model. Several scientific studies highlight the lack of scientific understanding in road construction, turning many areas into landslide zones. On slopes steeper than 30 degrees in fractured rock zones, excavation increases the likelihood of landslides during intense rainfall exceeding 50–100 mm per hour.

A recent study by Soumik Saha and Biswajit Bera of Sidho-Kanho-Birsa University found that aggressive hill cutting for the Char Dham Highway has led to a substantial rise in landslides along the pilgrimage routes to Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. The study identified 811 landslides across 800 km, with 81 percent occurring within 100 meters of the highway. Many slopes were cut at dangerously steep angles over 80 degrees, far exceeding safe engineering norms.

Despite these warnings, the “grand road” projects were implemented with impunity, putting thousands of lives at risk. To bypass mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), the project was deliberately divided into 53 packages under 90 km each.

“The race to complete quickly, transport more, and maximize profit has created conditions where it is impossible for anyone to reach safely. A single night of rain has revealed the future risks,” said Atul Sati, CPI(ML) Garhwal Secretary and leader of Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti.

The Supreme Court-appointed High-Level Committee in 2019, comprising government and independent experts, warned that



the work was extremely unplanned and unscientific, creating over 150 new landslide zones along the 839 km stretch. Locations like Dharasu (Uttarkashi), Bhanerpani, Nandprayag (Chamoli), Banswara (Rudraprayag), and Kwarb (Almora) have become permanent, active landslide scars.

“The consequences, predicted by experts and now tragically realized, are catastrophic. This project is no ‘all-weather road’; it is an ‘all-weather sliding road,’ a monument to ecological vandalism,” noted Indresh Maikhuri.

Deforestation and Concretization

Rapid deforestation and widespread concretization worsen extreme weather patterns by altering the local microclimate. For example, almost 50,000 trees, including slow-growing high-altitude species like



deodar, birch, and oak, are slated to be felled for the Char Dham project. Across the landscape, large-scale bulldozing for projects occurs with minimal regulation. During the recent floods in Himachal, videos showing massive piles of timber logs stuck at a dam pointed to large-scale timber mafia operations.

The removal of vegetation reduces shading and transpiration, while paved and concrete surfaces absorb and retain heat, raising surface temperatures. This localized heating increases the evaporation of surface moisture, contributing to greater atmospheric humidity. When combined with prevailing monsoon winds or low-pressure systems, these changes create conditions for intense and concentrated rainfall events.

Lack of action against corporate violators demonstrates government hypocrisy. While poor settlements and small vendors are relentlessly targeted under the pretext of removing encroachments, massive illegal constructions by politically connected entities, which directly cause disasters, are ignored.

Cumulative Impact: Climate Change and Himalayan Vulnerability

The effect of deforestation, rapid urbanization, and unplanned construction is significantly exacerbated by climate change.

The Himalayas function as Asia's "water tower," storing freshwater in glaciers and snow. These glaciers feed major rivers including the Ganga, Yamuna, Sutlej, Bhagirathi, Alaknanda, and Chenab, sustaining hundreds of millions downstream. Accelerated glacial retreat due to climate change has led to the formation of numerous glacial lakes, which pose a serious risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). The Central Water Commission reported a 10.81 percent increase in glacial lake areas from 2011 to 2024, signalling a heightened risk of catastrophic GLOFs. Over 100 dams in six Himalayan states also face elevated threats from flash floods triggered by glacial outbursts.

The Missing Government

Despite escalating environmental and geological risks, the government's response to the disaster has been both inadequate and largely performative. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aerial tour of disaster-affected areas in Uttarakhand, scheduled for September 11, 2025, was called off, citing bad weather despite bright sunshine. Instead, the Prime Minister met selected disaster victims at Dehradun's Jolly Grant airport.

The relief package announced, Rs. 1,200 crore, fell far short of the Rs. 5,300 crore requested by the

state government, highlighting the gap between announcements and actual support. On the ground, rehabilitation and compensation remain largely absent, with no rush for any discussion of plans to deal with the situation.

"But it seems the government has not learned from the disaster and continues to play with the lives of the people," Indresh says. The state government continues to push hydroelectric projects halted by the Supreme Court after the 2013 disaster. Illegal mining, elevated road projects displacing thousands of families, and large-scale contracts like the Rs. 4,081 crore Kedarnath-Sonprayag ropeway awarded to Adani illustrate a prioritization of corporate interests over public safety and without proper scientific study or assessment.

Atul Sati, who has travelled across the disaster sites, warns that this year's destruction far exceeds previous records, and climate change signals even more severe consequences in the future. Development in the Himalayas must be guided by science, ecology, and the lives of local communities, not by corporate greed and destructive mafias.

CPI(ML) has called for the constitution of a high-level scientific commission to study the impact of climate change, glacial floods, extreme weather patterns, and unplanned construction. The commission would recommend urgent measures for mitigation and sustainable planning in the Himalayan region.

The question remains: is the government listening to these warnings, or will it continue to waste lives, livelihoods, and the environment to satisfy leaders' obsession with grandiose displays and unchecked corporate profit? ■

Devastating Floods in Punjab Threaten Crops, Livelihoods and Food Security



Punjab is reeling under its worst floods in nearly four decades. Torrential rains in August and September, coupled with overflowing rivers, have submerged more than 1,000 villages across all 23 districts and 53 people have lost their lives.. Families have been displaced, livelihoods destroyed, and the state's food security severely threatened. The floods also caused severe damages in Haryana.

The disaster was amplified by extreme weather events in the Himalayan region. Rivers such as the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, and Ghaggar overflowed violently, turning fields into lakes and villages into islands. Thousands of hectares of cultivable land now lie under water, endangering wheat and rice production, the backbone of India's grain reserves. Farmers have lost standing crops, livestock has perished, and irrigation systems lie in ruins.

The floods have dealt a particularly cruel blow by striking during harvest season. Large stretches of paddy, Punjab's main kharif crop, were only weeks away from being harvested when they were submerged. Now, not only is

the standing crop lost, but fields left buried under silt and sand will take weeks to recover. This will delay the sowing of wheat in November, threatening the upcoming rabi crop as well. This double blow threatens both the present kharif harvest and the upcoming rabi season.

Experts and farmers' organisations point to administrative lapses as critical factors that worsened the crisis. Natural drainage channels were blocked by construction projects and unscientific highway building, while crucial desilting of the Sutlej was initiated only in June, far too late for monsoon preparedness. Surveys had already identified millions of cubic feet of silt at critical sites, and timely clearance could have reduced the severity of the flooding. Instead, bureaucratic delays and lack of urgency allowed the disaster to spiral.

Down To Earth also notes that crucial dam data, especially under the BBMB, was withheld during the 2025 floods despite legal obligations, and with Punjab's reduced role in the board and no regular government bulletins, people had to rely on activists and media, which worsened the crisis.

