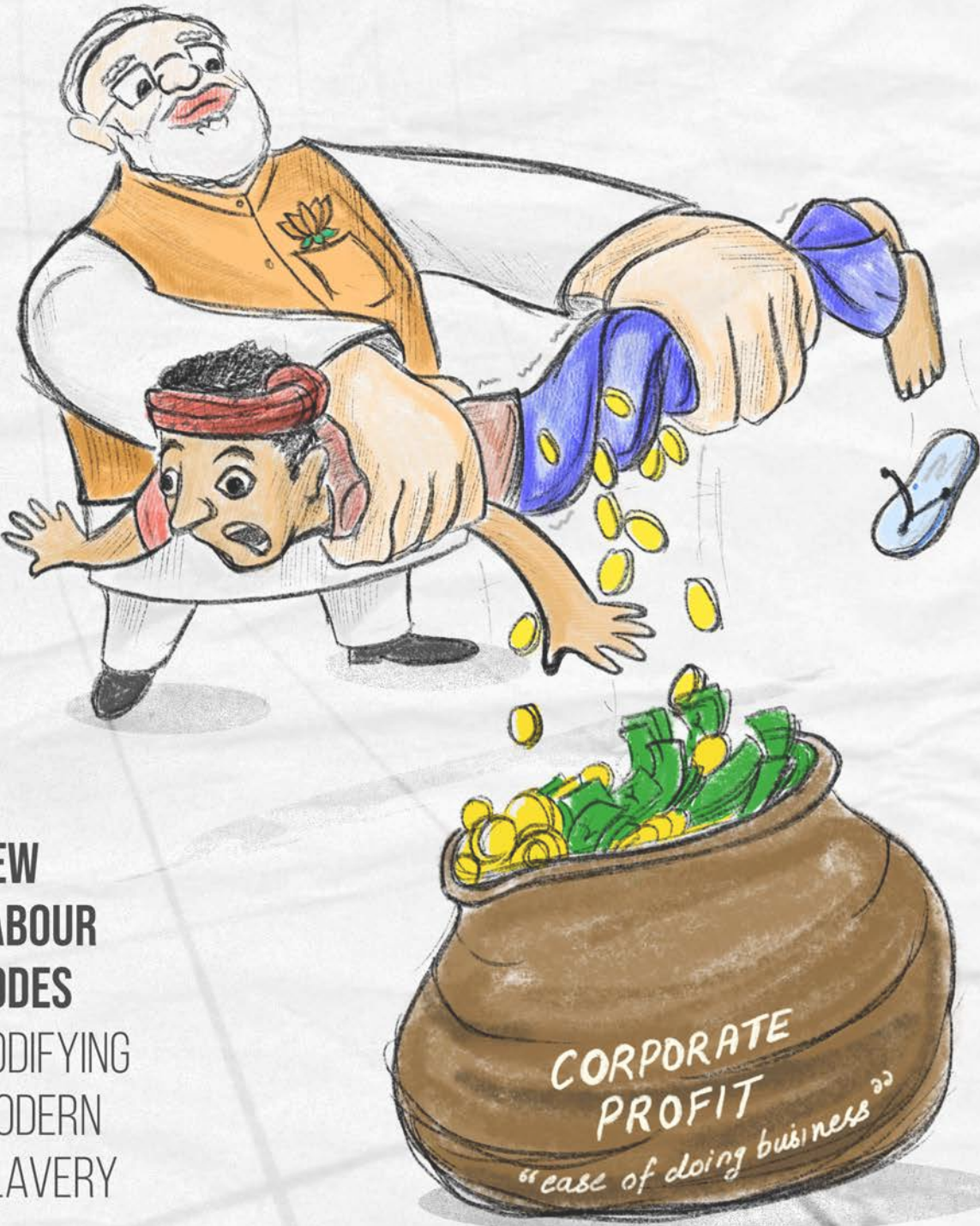


DECEMBER 2025
Rs. 25

Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)



**NEW
LABOUR
CODES**
CODIFYING
MODERN
SLAVERY

Labour Codes Implementation: Codifying Modern Slavery For 'Ease of Business'

The Union Government on November 21 notified the implementation of the four Labour Codes, despite strong opposition from workers and the toiling masses. The four Labour Codes - the Code on Wages, 2019; the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020; the Social Security Code, 2020; and the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 - though presented in the name of "labour reform," are essentially tools that codify modern slavery and exploitation for the benefit and profiteering of big businesses and corporate interests, all under the banner of "Ease of Doing Business."

These Codes drastically dilute industrial safety compliance, wage and welfare requirements, and effectively dismantle hard-earned rights of workers, including the right to form associations and take collective action. The thresholds for implementing safety measures and welfare provisions have been raised in favour of business, pushing a large section of the working class into conditions resembling bondage and paving the way for further informalisation and contractualisation of labour. The objective

and purpose of the four Labour Codes are not reforms, but to snatch away the rights and safety of workers in the name of facilitating corporate profiteering.

The Labour Codes, along with the recent draft Shram Shakti Niti 2025, reflect the regressive and anti-labour character of the Modi regime, which treats workers and the toiling masses of this country as expendable and attempts to push them into conditions of servitude.

CPI(ML) Liberation calls for the immediate withdrawal of these arbitrary and anti-people Labour Codes, and demands the convening of the Indian Labour Conference (ILC), which has been kept in abeyance by the Modi regime for the past ten years.

We call upon the people to extend their support and join the Day of Resistance and Defiance on 26 November 2025, called by the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and independent industrial federations, along with peasants led by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), in opposition to the implementation of the Labour Codes and to demand the withdrawal of the draft Shram Shakti Niti 2025.



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Bihar Elections and After: The Pledge of November 26



The November 2025 elections to the Bihar Assembly were the only state elections scheduled for 2025. The elections happened in the shadow of two unprecedented pre-poll interventions by the Indian state. The electoral rolls of Bihar were completely rewritten through a surgical exercise called Special Intensive Revision or SIR. Close to seven million names were deleted at one go and more than two million voters were inducted, effecting major alterations in the electoral roll across the state. And then ten days before the elections were finally announced, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar jointly launched an unprecedented money transfer scheme to deposit Rs. 10,000 in the accounts of some 15 million women. The money transfer in instalments continued through the poll period and 180,000 beneficiary women volunteers were deployed on poll duty.

The outcome of an election held under such extraordinary circumstances has turned out to be equally extraordinary. A government in power for twenty long years has retained office with close to eighty-five percent majority. A chief minister whose health conditions have of late been a matter of growing public concern and whose popularity rating stood at a distant number two or even number three in the opinion poll tracker for the entire year, has now been sworn in for the tenth time. With the BJP taking away the home ministry portfolio from the Chief Minister to assign it to Samrat Choudhary, one of the two deputy chief ministers, both belonging to the BJP, it is however abundantly clear that more than ever before the government in Bihar will now work under the BJP's control.