The Punjab government also failed to issue regular bulletins or press briefings on dam inflow/outflow, water levels, and related updates. Most information reached the public via private channels, activists, or media instead of state sources. The absence of transparent, real-time dam data and coordinated communication worsened the disaster's impact and left people unprepared.

To fix accountability and take action against those responsible for this flood and devastation, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) Punjab has

demanding the formation of a time-bound judicial commission headed by a sitting judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. It has also demanded immediate interim relief of Rs. 1 lakh for each flood-affected family. While seeking changes in compensation norms, SKM has demanded that compensation be given per acre as a basic unit and strictly "according to the extent of damage." SKM has demanded a special survey of affected areas and compensation of Rs. 70,000 per acre for damaged crops, Rs. 1 lakh per acre for damaged sugarcane, Rs. 10 lakh for the family of each deceased person, and Rs. 1 lakh for livestock loss. For collapsed houses, Rs. 10 lakh compensation, and for damaged houses, appropriate compensation.

Adding salt to the wound, when it is expected from the Punjab government to take effective measures to clean the fields of accumulated sand and silt, it is trying to leave this job on the farmers themselves in the name of a scheme launched with the name of 'Jiska Khet, Uska Ret' (that sand mining licences won't be required for selling sand from the farmers' fields till December 2025). This is nothing but a ploy to escape the responsibility on the part of the state government.

Moreover, Punjab has not opted for the central crop insurance scheme, nor does it have any alternative scheme of its own. Now it's the government's responsibility to compensate farmers for losses incurred due to floods.

The CPI(ML), reiterating the demands raised by farmers' unions, has called on the Government of India to immediately declare Punjab a national disaster and release a special flood relief package for the region. Without such measures, Punjab's farmers and the nation's food security will face an even deeper crisis. ■

All for Adani: Bhagalpur Farmers Face Eviction

When Bihar is preparing for the assembly elections amid SIR onslaught, the Modi government has gifted nearly 1,050 acres of land to Adani at one rupee per acre for 33 years in Bhagalpur for the construction of a coal powered power plant which was initially to be constructed by the National Thermal Power Corporation. This acquisition is endangering livelihoods of around 1200 farmers from 76 hamlets in 7 Panchayats of Pirpainti block, simultaneously putting a heavy pressure on the environment as lakhs of mango, guava, litchi, shisham, mahogany, sal, and teak trees may be uprooted. This area is a very fertile land with the main crop being sugarcane.

There are a few big landholders and BJP leaders in favour of land grab, but the poor small farmers from the backward castes as well as Dalit, Adivasi, and minority communities are opposing this decision. On 15 September 2025, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of this power plant from Purnia. From the inauguration stage in Pirpainti, the local BJP MLA Lalan Paswan threatened farmers to vacate their land, while also tempting them with promises of employment for locals in the project. It is worth noting that this is the same Lalan Paswan who, before becoming an MLA, used to take part in the Zameen Bachao Sangharsh Morcha (Jan Chetna Samiti) programmes in support of the farmers.

In anticipation of people's resistance at the foundation-laying event and to pre-empt protests, the administration arrested a local panchayat leader Deepak Singh of Ujjwala village (Harinkol Panchayat)

two days earlier on what villagers allege was a fabricated case, and sent to jail. District officials and some BJP leaders toured villages beforehand intimidating people if any "outsider" seen near the orchards or lands earmarked for the project would be jailed along with those sheltering them. This fear was further spread by some local journalists sympathetic to the ruling party who reportedly echoed these warnings.

A CPIML fact-finding team visiting Pirpainti witnessed first-hand this climate of fear. A local resident Shatrughan Yadav whose land has also been acquired, offered them shelter and also arranged tea and water for the team, but could not gather enough courage to join a public meeting at the nearby Panchayat Bhavan. The meeting was announced for 11 a.m. at the Panchayat Bhavan, but was found shut when the team arrived. Only a few women were sitting around. Villagers later revealed that BJP supporters, including some journalists, had spread rumours that the visiting team was linked to "Naxalite" groups, warning people that attending the meeting would get them into trouble. After much effort, a few villagers—mainly from Yadav and Muslim communities—gathered and shared their accounts.

The fact-finding team included Sudama Prasad, MP from Ara; Rambali Singh Yadav, MLA from Ghosi; Rajendra Patel, State Joint Secretary, All India Kisan Mahasabha; Shivsagar Sharma, National Vice President, All India Kisan Mahasabha; Mahesh Yadav, District Secretary, CPI(ML), Bhagalpur; Randhir Yadav, District Convenor, All India Kisan Mahasabha, Bhagalpur; Vinandeshwari Mandal; Ranveer Kushwaha and Sanjeev Kumar.

The team found that some wealthier farmers, mostly Rajputs, are openly supporting Adani since many of them work as contractors or run heavy vehicles and expect to gain from construction contracts. But Rajesh Tiwari, Congress block president of Pirpainti, whose family lost 30 acres to the acquisition, has opposed the project.

The Nitish-BJP government has recently merged 2,600 primary schools which were mostly in poor Dalit hamlets citing "non-availability of 10 decimals of land." Thousands of proposed health centres at the panchayat level were also stalled for the same reason. The government even abandoned its promise of providing three decimals of homestead land to landless poor, again claiming a lack of land. Yet, the same government did not hesitate to give 1,050 acres on a platter to Adani.

Ironically, the government can acquire lands for such projects, but has not made rules that provide a mechanism to purchase land for schools or hospitals; such buildings are constructed only on government or donated land. People have been opposing shutting down of schools and have long demanded land for education and housing, even staging protests at block headquarters. In the Bihar Assembly, CPI(ML) MLAs repeatedly raised the demand that land acquisition provisions be extended to schools and hospitals.

Deputy leader of CPIML legislative group in Bihar Satyadev Ram has also pressed for homestead land for the poor. When party MLA Rambali Singh Yadav demanded land for schools and hospitals in the Bihar Assembly, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's response was blunt: "There is no land available."

For farmers in Pirpainti too, land is declared unavailable for the poor, for schools, for health centres—but

is readily transferred to corporations at throwaway rates. The intimidation of villagers, arrest of local leaders, and silencing of dissenting voices underline how the state prioritises corporate interests over basic rights of education, housing, and livelihood.

The decision to acquire this land for the public sector NTPC was taken in 2014. Then it was verbally assured that the compensation would be provided based on the quality of the lands, and the cost of commercial trees will also be properly assessed. For example, for each mango tree a compensation amount of Rs 12 lakhs (considering a life span of 50 years) was promised, and that the payments will be decided for other cash trees in a similar manner. Besides, government jobs were promised for the children of affected farmers, and free electricity to each displaced family.

Then, people also shared their fear of environmental damage, and were assured in return of a perfect

pollution control mechanism for the upcoming power plant. This was in view of the environmental damage seen after the Kahalgaon thermal power project, which had devastated the environment in a radius of 12 kilometres to the extent that people face various problems due to high levels of ash from the burnt coal in the air from that plant.

People were promised proper compensation even for those who are not able to provide land papers due to various reasons. This promise was not kept and many farmers have been running from pillar to post for 11 years. They are even being forced to pay bribes to the officials.

So far, the only relief was that the lands are still under farmers' possession, but now with a public sector project being handed over to Adani and inauguration done by the PM, people are being served with fresh notices to vacate their lands. These eviction notices have

mentioned many orchards and lands with cash trees as barren lands. In Kamalpur village, the team found fifty farmers belonging to Yadav community have not received any compensation. While one villager, Vakil Yadav, who owns a 14 rooms house was approved a meagre compensation for the land only at the rate 40 thousand rupees per decimal.

Villagers also expressed their concern for the damage to the environment after felling of lakhs of trees.

With the inauguration, the lands have formally been handed over to Adani. There is no clarity as to how the promises made by the state government, most of them verbally, to the farmers will now be fulfilled. Villagers are fearing forcible evictions by Adani group with the help of administrative machinery and local henchmen backed by the ruling party leaders, as has been seen in many states. ■

Modi-Adani's Godda Treachery

Bhagalpur acquisition by Adani is being publicised as a venture that will generate 10-12 thousands jobs. A similar promise was made by Adani group CEO Rajesh Chandra Jha on 12 December 2017 when he signed an MOU with the then Raghobar Das' BJP government in Jharkhand for a power plant in Godda, which later on turned out to be a blatant lie.

The Adani Power (Jharkhand) Ltd. had acquired 558 acres of land in Godda, of which 517 acres was taken forcibly from farmers. Villagers who lost two or more acres of land were then promised jobs or an extra compensation amount of Rs. five lakhs. The promise of jobs was later turned out to be false even after people were made to undergo proper training. Jobs were given only as casual contract workers. The farmers are still agitating against this betrayal through legal as well as movemental means. Initially Adani had demanded 1363.15 acres including

1214.49 acres of private land belonging to local people, and it is still pressuring the government for more acquisitions to further expand its power plant and the coal block.

The Adani Power in Jharkhand employs a total workforce of 3316 by 14 July 2025. In March this year Adani group 'transferred' its 180 employees to a private contractor. This included 50 workers who were given jobs in exchange for their lands. When they protested they were forcibly suppressed, later given a hollow promise that the permanent job will be given when there will be vacancies.

The promises of protecting the environment and of social welfare measures also turned hollow. The local population still suffers from scarcity of electricity while the power produced to Godda is meant only to be exported to Bangladesh. Besides lands, Jharkhand is also being deprived of its coal and 36 MCM river water every year by this

Adani project and gets nothing in return.

After the commencement of Godda power plant there is a rise in lung related ailments in the area as was revealed by a research team. The air quality index (AQI) worsened from earlier 80 to 120 presently and acidity in water has increased from pH 6.8 to 5.5. The affected area is given the status of special economic zone (SEZ) covering 11 villages directly but includes more villages through various subsidiary activities. The area comes under the SPT Act which prohibits acquisitions, but the government misused the clause pertaining to public welfare. How can a plant producing electricity exclusively for sale in a neighbouring country be considered of public welfare?

The official record claims that about 400 families have been displaced comprising a total population of 1500, but many independent agencies' estimate this number at 5000 minimum. A promise was made for 10000 jobs generation which was never fulfilled. ■

Diaspora Communities Must Unite to Resist the Rise of Fascism in Britain

▲ SOUTH ASIA SOLIDARITY GROUP

The 'unite the kingdom' rally called by Tommy Robinson in Central London on 13th September, with well over 1 lakh people attending, was the biggest far-right mobilization seen in Britain, far exceeding those of British Union of Fascists' Oswald Mosley in the 1930s or the neo-fascist National Front which targeted South Asian and Caribbean communities in the 1970s. Its size and the fact that it far outnumbered the counter-demonstrators has only further underlined the fact that a much more powerful and effective anti-racist and anti-fascist political movement has to be built in Britain.

Electoral, support for Nigel Farage's far-right Reform is rapidly growing. On the streets, racist attacks are escalating. But the Union Jack and St George's 'England' flag-covered rally was very much a spectacle orchestrated by the global far-right, who not only funded the event, overwhelmingly attended by people from outside London (many of whom were fairly well off) but have funded the rise to global visibility of 'Tommy Robinson' (real name: Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) and his rabid Islamophobic rhetoric. The star speaker at the rally was South African-origin tech billionaire Elon Musk, who hysterically proclaimed that 'we either fight back or die'. Musk has been responsible for promoting Robinson on 'X' after he bought and renamed Twitter, where Robinson had previously been banned for hate speech. Another US tech billionaire, Robert Shillman, a

close ally of Israel and Netanyahu, has extensively funded Robinson, who was earlier unknown outside Britain where he was a fringe figure, a violent racist who has a string of convictions for assault and fraud.

As he has shifted from generalized racism to a focus on Islamophobia, Robinson has also been embraced by several Hindutva groups in the diaspora and in India. In 2022 he was invited to speak on the RSS's OplIndia channel in the wake of Sangh-orchestrated communal violence in the British town of Leicester, and claimed he would send men to help 'defend' Hindus. And after the September 13 rally, he was platformed on News 18 to wish the PM happy birthday and express his deep admiration for Modi. Robinson has condemned the horrific racially motivated rape of a young Sikh woman in Oldbury (see below) but only on the basis that Hindus and Sikhs – unlike Muslims – should be considered 'good' immigrants who have 'integrated'. Needless to say, such distinctions between South Asians are not made by the racists on the streets inspired by Robinson and Farage, as racist attacks become ever more frequent. As well as the Oldbury attack, recent days have also seen a Bangladeshi teenager brutally assaulted with a baseball bat when trying to defend his mother from having her hijab pulled off by racists, and a 9-year old child being fired at with pellet guns by two white men who shouted racist abuse at her.

As well as established Muslim

communities, the other major focus of hate for this latest incarnation of Britain's far right are recently arrived migrants and refugees (also coded as Muslim). The summers of 2024 and 2025 have seen violent demonstrations outside the hostels and hotels where asylum seekers are forced to live, while being denied the right to work. In a classic example of fascist scapegoating, the far-right has claimed falsely that these people, many of whom are fleeing imperialist conflicts in which Britain is deeply involved, are 'living in luxury' at the state's expense while local communities are starved of resources. Fascist rhetoric, as elsewhere, seeks to conceal the fact that deepening poverty, unemployment, homelessness and the collapse of the National Health Service is driven by successive governments' neoliberal austerity policies, policies which the billionaires who fund Nigel Farage's Reform party and Tommy Robinson want to see further intensified. In reality too, working class people of colour, including South Asians, are among the worst affected by austerity.