In its bid to retain power the BJP has of course made a whole host of promises to the people of Bihar. From one crore jobs and employment opportunities and one crore lakhpati didis (women with an annual

income of more than Rs. 100,000) to one factory in every district and ten industrial parks and 100 MSME parks across the state, the NDA manifesto is replete with ambitious promises for all sections of the people. Amit Shah also promised to make Bihar flood-free and give two lakh rupees to each woman who got 10,000 rupees under the Mahila Rozgar Yojana. While these promises are likely to be forgotten quickly as jumlas, the signal given by awarding the Pirpainti power project to the Adani group through a lucrative deal that has been dubbed a Rs. 62,000 crore scam by a former energy minister of the Modi regime and the BJP's declared desperation to implement the Bulldozer Raj model of UP in Bihar should perhaps be taken far more seriously.

For the Modi government and the RSS, currently celebrating its centenary, the Bihar victory of course marks a moment meant to be seized and used to advance the Sangh brigade's fascist agenda across the country and especially in the states that are going to the polls next - Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The SIR is already underway in twelve states with its characteristic haste and arbitrariness. Disturbing reports of deaths of BLOs under the pressure of SIR targets are being received from several states from

West Bengal to Rajasthan and from Gujarat to Kerala. Far from holding the ECI accountable for its dubious role in subverting India's electoral system, a public statement has been issued in the name of 272 retired bureaucrats, judges and military officials, all aligned with the BJP, condemning Rahul Gandhi for questioning the ECI.

While celebrating the Bihar landslide, Narendra Modi made it clear that his expedition is now all set to enter West Bengal exactly as the river Ganga, his favourite metaphor for his political trajectory since his 2014 arrival in Varanasi, flows from Bihar into West Bengal. Unmitigated centralisation of power around one party and unregulated concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands are the twin props that define the Modi era. The Supreme Court order that had stopped Governors from making a mockery of federal distribution of powers by fixing a time frame for clearing bills passed by state governments has now been overturned. Trade union rights protected by existing labour laws are now being summarily replaced by four new codes of slavery that give a free hand to the corporate policy of hire and fire.

And to clear the entire tribal belt of Central India for unregulated corporate plunder, adivasi

fighters are being systematically exterminated to crush the adivasi claim for constitutional rights. Even as BJP leaders got a video message from Madvi Pojje, mother of young adivasi Maoist leader Madvi Hidma asking her son to come home, Hidma and his comrades were killed in a fake encounter on 18 November. Ironically, the killing happened hours after the 150th birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, in a district named after Alluri Sitarama Raju, another iconic anti-colonial hero who was executed by the British colonial rulers hundred years ago on 7 May 1924.

Emboldened by two successive electoral landslides, Maharashtra in November 2024 and Bihar in November 2025, the Modi government and the RSS will now be in a hurry to seal their century-long wait to redefine and redesign India according to their ideology. This November 26 when we observe the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India and the fifth anniversary of the historic farmers' movement and the worker-peasant mass strike that forced the Modi government to repeal the farm laws of corporate takeover a year later, we must accept the challenge posed by the heightened fascist aggression with all our might. ■

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PART ONE

Hundred-plus Years of Aggressive Hindutva: An Overview

▲ ARINDAM SEN

No political discourse in India today can start without referencing the calamitous SIR. We have discussed the practical-political dimensions of its application and here we propose to glance at it from a broader historical perspective, underscoring its fascist overtones.

SIR: More than Election Theft

The nationwide SIR, which is a stepping stone to the notorious NRC and closely linked with allied operations like EVM and voter list manipulations, is arguably the most vicious attack on the most elementary democratic right of the citizenry: the right to free and fair elections, which entail the right to vote, the right to participate in the political process, the right to elect and eject governments. This is a meticulously planned conspiracy to pull down the very foundation of parliamentary democracy, to annihilate the basic spirit of the Indian constitution. In this sinister game plan, the saffron fascists are faithfully following their Godfather who ruled Germany in the 1930s

Indian Version of Nazi Citizenship Acts

Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 and started reconstructing his country into what RSS would call 'Aryan Rashtra'. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935¹ legally divided people into "Aryans" and "Jews," and citizens were asked to prove "Aryan descent" through documents like the Ahnenpass (Ancestral Passport) and Ariernachweis (Proof of Aryan Descent), tracing family lines back to grandparents or great-grandparents. By 1938–39, Jews were specially marked through census and registration drives, special identity papers stamped with "J," and forced name changes ("Israel" or "Sara"). Those unable to produce Aryan proof were expelled from jobs, universities, and professions. Eventually, this data provided the basis for preparing lists of people to be thrown into concentration camps and gas chambers. Thus, what was launched as an innocuous population registration programme, quickly metamorphosed into a mechanism of segregation, deportation, persecution and genocide.

In our country, a similar process is going on slowly, haltingly but *steadily*: recall how

the NDA mandated the creation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC) when it came to power in 2003, resumed the work as soon as it had the opportunity in 2014, announcing the NPR as the first step towards NRC, and then went on introducing a complete package of three measures with a flexible "chronology" – and now we have the monstrous all-India SIR. They have to work like this, because the Sanghi juggernaut lacks the kind of absolute power the Fuehrer possessed, and needs to maintain at least a semblance of the democratic process. This limitation they are trying to overcome by very many means, technological as well as political. They enjoy the services of the latest computing technologies including AI to prepare, process, and do almost whatever they want to with voter lists, EVM machines, vote-counting processes, and what not. Their political assets include docile Election Commission and Supreme Court, the godi media, and of course, the integrated network of 'IT Cell' and local rumour mills – to name only a few.

The similarity between the Nazi and the Sanghi citizenship Acts is abundantly clear. That holds true in some other instances too. But they are no copycats. They have *long roots in ancient India's religio-philosophical traditions* which, when suitably repackaged and served with trendy vibes, strike a soft chord with large sections of the majority community, including intellectuals and professionals. Moreover, the RSS emerged as a conservative, fundamentalist backlash against progressive social and political

[1] These included, inter alia, the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour", which banned marriage or sexual relations between Jews and "Aryans" and the "Reich Citizenship Law", which decreed that only people of "German or related blood" could be citizens of the Reich.

movements² in the 19th and 20th centuries, objectively serving the interests of dominant castes and classes. Without these ideological moorings and the support of ruling classes and castes, the RSS could not have grown to such power despite so many challenges and setbacks. This will be evident if we see how the so-called NGO actually evolved.



Prehistory of RSS

Long before the birth of the RSS, nationalism in India was thoroughly steeped in Hindu religious sentiment, a strong secular stream notwithstanding. In the 19th century, upper-caste Hindu elites began to form “Dharma Sabhas” (religious assemblies) to defend traditional Hindu practices and to counter Christian missionaries, Muslim reformers, and even Hindu reform movements like the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj. The first one was founded by Radhakanta Deb, a conservative Bengali zamindar, in Calcutta in 1830.