As explained in the statement below, the current racist upsurge has been heavily enabled, rather than confronted, by the Labour government under Keir Starmer, who has tried to position his party as 'Reform-lite' in an obviously self-defeating strategy. Starmer's rhetoric on migration has mirrored the far-right and his government's immigration policies, under which no legal routes remain for refugees to enter the country (with the exception of those from Ukraine), have further dehumanized migrants. He has also embraced Islamophobic myths about Muslim men as the primary perpetrators of sexual exploitation through 'grooming gangs'.

This juncture inevitably evokes past struggles against acute racism in Britain which succeeded in the 1970s and 80s. Among South Asian communities this period saw unity between those of different countries of origin and religions – as well as with others facing racism, particularly Caribbean communities – which it is essential to rebuild today, challenging the undermining of this unity by the rise of fascism in India and the rise to centrality of Islamophobia in global racist ideology. This is why the united statement by more than 40 organisations calling for justice for the survivor of the Oldbury rape, reproduced below, was significant. Reactionary elements prominent in the survivor's community locally have tried to prevent, using violent threats, any protest against the rape, claiming that any protest would be 'taken over by Muslim fundamentalists and left extremists'. Despite this however, the wider community came together for a diverse and well-attended Vigil in support of the survivor, just days after the attack. ■

Justice for the Survivor of the Oldbury Attack! Fascists Off Our Streets!

As organisations representing South Asian, Black, migrant, and refugee communities and those fighting racism, we are horrified and enraged by the attack on Tuesday 9 September on a Sikh woman in Oldbury, Sandwell, in what police are describing as a racially motivated attack. The 20 year-old woman was raped and viciously beaten in broad daylight by two white men who reportedly told her: "You don't belong in this country, get out." We express our deepest solidarity with the survivor and pledge to stand by her unconditionally. We acknowledge her tremendous courage in coming forward to report this horrific crime of sexual and racial violence.

We pledge to work together to get justice for the survivor, and to counter the rise of the far-right, facilitated by successive governments, which has given rise to this heinous crime. Our long history of fighting racism in Britain has taught us that we can only resist and prevent such attacks if all communities facing racism act unitedly. The British state has made every effort to divide us in recent decades but we must not allow this strategy to succeed, or succumb to racist 'good/bad immigrant' narratives.

Misogyny and gendered violence has always been deeply embedded in racism and white supremacy. There are numerous instances of sexual violence against Black and racialised women by the police and other agents of the state, which go unreported or the survivors are not believed. In the last few years we have also seen the far-right weaponizing women's and children's safety to spread racist and Islamophobic myths such as the tropes that 'grooming gangs' primarily consist of Muslim men and that migrants, refugees and trans people are the source of sexual abuse. They have used these myths to organise the racist violence which is now happening on a huge scale. Meanwhile, while the far-right claims to be 'protecting' (white) women,

it is no surprise that at least two in five of those arrested for participating in last year's racist riots had previous convictions for domestic violence. The far-right racists, like fascists everywhere, target racialized women for particularly vicious violence, viewing them as dehumanized symbols of their communities. This is what has led to the horrific Oldbury attack.

We also hold Keir Starmer's government responsible for facilitating this ongoing violence by pandering to the far-right. He has embraced the far-right narrative that migrants are responsible for what are in fact the effects of successive Tory and Labour governments' policies of austerity. Starmer's notorious 'island of strangers' comment inspired by Enoch Powell, his repeated dog-whistle invocation of 'small boats' and his government's increasingly oppressive immigration policies have fuelled the racist and misogynistic violence that we are now experiencing on our streets.

It is shameful that, at the time of writing, no government minister has made any statement of condemnation or concern about what happened in Oldbury. On the contrary, the Home Office appears to have instructed the police not to use live facial recognition (which is routinely used for surveillance and harassment of Black communities) on the participants in the massive fascist demonstration in London just four days later, despite the fact that police are still searching for suspects in the case.

We demand justice for the survivor of the Oldbury attack!

Fascists off our streets!

Keir Starmer: stop pandering to the far-right!

(Signed by South Asia Solidarity Group, Million Women Rise Movement, Black Lives Matter UK, Sikh Women's Aid, Birmingham Black Sisters, Indian Workers Association (GB), Nijjor Manush, Women of OWAAD, Migrants' Rights Network, Shaheed Udham Singh Welfare Centre – Women@ the Centre Group and 36 other organisations. More info @ southasiasolidarity.org) ■

Hands Off Venezuela: Defending People, Land, Sovereignty

▲ LUNA JJ

The Caribbean has once again become a zone of tension. The United States has increased its military presence under the pretext of combating drug trafficking, while foreign powers and companies continue to extract Venezuela's resources. For us, this is not a distant political story. It is a direct challenge to our sovereignty and the ideals of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Venezuela has never sought to invade or dominate another country. We are a nation of culture, resistance, and peace. Yet when warships armed with advanced missiles patrol our waters, we cannot remain passive. We deploy troops, reinforce coastal defenses, and activate naval and river patrols not out of aggression but because defending peace is our duty. In the Essequibo region, we monitor resource extraction and assert our legal rights while avoiding unnecessary conflict.

Our lives continue to be battered by US-led economic sanctions since 2017. Despite government efforts such as bonuses, food packages, and student subsidies, ordinary citizens still bear the daily burden. The sanctions block access to oil

revenues, foreign currency, and basic goods, challenging our very survival. Yet we continue to stand with resilience, determined to defend our freedom and protect our dignity.

Our Bolivarian Revolution may not be perfect, but it is ours. As long as teachers teach, students question, and people say "no one decides for us," sovereignty remains alive.

Our resistance extends far beyond borders and waters. We live it in classrooms, neighborhoods, and community spaces. We teach students to think critically, understand their rights, and recognize that sovereignty is defended through ideas, language, and awareness. Every lesson, every discussion is an act of cognitive sovereignty. We organize community kitchens, support local projects, and continue building the country from the ground up.

History shows why vigilance matters. From the US occupation of Cuba in 1898 and support for Panama in 1903 to the invasions of the Dominican Republic in 1916 and Grenada in 1983, foreign interventions have often been disguised as aid or security. Today, Venezuela faces a new version of that script. We are

not fooled by claims of "hemispheric security" or anti-narcotics operations. They mask political and economic interests. We remember, we resist, and we act.

International solidarity strengthens our efforts. Grassroots movements, unions, student organizations, and critical thinkers around the world speak out against sanctions, interference, and media distortions. This support is recognition, encouragement, and shared memory. It reminds us we are not alone and reinforces our belief that dignity is not negotiable.

I write this article to reach India as part of that bridge of dignity. There, people understand what it means to resist colonialism, defend their resources, and build sovereignty from the ground up. Your solidarity strengthens us and binds us together in the conviction that dignity must always be defended.

Venezuela continues to resist not through surrender but through every action that defends our sovereignty and our people. The Bolivarian Revolution belongs to us. It is imperfect but real. As long as we teach, question, and organize, our country will remain free, dignified, and unbowed.

(Luna JJ, is an English teacher who works in a public school and lives in Cota 905, Caracas) ■

CPIML Delegation Visits Venezuelan Embassy to Express Solidarity Against U.S. Aggression

On 10 September 2025, a delegation of CPI(ML) Liberation Central Committee members Comrade Prabhat Kumar, Comrade Rajiv Dimri (General Secretary, AICCTU), and Comrade Purushottam Sharma (National Secretary, AIKM) undertook a solidarity visit to the Embassy of Venezuela in New Delhi.

The delegation held a meeting with Alfredo Caldera, Counsellor of the Embassy, and conveyed strong solidarity with the people of Venezuela in the face of renewed U.S.-led

imperialist aggression. They also presented a poster declaring "Hands Off Venezuela" as part of the global campaign against U.S. intervention.

After signing the Embassy's declaration condemning U.S. threats and war manoeuvres that endanger peace and stability in the Caribbean and Latin American regions, the CPI(ML) delegation emphasised that this escalation is part of a wider imperialist offensive threatening global peace, from the Israel-U.S.-led genocide in Gaza to imperialist aggressions across West Asia. The CPI(ML) Liberation leaders reaffirmed their steadfast support to the people of Venezuela in their struggle to defend independence, peace, and the historic gains of the Bolivarian Revolution. ■

Nationwide Strikes Against Macron's Austerity and Rising Far-Right Threat in France

Hundreds of thousands of workers, students, trade unions, and citizens have taken to the streets of France in a massive wave of strikes, marches, and blockades against President Macron's long-standing austerity agenda. Yesterday's "Block Everything" action saw 175,000 people participating in 550 rallies and 262 blockades across the country, with tens of thousands marching in Paris, Toulouse, Rennes, Marseille, Lyon, and Montpellier. The Macron regime responded with massive repression, with eighty thousand police deployed across the country carrying out sweeping arrests and suppression.

Opposition to Macron's policies

has been growing for years, as he has consistently pushed through cuts in pensions, healthcare, education, social welfare, public services, and wages. These measures have pushed ordinary people to the brink, while profits and dividends of the rich continue to be protected. The €44 billion austerity package freezes pensions in 2026, cuts billions from healthcare, caps ministry spending at 2025 levels, abolishes two national holidays, and slashes social welfare, public services, and transport subsidies, hitting the poorest hardest. Workers' wages are effectively frozen or reduced in real terms, while the wealthy continue to benefit. Framed as deficit reduction and funding for

rearmament, these policies shift the burden squarely onto working people and retirees.

The mounting protests contributed to the fall of Prime Minister François Bayrou's government. Despite overwhelming popular opposition, Macron ignored calls for progressive leadership and appointed right-wing conservative Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu as the new Prime Minister.

Macron's refusal to have a leftwing prime minister and continuing imposition of neoliberal austerity policies are not just making his government unpopular and unstable, it is also contributing to the alarming and relentless rise of the far-right in France. The anti-austerity struggle of the working class and progressive Left circles of France has to step up its vigilance against this growing fascist threat. ■

Solidarity with Global Sumud Flotilla Sailing to Break Siege on Gaza

CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya has extended the party's solidarity to the Global Sumud Flotilla, which is sailing to break the siege of Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid. In a letter dated September 12 addressed to the organisers and participants of the international mission, Dipankar saluted their determination and courage in confronting the genocide and blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel.

Writing on behalf of the people of India, he described the flotilla as "a brave voyage of defiance, determination and hope that sets sail against siege, genocide and

occupation." He noted that the ships of the flotilla carry not only supplies but also "the unyielding will of the world's peoples to stand with Palestine and the people of Gaza."

The letter condemned the continuing assault on Gaza, stating that "Gaza bleeds under bombs and blockade unleashed by fascist Israel, yet refuses to surrender. Children grow up amid ruins yet raise their voices in songs of freedom. Every attempt to crush Palestine only strengthens its roots, for a people fighting for dignity cannot be erased."

Dipankar hailed the courage of successive solidarity missions to Gaza, declaring that "no wall of oppression can hold back the tide of history. The Flotilla is that tide, reminding us that international and people-to-people solidarity is stronger than weapons, and that the seas themselves echo with the promise of liberation."

He affirmed that the struggles of the Indian people against oppression and injustice are linked with the Palestinian people's fight for freedom. The letter concluded with the call: "From the river to the sea, we join our voices with yours. Palestine will be free. Break the siege. End the genocide. End the occupation." ■



Betrayal of India's Anti-Colonial Legacy: CPI(ML) on Israeli Trade Delegation Visit

CPI(ML) strongly condemns the visit of Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to India and the signing of a Bilateral Investment Agreement with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in New Delhi on 8 September 2025. Smotrich is a notorious war criminal and a key architect of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza and its brutal apartheid regime against Palestinians. By welcoming

him and deepening trade ties, the Indian government has committed a grave betrayal of India's anti-colonial legacy and made itself complicit in Israel's crimes against humanity.

Smotrich, along with Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, faces arrest warrant applications from ICC prosecutors on charges of apartheid, incitement to genocide and war crimes, including calls to reoccupy Gaza and ethnic cleansing of Palestinian population.

This agreement comes at a time when Gaza is reeling under genocide, siege and starvation inflicted by

the Israel-US axis, and when Palestinians face daily dispossession and apartheid. Rather than aligning with global calls for accountability and standing with Palestine, the Government of India has chosen to legitimise Israel's genocidal policies.

The CPI(ML) demands that the Indian government withdraw from all economic, military and political ties with Israel and stand firmly for justice, freedom and dignity for Palestine. India must also join the global movement pressing for a comprehensive military embargo against Israel. ■

Stop Arrests of Refugees from African Countries in Delhi

CPI(ML) MP Rajaram Singh has written a letter dated 19 September 2025 to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding an immediate halt to the arrests of refugees from African countries in Delhi and the release of those already detained. The intervention follows disturbing reports of police raids in Malviya Nagar, where refugees from Sudan and Somalia have been picked up despite being recognised by the UNHCR as refugees.

Rajaram Singh noted that more than 25 refugees have been arrested,

leaving behind wives and children in extreme vulnerability, including risks of sexual violence. The instruction to disregard UNHCR-issued identity cards and to treat refugees as illegal foreigners was strongly criticised as a violation of international humanitarian norms, exposing the refugees to harassment and abuse of power.

The letter reminded the government that the National Human Rights Commission has already been tasked with drafting a law on refugee protection. In such a context, the arrests and detentions were described as unjustifiable and inhuman.