Punjab Hindu Sabha to Hindu Mahasabha

The Punjab Hindu Sabha, the first overtly political Hindu organization, was established in Karachi in 1909. Its leading light Lal Chand argued that Hindus had been historically weak because they lacked collective self-assertion and the Congress ideal of “self-abnegation” (tyāg or self-effacement) in the name

of “national unity” made Hindus subservient to the demands of Muslims. In *Self-Abnegation in Politics* (1917), he asserted:

“Politics knows no morality higher than self-preservation. The race which practices self-denial in the struggle for existence perishes by its very virtue.”

And further: “The Congress doctrine of self-effacement is a pious fraud. It disarms the Hindus while arming their rivals.”

Savarkar developed the clear-cut anti-Muslim nationalism to a new, more sophisticated plane. In 1923, while imprisoned in the Andamans’ Cellular Jail, Savarkar wrote *Essentials of Hindutva*, later expanding its core ideas in speeches and writings. To be very brief, he held that those who revere India—from the Indus valley to the seas—as both fatherland and holy land, proudly worshiping it as their own, are Hindus and form one indivisible nation. Muslims and Christians—whose holy lands are Mecca or Palestine (today we may call it Palestine/Israel)—may have lived here for generations, but do not truly love it as fatherland. Therefore, in truth they belong to other nations.

This thesis elevated “Hinduism” beyond sects and divisions into a single community -- unified via festivals like Diwali, pilgrimages, and the figure of Ram, whom almost all Hindu sects across the country love and worship. Savarkar set up his

Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 on this novel formulation.

Born in the Hellfire of Communal Riots

Savarkar’s work inspired another Maharashtrian Brahmin, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, to found the RSS in Nagpur in 1925. He consciously chose Vijaya Dashami for the occasion. Vijaya Dashami—that is, the day when Ram is said to have triumphed over Ravana. The saffron flag of Ramchandra—which Shivaji is also believed to have used—was adopted as the organization’s flag.

The socio-political backdrop to the birth of RSS deserves our attention. The Non-Cooperation Movement under Gandhi’s leadership and the Khilafat Movement led by the Ali brothers (Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali), Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Hasrat Mohani—these two streams of anti-British struggle converged around mid-1920, exerting tremendous pressure on the British government. An exemplary atmosphere of Hindus and Muslims fighting together against the common enemy developed. However, when Gandhi abruptly called off the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1922 following the Chauri Chaura incident, the spell of Hindu-Muslim camaraderie collapsed, and brazen communalism resurfaced. Hedgewar described the situation

[2] These included, apart from the Hindu-Muslim united struggle against the British government, the communist movement, and many other trends. The RSS actively defended traditional Hindu practices and therefore vehemently opposed even Hindu reform movements like the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, not to speak of the anti-Brahmin movement. According to Golwalkar, “The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis of our concept of a nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu Nationhood, and made many of the ‘freedom movements’ virtually anti-British movements. Anti-Britishism was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view has had disastrous effects upon the entire course of the freedom struggle, its leaders and the common people.” Golwalkar thus argued that defining nationhood on territorial grounds (i.e. people living in the same political borders) is “lifeless,” “unnatural,” and “unscientific.” He believed that what really binds a nation is cultural unity — religion, language, shared history — rather than just geography.

with fierce anti-Muslim hatred:

"As a result of the Non-Cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi ... the evils in social life which that movement generated were menacingly raising their head. As the tide of national struggle came to ebb, mutual ill-will and jealousies came on the surface. ... Conflicts between various communities had started. Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict was nakedly on view. ... The yavan-snakes [i.e. Muslims] reared on the milk of Non-Cooperation were provoking riots in the nation with their poisonous hissing." (From *Sri Guruji Samagra Prashikshan* Vol. IV, published by Suruchi Publication, New Delhi).

The RSS came into being and grew by capitalizing on this very situation. In 1927, during a riot in Nagpur, the RSS actively participated and started growing rapidly. In the same vein, it gradually expanded to other places as well.

It was not without a reason that Maharashtra became the cradle of militant Hindutva. As Anand Teltumbde points out³, the 1870s saw Jyotiba Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj spark an anti-Brahmin movement, carrying forward his programme of education, rationalism, and social equality. Brahmins were further alarmed when the 1911 Census divided the Hindu population into three categories – Hindus, Depressed Classes, and Animist Hindus (Tribes) – thereby institutionalising internal divisions within the so-called Hindu fold. This development profoundly unsettled the Brahminical leadership, which

had long assumed that the reins of political power would naturally pass into its hands once the British left India. By the early 1920s, the anxiety among the upper-caste elite of Nagpur was palpable: their historical monopoly over education, ritual authority, and nationalist politics was being challenged simultaneously from below by Dalit and Shudra movements and from outside by Muslim political assertion.

Upper-caste Hindus responded by organizing around the concept of an indivisible Hindu society (including Dalits). Freedom fighters like Tilak aligned this to anti-British struggle, but reactionary Brahminical sections branded Muslims as national foes, opting for anti-Muslim Hindu unity as the simplest and best path. Savarkar and Hedgewar embodied this strand, as outlined above.



Ideological Roots of RSS

The ideology and politics of RSS are solidly based on the annals of the warrior king Ram and the sermon on the battlefield of Kurukshetra delivered by Lord Krishna. These are the chief sources of its bellicose majoritarian nationalism: their reading of the epics provide moral justification for their permanent war against minorities, Dalits, 'urban Naxals', 'foreign agents' and infiltrators – a war that will, they expect, usher in a modern *Ram Rajya* ruled by someone like Ram or Shivaji (and now maybe the 'divinely born' Hinduhridayasamrat!).

War as Sacred Duty: Teachings of Ramayana and Gita

Savarkar and key RSS leaders passionately projected Ram as India's ethical-political ideal. "Our forefathers spoke of *Ram-rajya*. By this they meant not a kingdom of weakness, but a state founded on strength, national unity and fearless defence of the motherland" -- said Savarkar in his Presidential Address, Hindu Mahasabha, 1937 (*Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Vol. 4). He further observed, "Shri Ram is the ideal of a national hero, who defended his people, punished the wicked and founded a kingdom based on strength and dharma." (Collected Works of V.D. Savarkar, Vol. 3)

"In Shri Ram", Golwalkar declared in his Vijayadashami address at Nagpur in 1950, "we see dharma and national duty blended." (*Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan*, Vol. 3)

Divine Bellicosity: the Gita

As we know, the Bhagwat Gita has been the most popular source of inspiration to almost all sections of nationalists from Congress leaders like Tilak, Gandhi and Subhas Bose to national revolutionaries in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab in the 19th and 20th centuries. They interpreted and upheld the text in keeping with their own ideological-political outlooks. Even Ambedkar, from a standpoint very different from Gandhi's and Tilak's, referenced parts of the Gita on different occasions (for example, to explain the true purpose of his Satyagraha at Mahad). However,

[3] The RSS Was Also a Reaction to Early Dalit Mobilisation, *The Wire*, 25 October, 2025

in later years with deeper studies he completely changed his view.⁴

The RSS took this reverence to an extreme position. It took the *Bhagavad Gita* as the cornerstone of its violent Hindu nationalist ideology, viewing it as a manual for moral discipline, character building, and struggle for the attainment of Hindu Rashtra. In RSS *shakhas* (daily branch meetings), the Gita is routinely invoked through recitations, discussions, and training modules to instill values like selfless action (*nishkama karma*), obedience to hierarchical authority, and national duty. RSS leaders, past and present, have repeatedly drawn on the Gita to justify the caste hierarchy, anti-minority stances, and disciplined armed campaigns, ostensibly to protect the Hindu community, which is allegedly under seize.