Rajaram Singh recalled Swami Vivekananda's 1893 Chicago address,

where he declared pride in India's tradition of sheltering the persecuted and refugees of all nations. The letter warned that the current treatment of African refugees contradicts this legacy and risks damaging India's relations with African nations, with possible repercussions for the Indian diaspora there. The example of the expulsion of Indians from Uganda was cited as a cautionary reminder.

The CPI(ML) MP urged the Prime Minister to immediately intervene, stop the arrests, and ensure the release of those already detained, reaffirming India's long tradition of solidarity with oppressed peoples across the world. ■

Protests Against Lynching of Vendor Md Mohsin Alam in Bihar

The CPI(ML) and the Patna Footpath Vendors' Union organised protest meetings in Patna on 20 September against the brutal mob lynching of vegetable seller Md Mohsin Alam at Kako Bazar, Jahanabad. The protests also demanded strict action against the BJP-backed criminal Vicky Patel, accused in the killing.

Speakers at the protests condemned the brutal killing of Md Mohsin Alam, the growing incidents of mob lynching, and criminal attacks on poor vendors and minorities under BJP rule.

They demanded justice for Md Mohsin Alam and protection for small vendors and workers across Bihar. ■



Chennai Sanitation Workers Protest for a Life of Dignity

▲ BHUVANA



The working and living conditions of Tamil Nadu's sanitation workers—and the lack of political will by the ruling government to address them—have become the centre of political discourse in the state, thanks to the 13-day protest beginning August 1, by over 2,000 sanitation workers from two of the 15 zones of the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC). The protest was organised under the leadership of the Toilers' Rights Forum (TRF), affiliated to LTUC and AICCTU.

A Brief Backdrop

Sanitation workers of Zones 5 and 6 of GCC, employed under the NULM (National Urban Livelihood Mission) scheme directly by the Corporation, have been opposing the outsourcing of the job of solid waste management. This follows a GCC resolution in April approving outsourcing for a monthly contract of Rs. 273 crores. Outsourcing comes with wage cuts, and for these workers—who have put in 5 to 20 years of service to keep the city clean—it means the end of their status as NULM workers from 01.08.2025, and thus illegal retrenchment and insecure jobs. The waste management has already been outsourced in other 11

zones when AIADMK was in power. The DMK led GCC has now decided to outsource two zones and such an attempt in another zone was stalled by the union through a combination of street and legal battles.

These sanitation workers—many of whom are Arundhathiyars, Adidraavidars, poor from all castes, and mainly women—belong to the very communities whose interests the DMK government claims to champion. For them, dignity has long been a major casualty, and neglect is systemic.

Eighty percent of these workers are women—many single mothers and sole breadwinners. They secured statutory minimum wages only after years of street struggles and court battles under the TRF banner. Their daily wages gradually increased from Rs. 410 to Rs.753 through struggles, amounting to a monthly salary of Rs.23,000. If outsourced, their wages would be slashed to Rs.15,000. They refused to accept a wage cut simply to fill corporate coffers as even Rs.23,000 that they were already getting was insufficient to manage their families in a city like Chennai.

In June 2025, sanitation workers of Zones 5 and 6 launched a mass campaign for permanency

and against outsourcing. Over 1,000 workers met lakhs of residents, raised Rs.7 lakh in funds, and won significant public support. Their campaign also had a legal dimension, with petitions for regularisation and against outsourcing.

On July 1, they staged a gherao of the GCC office at Ripon Building under the leadership of Comrade Bharathi, the president of AICCTU (TN) and TRF. Arrested and released on the same day, they refused to disperse until officials assured them of a meeting with the Commissioner. When this assurance was not honoured, they staged another demonstration on July 4 before the Collector's office.

On July 9, workers found contractor vehicles at the zonal office and immediately launched a road roko. The police detained them in two halls, and later released them after officials promised further talks. On July 25, five women workers began an indefinite hunger strike at the LTUC office demanding permanency and opposing outsourcing. Leaders from CPI, CPI(M), VCK, DMDK, SDPI, Thamizhar Vazhvurimai Katchi, CITU, AITUC, HMS, UTUC, and AIUTUC visited and extended support. On the third day, one woman fainted and was hospitalised, but others continued.

Forced by the hunger strike of women workers and also as directed by the court, on July 28, the government issued a GO referring the issue of outsourcing to the court which was received by the union on 30 July. As laid by section 33/1 of ID Act, any change in working conditions without the permission of the court during pendency of a dispute, is illegal and punishable. Hence, the working condition of sanitation workers can not be altered, including retrenchment in this case, without the permission of the court or until the court disposed off the matter.

Based on the reference of the

dispute to the court, the hunger strike was withdrawn. But the relief was short-lived. On 31.07.2025, workers were told that their NULM jobs had ended, and they were asked to join the contractor company Enviro Solutions from 01 Aug 2025. Workers launched a sit-in before GCC headquarters at Ripon Building which is at a prime location in the centre of the city protesting the action of the administration.

The 13-Day Sit-In Protest

Workers from Zones 5 and 6 began their sit-in protest from August 1, at Ripon Building demanding restoration of their NULM jobs and against the outsourcing. Their struggle went viral on social media, drawing wide support—from CPI, CPI(M), VCK to BJP, from CTUs to celebrities, students, advocates, and democratic forces across Tamil Nadu. The ruling DMK led state government and the corporation, however, stood firmly against workers and for outsourcing.

The protest quickly became a “talk of the town.” People at large understood and supported the demand. Except for a few pro-DMK YouTube channels, social media rallied behind the workers. Mainstream media too carried regular coverage. Neelam Social, run by a film director Pa. Ranjith, documented the protest daily and released a powerful short documentary.

Meanwhile, garbage piled up in both zones, posing health hazards for locals. Solidarity demonstrations spread to other districts, with AICCTU and CITU organising protests. CPIM State Secretary Com. Shanmugam and VCK President Com. Thirumavalavan met the Chief Minister, urging a solution.

Negotiations began and around seven rounds of talks were held involving ministers and GCC authorities. The government insisted

that privatisation was a government policy and cannot be withdrawn, but workers stood firm and said a loud “No outsourcing.” As the Independence Day was nearing, workers waved the tricolour and declared: “No freedom without permanency”

Police Crackdown

On August 13, the Madras High Court, acting on a ruling party sponsored PIL, directed the police to evict protestors from the unauthorised place. Hundreds of police personnel surrounded Ripon Building the same night. Roads were blocked, the area cordoned off, and the Ripon Building was lit in tricolour when the eviction and the crackdown began at midnight.

Women were dragged and thrown into vans by women police. Leaders including Comrade Bharathi, Janakiraman, Suresh, and Jothi were forcibly detained. Over 1,000 workers were arrested, sent to eight remote locations in the city and held for 24 hours. Many were injured, some fainted but were not treated. Chaos reigned, and for hours families did not know where their loved ones were.