Among the most prominent leaders of Hindutva, Savarkar used the Gita primarily to justify action, courage, and violence as duty—especially the teaching of fighting even against one's kin for the sake of *swadharma* (one's own religion). Golwalkar and later RSS leaders treated the Gita as the scriptural charter of *karmayoga*, emphasising disciplined, selfless service to the Hindu nation. The Gita for them was a manual for organized, militant activism, not mysticism, as the following quotes reveal.

Savarkar very clearly highlighted what he considered the basic teaching of his holy book when he wrote, "The Gita clearly enjoins every man to do

his duty in defence of the nation even if in doing so one may have to kill one's own people. Arjuna was taught that nothing is more sinful than shirking one's duty towards the national cause." (*Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* (1963)). In *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923), he said, "Shri Krishna is the divine incarnation of the national hero who teaches us to fight for *swadharma*."

More an activist than a theorist, Hedgewar said, "The Gita teaches us steadiness in action—*karmayoga*. The Sangh worker must develop this quality in service of the Hindu society." (*Dr. Hedgewar: The Epoch Maker* (a compilation of speeches from RSS Publications)).

Golwalkar, the longest-serving and most admired *sarsanghachalak*, wrote in his *Bunch of Thoughts*: "Shri Krishna has in the Gita given us the law of nation-building—unity, selfless action, and dedication to *dharma*."

The cult of belligerent *bhakti* continues to this day. In February 2019, Modi released a three-meter-long, 800-kg copy of the Gita, at a function in the ISKCON temple in Delhi. Hailing it as "the source of all knowledge and the core symbol of our culture", he quoted a passage where Krishna tells Arjuna: "To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the postulates of *dharma*, I appear on this earth, age after age." The Prime Minister explained, "We always have the power vested by god to protect our land from miscreants and Asuras."

The allusion, clearly, was to the recently arrested Dalit activists in Bhima Koregaon case and other 'enemies of the state'. And who was the *avatar* of Krishna? Obviously, Modi himself—the "we" was only a polite way of saying !! Later, while campaigning for the 2024 LS elections, he said that he was not a normal, biologically born human and added, "God has sent me for a purpose." Meanwhile, the NDA government had ensured that the Gita occupied pride of place in the "Indian Knowledge Tradition" and in school curriculums in BJP-ruled States.

MN Roy on Philosophical Roots of Fascism in India

Roy, a contemporary of Savarkar and Golwalkar, produced a prescient analysis of fascism's philosophical foundations in India. He showed that in the Indian context, Fascism was a peril latent in the country's own philosophical traditions like fatalism, *karma*, and unquestioning obedience to divine authority. In the absence of an Enlightenment-like rationalist upheaval as in Europe, India's scriptural myths—romanticized by most nationalists as Vedic ideals—fostered a psychology of cosmic submission. This understanding rendered the masses susceptible to authoritarian mobilization, even under figures like Gandhi.

At the heart of Roy's indictment lay the *Bhagavad Gita*, which he viewed as a metaphysical blueprint for totalitarianism. In it, Krishna's counsel to Arjuna justified war and destruction as

[4] Ambedkar did not explicitly link the Gita to fascism, but made scathing critiques of the same, as well as other Shastras (which, he demanded, must be blown up with dynamite) because they justified rigid dogmas and oppressive hierarchies while suppressing rational thinking and reasoning. In a number of scholarly works, he demonstrated that the Gita was essentially a Brahmanical reaction to the revolutionary and rationalistic thought of the Buddha. He explained: "The Bhagvat Gita is emphatic that one must follow one's *svadharma*. And *svadharma* is nothing but the duty of caste. In short, the Gita is a reiteration of the duty of each according to his caste." (Riddles in Hinduism).

divine duty, subordinating reason and conscience to a mystical order. As Roy wrote in *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution* (1952): “The philosophy of the Gita teaches unquestioning obedience to authority, the suppression of reason in the name of duty, and the moral justification of war as the fulfilment of divine will.” He elaborated: “In the Gita, Krishna exhorts Arjuna to do his duty, to kill, to destroy, without questioning the moral justification, because action in the performance of one’s duty is superior to inaction. Thus, the individual conscience is subordinated to a mystic cosmic order.”

Roy drew stark parallels between this and fascism’s glorification of the state: “The Fascist glorifies the State as divine; the Indian theologian sanctifies the caste order as divine. In both, the individual is effaced before a higher mystical whole.” He pinpointed four key enablers of Indian fascism—irrational mysticism in religious philosophy, fatalism and glorified obedience in the *Gita*, the caste system’s rigid hierarchy, and the uncritical use of ‘spirituality’ in politics—arguing that power itself becomes godly mandate: “... the roots of the philosophy of Fascism can be traced in the divine philosophy of the Gita, according to which all power (*bhibhutis*) on earth are the powers of God.”

The communist leader and Marxist scholar cautioned that nationalism, if rooted in religious revivalism, risked mirroring Europe’s fascist surge: “If India, in seeking self-expression, turns to her mythical past for inspiration, she will find there not the spirit of liberty but the sanction for obedience.” ■

Analysis of Karnataka Government’s Menstrual Leave Policy

▲ SHILPA PRASAD

In Gloria Steinem’s famous essay published in 1978 called “If Men Could Menstruate”, she asks, “What would happen, for instance, if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not?” Women have spent decades answering this question, while laws and law-makers play catch-up.

What is Karnataka’s menstrual leave policy?

On 9th Oct. 2025, the Karnataka Government’s Cabinet cleared the decision to implement the Menstrual Leave Policy, 2025 (“policy”) in all sectors including all government offices, garments, MNCs, IT and other private industries across the state. The policy mandates 1 day of paid leave per month for women. The Cabinet decision details the intention of the policy to recognize the importance of health as a fundamental part of women’s rights as well as their workplace welfare, in addition to creating an environment where women can prioritize their health without fear of repercussions or stigma. This policy comes after an 18-member Committee headed by Dr. Sapna S. had recommended 6 days leave per year.