They were released only the next evening (August 14), after the intervention by the High Court based on a Habeas Corpus petition. Advocates associations staged joint protests demanding the release of Comrade Bharathi, other advocates and workers. Solidarity demonstrations by AICCTU and other organisations were held across the state.

After the Crackdown

Undeterred by the state repression, workers gathered at the LTUC office, on August 15, observed Independence Day and pledged to carry the struggle forward. On the same day, GCC announced that it would postpone outsourcing plans in Zones 4 and 8 until the assembly

elections in 2026 in order to avoid workers unrest — a significant victory for the protestors.

Meanwhile, the courts barred Comrades Bharathi and Suresh from speaking or writing on sanitation workers, even when the court ordered a one-person commission to probe into police excesses on the midnight of August 13-14 which was subsequently withheld by the court when the judges were changed. False cases were slapped against union leaders, including Comrades Kumarasami, Bharathi, Suresh, Eraniappan, and Adhiyaman.

The battle is on. The union petitioned to resume the protest at a designated site, but the police refused saying that it can cause a law and order problem. Workers, however, continue to adopt novel forms of protests. On 29.08.2025, over 1,300 workers individually submitted letters at zonal offices demanding reinstatement under NULM. A protest public meeting organised at Chennai, as a part of the state call of AICCTU, was attended by more than 1000 workers and was addressed by comrade Kumarasami. Workers assembled at May day Park in Chennai on 4 Sep to discuss future plans but were rounded off by the police, arrested and released only at night. The media was prohibited from meeting workers by the police which was condemned by the Chennai Media associations. 13 women sanitation workers' leaders began their hunger strike at their house, a private place in a sanitation workers slum on 8 September but were arrested within an hour and released past midnight. Workers again sat in front of the Toilers Statue in Marina Beach the next day but were again arrested by the police. Workers continued their hunger fast under police custody as well. Workers relentlessly continue with protests in various forms and places in Chennai.

AICCTU called for statewide protest demonstrations on August 14th and September 2 condemning police attempts to silence AICCTU and LTUC leaders by slapping false cases and demanding permanency and implementation of minimum wages for all sanitation workers in Tamil Nadu as per GO 62.

AICCTU and All India Municipal and Sanitation Workers Federation (AIMSWF) declared an all India protest day 18 August and protest demonstrations were held across the country.

AICCTU, LTUC and TRF conducted a propaganda campaign seeking justice for sanitation workers from 10 to 17 September, covering eight districts. The campaign was to be inaugurated by the state president of AICCTU, Comrade Bharathi, on 10 September at Coimbatore, but permission was denied at the originating place itself. Still, the campaign was launched by Comrade Bharathi through a meeting of sanitation workers at the Pricol Workers' Union office. Another meeting planned at a community hall in a workers' locality was also denied permission, and finally the meeting was held at a worker's house and was addressed by Comrades Desikan, Govindaraj and Balasubramanian.

Despite heavy obstacles created by the police and the state, the campaign was successfully carried out. Programmes were conducted across the state including in Chennai, Tenkasi and other districts. The workers and the unions remain determined to carry forward the struggle for permanency, minimum wages, and against outsourcing and false fabricated cases. ■

West Champaran Observes 29th Martyrdom Anniversary of Comrade Safayat Ansari

The West Champaran District Committee of the CPI(ML) Liberation organised a Shaheed Mela on September 14 to mark the 29th martyrdom anniversary of Comrade Safayat Ansari, who was killed 29 years ago by the feudal-criminal nexus of Champaran. The event paid tribute to Comrade Safayat and other martyrs of the people's struggles in the district.

Comrade Safayat Ansari had been targeted by feudal forces who sought to crush the assertion of the landless poor and small peasants through violence. But their designs failed, as the revolutionary communist movement has continued to grow in Champaran. Since his martyrdom, the CPI(ML) has organised the Shaheed Mela every year in his memory and

in honour of all martyrs of people's struggles.

In the 2020 Assembly elections, while the NDA captured all seats in West Champaran, Sikta constituency elected CPI(ML)'s Comrade Virendra Gupta, keeping alive the legacy of Safayat Ansari's struggle.

Speaking at the anniversary meeting, CPI(ML) leaders asserted that the legacy of Champaran's martyrs remains a guiding light for today's struggles. Paying homage, the General Secretary of CPI(ML) underlined: "We must all unite against the new attempts by communal-feudal fascist forces to disenfranchise and suppress Dalits and marginalised communities. The fighting people of Bihar will resist and defeat these forces."

The spirited gathering concluded with renewed resolve to carry forward the struggle for justice and to free Bihar from the anti-people misrule of Modi and Nitish. ■

Mazdoor Mukti Morcha Punjab Stages Sit-In Demanding Resumption of MNREGA Works

Mazdoor Mukti Morcha Punjab (Liberation) staged a sit-in on September 1 in Block Jhunjir of Mansa district demanding the immediate resumption of MNREGA works. Hundreds of workers gathered in front of the BDPO office and submitted a memorandum to officials outlining their demands.

The memorandum outlined a series of demands including the reduction of MNREGA working hours from eight to six, withdrawal of amendments in labour laws, permanentisation of MNREGA mates, increase in minimum wages, and bringing the farming of small farmers under MNREGA. Workers also demanded that Gram Panchayats ensure maintenance of crops, a daily

MNREGA wage of Rs. 1000, 200 days of work per year, and an end to the practice of contracting in MNREGA. Additional demands included allowances for work beyond five kilometers, transport arrangements for distant work sites, improved network facilities, and compensation for losses due to floods including Rs. 10 lakh per person for loss of life, Rs. 5 lakh per family for house damage, and Rs. 70 thousand per acre for crop loss.

The dharna was addressed by CPI (ML) Liberation Central Committee member Comrade Rajwinder Rana and Mazdoor Mukti Morcha Punjab District President Comrade Balwinder Singh Gharanga.

The protest highlighted growing frustration among workers over stalled projects and inadequate compensation, and the organisers warned of further mobilisation if the government fails to meet their demands.

Villagers Dedicate Pond to Anti-Feudal Martyrs on 60th Anniversary in Siwan

On September 5, Dubba village in Darauli panchayat, Siwan (Bihar), marked a historic occasion today as villagers and CPI(ML) leaders came together to honour the memory of Comrades Ramvriksh Bhagat, Radha Bhagat, and Ramvrat Kohar, who were martyred on 15 July 1965 in the struggle against feudal domination.