A comprehensive government order is yet to be issued to implement the policy. It has also been reported that the Karnataka Government is considering introducing a Bill to enforce the policy. The Law Commission of Karnataka had earlier drafted a bill called the Karnataka Menstrual Leave and Hygiene Bill, 2025. However, the said Bill has yet to be publicly released in the Karnataka Gazette to call for comments. News reports regarding the Bill claim it contains the following:

1. The definition of “menstruating person” includes girls, women, and transgender persons.
2. The Bill mandates menstrual leave for working women as well as menstruating students.
3. Menstruating persons studying or employed can take upto 2 days leave per month either consecutively or intermittently, provided it does not exceed 12 days a year.
4. The Bill proposes a Karnataka Menstrual Leave and Hygiene Authority to redress grievances.
5. Denying menstrual leave attracts a penalty of Rs. 5,000 for each contravention.

However, as an official version of this Bill is yet to be released, it may be modified or entirely changed by the Karnataka Government.

Karnataka’s menstrual leave policy a welcome move, but leaves

much to be desired, for reasons discussed below.

Why do we need menstrual leave?

According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey's Annual Report for 2023-24, in rural Karnataka, the labour force participation rate was 83.7% for males, 49.9% for females. In urban Karnataka, the rate was 81.4% for males and 33.5% for females. Of this, a staggering 51.8% of females were self-employed (own account, helper in household enterprise), 24% were regular wage / salary workers, 24.2% casual labour. An even deeper dive shows that of this population, 43.4% females were not literate. It is evident though that the nature of this employment is insecure, informal, and unorganized

First, given the overwhelming participation of women in the workforce, a menstrual leave policy was a necessary move to achieve substantive equality. Substantive equality requires that equals should be treated equally, and where there is inequality, there must be differential treatment. To this end, a menstrual leave policy is pursuant to implementing the right to equality in Article 14 of the constitution.

Second, a large portion of females suffer pain during menstruation. This pain can range from mild to severe to chronic. This pain is often exacerbated by stress, physical health, nutrition, and access to medical help. It must also be remembered that access to nutrition and a health is also inherently unequal, with marginalized and Dalit communities lacking equal access. Given this, there is a real association between absenteeism and menstrual pain.

Concurrently, there is also a real association between women being forced / required to work despite the pain. This has a serious impact on their physical as well as mental health.

Even so, menstruation need not be painful to justify menstrual leave, as the workplace cannot be gender blind and must adjust to the physical needs of women.

Third, a legal mandate of menstrual leave may break the taboo surrounding menstrual health and create scientific information regarding the causes, effects and circumstances surrounding menstruation.

Fourth, India has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women on 9th July 1993, under which Article 11(e) recognizes the right to social security for sickness and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave. Article 11(f) also recognizes the right to protection of health and safety in working conditions, including safeguarding the function of reproductivity. Reading this with Article 253 of the Constitution which grants parliament the power to make any law to implement an international convention, India has a responsibility to take all measures to protect health and reproductivity of women in the workplace.

Fifth, Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, which must be read to include menstrual injustice as a form of workplace discrimination. Article 15(3) then permits the State to make special provisions for women.

There are sufficient constitutional and legal reasons

to introduce a menstrual leave policy. However, the question is, is Karnataka policy sufficient?

Is Karnataka's menstrual leave policy sufficient?

The policy is a step in the right direction towards equality. However, it stops short in the following ways:

First, the policy has not yet been backed by a Government Order or legislation, the latter of which will be required in order to truly enforce a paid menstrual leave policy, especially in private industries. Thus, the question of implementation has been left open right now. A menstrual leave policy must have a clearly defined date for implementation, and a clear manner in which it will be implemented. This may include a mandatory requirement for furnishing reports every quarter by both private and governmental establishments, along with a penalty of imprisonment of the management if the menstrual leave policy is violated.

Second, menstruation occurs in a 21–35 day cycle, during which women experience pain from 1-3 days, in some cases even more. Paid monthly leaves of 3 days may have been adequate to truly address menstrual injustice, while a 1 day leave policy may not be sufficient. No scientific study or data has been referenced by the Karnataka Government in its Cabinet decision.

Third, the policy must protect against bias, especially in private industries. This must extend to bias in hiring/firing decisions as well as discrimination against existing female workforce.

Fourth, the policy must

specify a district level grievance redressal authority with the power to issue directions, enforce orders, recover fines, and complaints must be adjudicated within a 3 month time-frame.

Fifth, to truly ensure implementation of the policy, the penalty cannot merely be a meagre fine. It is widely known that company Managements do not fear the payment of fines, and to truly hold them accountable, imprisonment may also be provided.

Sixth, the menstrual leave policy is silent on its applicability. It must extend to all classes of menstruating workers, be it permanent, contract, daily wage, casual, part-time, fixed term, etc. It must also apply to all categories of establishments, without exception. The policy must apply also to all menstruating persons, including transgender persons.

Seventh, the policy must contemplate and address how the policy is going to be implemented in the informal & unorganized sector such as for domestic workers. The Karnataka Government must learn from the failure to implement sexual harassment laws in workplaces for domestic workers to ensure that similar failures do not arise in implementing menstrual leaves in informal sectors.

Eighth, in Nov. 2025 in Maharshi Dayanand University, Haryana, women sanitation workers were forced by supervisors to provide "photographs of their private parts and sanitary pads" as proof that they were menstruating. Such dehumanizing demands by the management must be avoided at the outset by a clearly outlined procedure in law to sanction menstrual leaves immediately.

Will it affect employment of women in Karnataka?

It is widely argued that paid menstrual leave will cause private employers to reduce their female workforce and also discriminate in hiring women. However, the possible illegal behavior of employers is no justification for denying women their constitutional rights. If the same argument were to be accepted, no labour laws or reforms could have ever been possible, as any advancement of workers is perceived to prejudice the management in a capitalist society. Similar arguments were also made while introducing maternity benefits.

Much like the arguments regarding laws protecting women against violence such as Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (now repealed) that criminalized cruelty by the husband / his relatives towards a woman, arguments are made that the menstrual leaves will be misused. However, as has been demonstrated regarding Section 498A cruelty cases, these concerns are fictitious, often exaggerating or mischaracterizing acquittals due to high burden of proof in criminal law, as "misuse".

However, pragmatically, to address real fears of retaliation by private employers, the Karnataka Government must adequately prevent employment discrimination by mandating a percentage of female workforce in the establishment. A similar policy already exists in the public sector, with the Karnataka Government mandating 33% reservation for women in all outsourced jobs of government departments and

organizations (within the SC/ST and OBC quota).

Why don't we have a nationwide policy?

There are staggered menstrual leaves provided across a few states in India. In Bihar, 2 days menstrual leave per month is provided for government employees. In Odisha, women in both govt. and private sectors get one day paid menstrual leave per month. In Kerala, female students have menstrual leave as 2% relaxation in required attendance. Sikkim's High Court registry allows women staff to take 2-3 days of menstrual leave per month subject to a medical officer's recommendations. Sikkim University provides 1 day menstrual leave for students and staff. Certain private companies also have menstrual leave policies. Centrally, in 2017, a private member Bill was introduced by Ninong Ering in Parliament to provide 4 days menstrual leave to women in registered establishments. However, this Bill was never tabled for discussion. Another Bill was introduced by Hibi Eden in 2022 providing 3 days paid menstrual leave in a registered establishment for working women and for female students. This Bill was also never taken up.

This lack of uniformity stems in part from the lack of a central menstrual leave policy. Due to this, a worker in Karnataka may enjoy menstrual leave, but if forced to migrate to another State in search of a job, may not get this benefit.

Conclusion

In Kalpana Kannabiran's article "We Need to Talk About Caste When We Talk About Menstrual Justice", she notes

(quoting Inga T. Winkler) that menstruation is fundamentally about power relations – be it the power of the prison guard to dispense menstrual products, the judges to authorize sterilizations, parents/relatives to force girls to marry, and religious authorities to expect conformity. Kannabiran finds that caste is deeply linked to menstrual injustice, which does not merely have to do with menstrual health, or menstrual hygiene, or its management. Deepthi Sukumar in her article “Personal Narrative: Caste is My Period” notes that menstrual taboos are part of the caste & patriarchal design to maintain caste hierarchy, and any attempt to address this cannot be blind to this reality.

The Karnataka Government's decision to introduce menstrual leave is laudable. However, in order to truly address menstrual injustice, its implementation will have to account for caste as well as genders. Only then will it truly be able to make the change it seeks to achieve.

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Draft Seeds Bill 2025 Threatens Farmers' Rights and Seed Sovereignty

▲ SANJAY SHARMA

The Draft Seeds Bill 2025 is released for public comments by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare which is likely to be placed in the next Budget session of the parliament. This will replace the Seeds Act of 1966 and Seeds (Control) Order of 1983. The Seeds Act 1966 was enacted in the era of Green Revolution when quality, production and supply of seeds was to be ensured primarily by the government. The legal framework for the production and sale of seeds provided in the new draft bill does not take into account Indian farmers' legitimate concerns regarding seed sovereignty and livelihood rights.

Majority of the population is still dependent on agriculture irrespective of the continued decline of agriculture's share in the GDP. Agriculture continued to be a way of life and culture for Indian society. The draft bill completely ignores farmers as the primary stakeholders and cleverly transforms them into mere consumers of seeds. Although the bill recognises farmers' right to "grow, sow, re-sow, save, use, exchange, share or sell his farm seeds", but at the same time gives a free hand to the big seed corporations including multinationals for controlling seeds and seeds market in India.

Rural communities and various nongovernmental initiatives - FPOs, NGOs and local seed collectives - involved in preserving, sharing and sale of seeds will now require registration under the proposed Act. These play a significant role in preservation of local varieties and maintaining biodiversity but will now be treated at par with commercial seeds companies. All seeds for sale must be registered basing on Value for Cultivation and Use trials (VCU) in multiple locations to ensure optimal quality. Many varieties locally available genetically diverse, well adapted and known for specific qualities like taste and flavour may not pass such trials.

The basic tenet of unrestricted right of farmers and rural communities to save, use, exchange and sell their own seeds free from too much bureaucratic and commercial corporations' control, takes a back seat as seeds are not considered a common heritage essential for biodiversity and cultural preservation. Instead seeds are merely a commodity involving intellectual property or proprietary rights owned by the seller company. The proposed draft gives a framework for regulation of the commercial seed market in a way that privileges commercial seed companies monopolising the seeds market.

Agriculture is a state subject and existing Seeds Act 1966 mandates

a central seed committee with the representation of all states. While an updated legislation is the need of the hour in view of scientific, technological, political and social advancements, a review group formed by the government had already proposed the institution of a National Seeds Board way back in 1995. The new draft proposes a Central Seed Committee dominated by bureaucracy with a nominal representation of states/UTs by dividing all states into five broad geographical regions. This committee is empowered to take all the decisions including programming, planning, production, storage, processing and export or import of seeds. This will be responsible for setting standards for registration, certification and testing etc. There is a provision for state seed committees which can look after registration of state seed varieties and advise state governments for registration of seed producers, dealers, distributors and supervise sale, stocks, prices in respective states.

Every seed sold in the market has to be registered after a VCU trial conducted by accredited centres which till now are Indian Council of Agricultural Research, agricultural universities and similar organisations. Now the Draft Bill includes 'other organisations' which can fulfill prescribed eligibility requirements. It is not a hidden fact that for private corporations it is much easier to manipulate private institutions. Moreover the Bill proposes to recognise 'any organization established in territory outside India, for conducting trials to assess the Value for Cultivation and Use', this will give multinational corporations enough space to

manipulate quality standards. The provision of allowing foreign organisations for VCU trials in a foreign soil without any testing on Indian soil also poses a risk of contaminating the ecosystem.

The Draft Bill in the name of ease of doing business provides for a central accreditation system for companies operating in multiple states and such accredited companies shall be deemed to be registered in the State Register. Their application for registration cannot be rejected on technical, financial, or infrastructural grounds, while non-accredited seed producers, that means small seed producers, will have to comply with required technical, financial or infrastructural requirements.

A Bill meant for providing farmers good seeds does not talk about even a minimum mechanism to ensure affordable prices to them. The government must provide a mechanism to regulate seed companies from charging exorbitant prices, the Bill only says the central government 'may regulate sale price of seeds' in emergent situations like scarcity of seeds, abnormal rise in prices, monopolistic pricing or profiteering. This clause is highly inadequate and tilted towards the vested interests of big seed corporations.

What happens if the seeds purchased by a farmer did not deliver as promised? The reports of selling substandard or faulty seeds are rampant in various states and in most cases farmers never got any compensation. The Bill must have addressed this gap by providing a proper mechanism for compensation to farmers in a rational way. The companies lay blame on farmers themselves for

the crop failure in absence of any stringent legal framework. The draft remains silent on this sensitive issue and gives a punitive clause sans compensation by providing punishment for supplying spurious seeds as a penalty of Rs. ten lakhs which may double or triple in case of repeat offenses. For big seed companies a sum of ten or thirty lakhs is a negligible amount that cannot serve as a deterrent and easily lets them free.

In absence of a compensation mechanism farmers are forced to go to the time taking and tedious Consumer Protection Act, and in absence of a stringent penalising clause for seed failure the Bill undermines corporate accountability on one hand and increases risks for farmers and endangers their autonomy on the other hand.

The Bill overrides or dilutes some of the provisions of Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR Act), 2001 including a provision for compensation.

The Bill provides a digital traceability feature with introduction of a central seed portal (SATHI) and mandatory QR Codes on every packet for tracking. Although this feature may place small producers, FPOs and rural community seed keepers on an uneven plane owing to extra costs incurred, in absence of a governmental support system for them.

Instead of regulating private seed corporations to benefit farmers, this bill primarily attacks farmers' rights over their seeds and agriculture. ■

Pollution Politics and the Working Class Burden

▲ SOUTRIK GOSWAMI

The Delhi NCR's recent plunge into the literal toxic gas chamber has yet again sparked the debate on the nation's air pollution crisis. But beyond the traditional analysis of this more than a decadal disturbing past what remains evident from the newly formed BJP government's response to this problem exemplifies that aligning with Hindutva brigade's fascist politics is now equivalent to suicide. As exasperating it might be, we are yet in another year where reports all around the news, scientific journals, doctors and social media moguls are ravaging on how every breath is reducing our lives.