The villagers dedicated the local pond—once seized by feudal forces but now collective property of the panchayat—to the martyrs by installing a panel of statues on its bank. CPI(ML) General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya,

Darauli MLA from CPI(ML) Comrade Satyadeo Ram, and Panchayat Mukhia Comrade Lal Bahadur Kushwaha together unveiled the statues, paying tribute to the martyrs' sacrifice. They hailed the struggle for dignity and rights as a beacon for ongoing battles against feudal oppression and injustice.

Hundreds of villagers from across the panchayat attended the memorial meeting, along with more than forty members of the Bhagat family. Among them was 75-year-old Nathuni Bhagat, son of martyr Ramvriksh Bhagat, who travelled from Siliguri with others to participate.

The programme was addressed by Comrade Dharendra Jha, MLAs Comrade Amarjit Kushwaha and Comrade Amarnath Yadav, CCM Comrade Naimuddin Ansari, AIPWA Bihar President Comrade Sohila Gupta, and District Secretary Comrade Hansnath Ram.

Speakers recalled how the martyrdom of Ramvriksh and Radha Bhagat and the disappearance of their brother Heera Bhagat had shaken the village in 1965, forcing many families to flee. Yet, they emphasized, the courage of the martyrs and the resilience of Dubba's people transformed tragedy into inspiration for future generations.

The meeting resolved to carry forward the martyrs' legacy of anti-feudal struggle, social justice, and people's unity. ■

Special Survey Workers in Bihar Demand Permanent Jobs



Thousands of special survey contract workers took out a protest march on 11 September on the roads of Patna under the leadership of AICCTU, Mahasangh (Gope) and Special Survey Contract Workers and Engineers Association against the brutal police lathi charge on the dismissed (7480) protestors in front of BJP State Office yesterday where they were raising slogans against

their dismissal, and for immediate reinstatement and fulfillment of five point demands.

Their demands include regularisation of the services of all special survey workers, stop police repression of protesters, implementation of the same honorarium as per regular posts of AE-JE-UDC. During the demonstration, the workers protested against the

dictatorship of the government by lighting the flashlight of their mobile phones.

CPIML Legislative Council Member cum Scheme Workers leader Shashi Yadav and AICCTU National Secretary Ranvijay Kumar addressed the march at Buddha Smriti Park. They said that instead of providing jobs to the youth, the BJP-JDU government is snatching jobs from the youth and when the youth are protesting for job restoration and their demands, they are resorting to lathicharge. The Nitish government does not have the courage to negotiate, so the government is resorting to police repression and harassment.

The government should immediately take back the special survey contract workers in service by withdrawing the dismissal order and make their service permanent and fulfill all the legitimate demands. The youth of Bihar will strongly reply to the dictatorial attitude of the BJP-JDU government. ■

IIDEA Protests Against TCS Layoffs in Bengaluru

The IT & ITES Democratic Employees Association (IIDEA) staged a demonstration in front of the TCS Whitefield campus on September 5 to protest the company's mass layoffs and exploitative employment practices.

The protest was organised in response to TCS's recent decision to lay off 12,261 employees, mainly affecting mid- and senior-level professionals, alongside the imposition of a new deployment policy that compels employees to

maintain 225 billable days per year. IIDEA also highlighted serious concerns regarding TCS's recruitment practices. More than 500 professionals who received offer letters with joining dates in July 2025 are still awaiting clarity. Many of them had resigned from previous jobs in anticipation of joining TCS and are now facing financial and professional uncertainty.

Addressing the gathering, IIDEA leaders emphasised that automation and artificial intelligence should serve to improve work-life balance rather than destroy livelihoods. They urged TCS to focus on reskilling employees, reducing excessive work

hours, and providing job security during technological transitions. The association has called for an immediate halt to all layoffs, a stop to forced resignations under false claims, fair severance and healthcare support, and transparency in layoff criteria. It also demanded that workers be consulted before any restructuring and that automation be deployed to reduce workload rather than eliminate jobs.

The protest reflects growing concerns among IT professionals over job insecurity and exploitative work practices in the sector, and signals the need for greater accountability from major technology companies. ■

OBITUARY

P.V. Ramana Reddy

Comrade P.V. Ramana Reddy, member of the Andhra Pradesh State Committee of CPI(ML) Liberation, passed away on 14 September 2025 at 9:30 a.m. in Vijayawada. Comrade Ramana Reddy, aged 73, had been battling advanced-stage bone cancer.

A lifelong revolutionary, Comrade Ramana Reddy joined CPI(ML) Liberation five years ago, after decades of commitment to the communist movement since his student days. He was a well-known leader of the revolutionary movement in Andhra Pradesh, and throughout his life, he consistently upheld and cherished the unity of the communist movement in the country.

CPI(ML) Liberation pays rich and revolutionary tributes to Comrade P.V. Ramana Reddy, who dedicated his entire life to the cause of the people and the revolutionary movement. ■



Sankarshan Thakur

Veteran journalist Sankarshan Thakur, passed away on September 8, 2025, at the age of 63, following a prolonged illness. His death marks the end of an era in Indian journalism, leaving behind a legacy of fearless reporting, incisive political analysis, and literary excellence. At the time of his passing he was editor of the Kolkata-based English daily The Telegraph.

Son of renowned Emergency era editor and writer Janardan Thakur, Sankarshan began his journey in journalism at a young age.

One of the last few surviving journalists in today's print media with the courage to speak truth to power, he was also a perceptive chronicler of Bihar society and politics. His writing was characterized by keen political insight, deep empathy for the subjects he covered, and a distinctive personal style.

CPIML conveys its deepest condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues. His legacy of courage, empathy, and dedication to democratic values will continue to guide all who fight for justice, truth, and the rights of the people. ■



Free India's Prisoners of Conscience



The Delhi High Court order of 2 September rejecting the bail pleas of nine activists – Sharjeel Imam (2044 days), Khalid Saifi (2015 days), Meeran Haider (1980 days), Gulfisha Fatima (1972 days), Shifa Ur Rehman (1955 days), Umar Khalid (1815 days), Athar Khan, Mohd Saleem Khan and Shadab Ahmed – who have been unjustly incarcerated for years is a travesty of justice. These young leaders and activists have been jailed under fabricated charges by the Delhi Police, without a shred of credible evidence.

The so-called “larger conspiracy,” as termed by the police in the case, actually lies in the nexus between the police and right-wing Hindutva groups. The communal polarisation openly fanned by BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra, and the silence and complicity of the Delhi Police, represent the true conspiracy behind the February 2020 violence. Instead of holding the real culprits accountable, the state has chosen to persecute those who stood up against communal violence and led democratic protests against the unconstitutional CAA-NRC.

Their prolonged incarceration is a political conspiracy to silence dissenting voices and intimidate movements that resist the communal and authoritarian agenda, and the failure of the judiciary to stand in defence of civil liberties reflects the serious erosion of democratic institutions in the country. We hope the Supreme Court will take cognisance of this injustice and travesty, and uphold the fundamental right to liberty.

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