India's overall environmental & climate crisis despite not being at the forefront of the national political agenda has time and again proved to be one of the most rampant subjects concerning some of the core issues of the citizens, especially the most under-privileged groups, with the air-pollution crisis as one of the most quintessential of the examples. According to the State of Global Air Report 2024, air pollution now claims over 21 lakh lives annually in India, with another report stating one in seven deaths in NCR is related to this.

The hardest impact remains on the working class and vulnerable communities, driven by their occupations, economic conditions, and living environments. Outdoor workers

such as construction laborers, migrant workers and agricultural workers face constant exposure to toxic air, heightening the risk of severe diseases. Those from lower-income groups often live in densely polluted areas with minimal access and awareness to protection or healthcare, making air pollution both a public health crisis and a social justice issue.

Beyond the scientific and policy level dissection of the current pollution conundrum, what essentially comes across is the absolute negligence of the present government and their priorities which puts people's concerns at last. This is evident from the fact that as the capital of world's largest democracy with the self-assumed title of 'vishwa-guru', maintained its not-so-lofty title of 'most polluted capital' for the seventh straight year, whereas the / institutional and governance response remained ironic but devastating. This year's action or rather the in-action of the triple-engine BJP government is tantamount to telling the Delhiites that, we and our future generations can die without breath but neither can we protest nor anyone is going to listen and solve. All of this happens as the tenders for ordering air purifiers worth 15 lakhs are floated for the Delhi state government, and the campaign by the Chief Minister to ask people to 'Thank You Modiji' makes its rounds. We wonder who

we should thank for taking away almost ten years of our lives, as breathing Delhi's air can reduce our life expectancy by the same.

India's pollution crisis has a pattern of overt negligence and lack of effort over the past several years, as beyond Delhi NCR region, this also is a national crisis. India's National Clean Air Program is the primary policy in place since 2019 to address this paramount challenge, covering 131 cities in India, however it leaves over 200 cities which also are dealing with this massive concern.

Despite the past several government's failure to appropriately address this crisis in Delhi NCR, the response of the Rekha-Modi duo has set abysmally low standards in this current year. This was the first time in several years the elected government went out of its way to approach the courts to legalize cracker bursting in Delhi NCR. The so-called 'green crackers' which were allowed not only had implementation challenges but were also warned against by several experts & media about the serious consequences and they created disastrous outcomes.

This political move of wooing Hindu majoritarian enthusiasts led to a four-year high pollution on the day next to Diwali, and since then the region's air quality has not recovered. What remains even more ghastly is that rather than taking any accountability, and coming up with concrete policy measures, the state has engaged in false solutions like cloud seeding, which have historically proved to be ineffective. And when all else failed, a political twist was given to scapegoat the past government which turned into a political-blame game and even attempts were

made to fudge the data from air quality monitoring systems.

Delhi NCR's air pollution challenge has shown that resistance and protest can only be the way forward, by people fighting for their own rights and coercing this regime out of its way. The desperation of covering up their failures was clearly shown in arbitrary detention of senior citizens, children and students on the protest call concerning this disastrous state of life in Delhi at the India gate. Nevertheless, the people of Delhi have not backed down, several organizations, activists, students, researchers & experts and concerned citizens have joined hands to keep

mobilizing to ask for accountability and demand actions from the state. Research and science show several key low hanging measures which can be taken to actively reduce the dangerous air quality levels such as increasing public transportations, introducing rapid bus transit & restricting private vehicles, restricting constructions or polluting business and ensuring compensatory wages to workers.

However, in reality, this government is taking no steadfast steps as its priorities are with the capitalist groups who will fail to benefit with such active measures in place. The way forward remains clear, Delhi's environmental challenge is now

a year-round concern, with killer toxic fumes in winters to heat extremes in summer. The people must stand together to fight and ask for comprehensive long-term action such as air-shed management practices, heavy investments in public health infrastructure, affordable long-term public transport by keeping Delhi's ordinary and working-class citizens in the center. This environmental concern challenges the very livability in this city and people need to fight to take down any such regimes who are against their interests and fight to keep for their rights. ■

Delhi: Students and Citizens Protest Against Dangerous Delhi Pollution

On 18th November, hundreds of residents of Delhi joined protest call at Jantar Mantar tormented by the severe AQI in Delhi. Protesters gathered in huge numbers and raised slogans demanding immediate action from the government.

JNUSU President Aditi said at the public meeting, "people are suffering and this government is not even ready to acknowledge the crisis. However, they have installed ₹6 lakh worth of air purifiers in government buildings to save themselves from the venomous air. The people demand immediate and long-term action against the poison in Delhi's air."

AISA Delhi State President, Saiyed Ishfaq said, "we are asserting that pollution is a socio-political issue, and its answer lies in the intent of those who we choose as decision makers. But right now, we see our Chief Minister is not ready to step up. The venomous air needs immediate catering as well and lasting solutions. We demand a people centric policy for industrial and vehicular pollution, which does not exclude the already marginalised."

The protest called for urgent measures that the government must implement to confront Delhi's air emergency:

1. Strengthen affordable public transport by increasing DTC buses and metro coaches

and provide free travel during peak-pollution periods to discourage private vehicle use.

2. Impose a moratorium on construction activities and guarantee compensation and job protection for affected workers.
3. Strictly enforce industrial pollution norms and penalize violators without exception.
4. Launch a special medical care and support drive for children, the elderly, and those with respiratory illnesses.
5. Ensure transparent, real-time AQI monitoring and proper functioning of all air quality stations.

Earlier on 9th November, the protest against Delhi's pollution at India Gate was met with a police crackdown. Despite regular police intimidation, the protest continued and ended with a resolve to carry forward the fight for clean air. ■



New York, JNU, Bihar: Diverse Elections, Common Challenge

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Ahead of the two-phase Bihar Assembly elections, we had two very significant electoral battles with inspiring outcomes - the mayoral election in New York and closer to home, the students union election in Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. Historically New York city has always been a Democratic stronghold and JNUSU has been a bastion of Left student organisations. So on the face of it there was nothing extraordinary in another Democratic Mayor getting elected in New York City or another Left panel sweeping the elections in JNU. But a closer look will tell us why the victory of Zohran Mamdani in New York and the clean sweep of the Left panel in JNU are truly historic.

Zohran Mamdani created history once already when he won the mayoral primary election of the Democratic Party to choose its mayoral candidate by defeating his powerful rival former Governor Andrew Cuomo on 24 June. And now his final victory as the first immigrant and Muslim Mayor of New York has been a tight slap to the racist far-right Trump Presidency. Zohran's victory marks the potential of a powerful Socialist counter current in American politics at a time when the US is experiencing the worst kind of far-right white supremacist and hyper-nationalist tyranny. His victory in the primary enraged the Trump-Netanyahu combine

and the billionaire club led by Elon Musk and his ilk like anything and Mamdani was demonised as a crazy lunatic. His victory also defeated this extreme anti-Communist streak of conservative American politics which considers anything leftwing as 'un-American'.

Commonsense political wisdom could never imagine such a clear and emphatic victory for an 'outsider' like Mamdani especially with his bold economic and political positions like espousal of rent freezes, free transport, affordable childcare, living wages, and other basic rights and welfare measures for the working people, advocacy of equal rights, safety and dignity for immigrants and strong support for Palestinian freedom and condemnation of Israeli war crimes and genocidal occupation. Being an immigrant and a Muslim, his identity was perceived by many as a 'disadvantage' in an America dominated by Trump's Islamophobic anti-immigrant MAGA doctrine. Yet he ran a campaign that proudly embraced these identities and turned the diverse immigrant population of New York into a powerful united constituency and the agenda of the working people's right to the city, the call for reclaiming New York city and American democracy into a winning theme in the Mayor election. His vibrant social media campaign and energetic mass contact programme would become a new

textbook of progressive election strategy opening up a new space for democratic socialists in an era of rabid far right offensive.

Elections to the Jawaharlal Nehru University Student Union have traditionally been a shining example of vibrant campus democracy animated by progressive Left forces, especially the radical Left stream of student politics under the leadership of the All India Students Association. But the Modi era has seen a steady rise of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the far right Hindu supremacist student organisation of the Sangh brigade. The rise has been facilitated by the neoliberal New Education Policy that promotes privatisation at the cost of public-funded institutions of higher education and research and the RSS campaign of institutional capture which is subverting progressive campuses from within by packing the faculties with RSS appointees, changing curricula of education and research and regimenting and vitiating the environment of the campus.

Ahead of the JNUSU election, the ABVP unleashed an ugly campaign of violence, communal hate and casteist abuse and the RSS organised a big Shakha parade as part of its centenary celebration. Victory in JNU would have been the best proof of the Sangh's ideological hegemony in its centenary year. But not only did the ABVP fail

to win any of the central panel posts, it also drew a blank among councillors in all the major schools. The ABVP in JNU does not have the courage to engage in an ideological debate with the progressive camp, it relies more on muscle and money power and undue institutional backing and influence by people in positions of power. The Left student movement remains resilient enough to defeat this ploy and it will have to continue to face this challenge by strengthening its role as the champion of student welfare and democracy, within and beyond the campus.

In many ways, the people of Bihar face the same challenge of far-right aggression. In an election where the people faced two-decade-old NDA government and the prolonged reign of institutionalised corruption, syndicated crime and economic mismanagement resulting in chronic poverty and pervasive unemployment, the election scene got disrupted by an unprecedented reconstruction of the electoral roll. Accompanying the resultant disenfranchisement and disruption was an unprecedented dose of financial populism that entailed money transfer of ₹30,000 crore to some thirty million beneficiaries right in the middle of the elections. But the people of Bihar have fought hard against this electoral disruption. The battle of the people of Bihar continues to ensure a decisive victory over the fascist expedition of the BJP in spite of this unnatural electoral disruption, just as the working people of New York and the students of JNU have done. ■

Decoding the Unnatural Outcome of the Bihar Elections

Contrary to popular expectations, and even the predictions of most exit polls, the outcome of the Bihar elections has turned out to be as astounding as the Maharashtra landslide. On one level it appears to be a reenactment of the 2010 election outcome when Nitish Kumar's NDA had won an unbelievable 206 seats in Bihar's 243-member Assembly. The main opposition party RJD then had been reduced to a tally of merely 22 seats. But that was when Nitish Kumar was in his prime and the Modi era had not yet begun in Delhi. A repeat of the 2010 outcome, with a united opposition down to only 35 seats, after fifteen long years, five years after the government had a narrow escape in the previous election and when the BJP too lost its independent majority in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, can only be considered most unnatural.

The result has to be seen against the backdrop of two unprecedented state interventions that were designed to shore up the declining electoral prospects of an increasingly non-performing and unpopular government. A surgically executed Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls that struck off close to 6.9 million electors and inducted more than 2.5 million voters, along with more than 3 lakh voters mysteriously added after the SIR was completed and elections were announced, drastically altered the electoral balance across the state. The alterations effected through the SIR deletions and inclusions were more than the 2020 leads of the opposition in most constituencies. The post-SIR inclusions tilted the balance further in close to a dozen marginal constituencies.

The SIR also triggered widespread anxiety and fear of loss of not just the vote but also citizenship and various allied rights and benefits. Bihar witnessed the highest voter turnout in its electoral history, propped up by organised transfers of non-resident voters (for example arrangement of special trains to ferry pro-NDA voters to Bihar). The administration too chipped in with its open bias that permitted widespread organised pro-government false voting. The extra vote, whether synthetic or organic, has boosted the NDA vote share and the anomalous first past the post system translated it into a disproportionately high seat tally. The result is an incredible 202 seats for the ruling coalition that even put most of the exit polls to shame.

The second state intervention came in the form of an unprecedented quantum of direct cash transfer right on the eve of and even during the elections. Three particular measures were especially designed to defuse the mounting anger of the people against a callous non-performing government: an increase in old age and disability pension from a paltry ₹400 to ₹1,100 per month,

free distribution of up to 125 units of electricity per month and most significantly a one-time transfer of ₹10,000 to nearly 15 million women connected to self-help groups managed by the rural livelihood mission, known as Jeevika in Bihar.

The new scheme, farcically christened Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana (which should actually be called Mahila Karzdar Yojana or women indebtedness scheme), was launched just days before the announcement of the poll schedule in Bihar, and disbursements continued during the elections. In an interview Amit Shah had described the ₹10,000 transfer as seed money for a potentially larger loan in the coming days. Aware that women in Bihar are angry with the coercive microfinance loan recovery campaign, a disturbed Nitish Kumar rushed to clarify that the ₹10,000 instalment was not a loan and would not have to be returned. To make sure that the disbursement actually resulted in votes and the electoral harvest was properly reaped, 1,80,000 Jeevika 'volunteers' were deployed on poll duty as mentioned in the post-poll press note issued by the Election Commission of India.

A third major election period signal that did not however get due media attention was the announcement of the Pirpainti Adani power deal whereby Adani got 1,050 acres of land for a token annual lease value of just ₹1 and also assured purchase of electricity at more than ₹6 per unit. Former energy minister of the Modi cabinet and two-term BJP MP from Ara, RK Singh, alleged a ₹620 billion scam and demanded a CBI probe only to

invite his own expulsion from his party. While scrapping Electoral Bonds as unconstitutional, the Supreme Court had raised the issue of quid pro quo between corporate donors and political recipients.

What then has been the Adani group's involvement in the Bihar elections in lieu of the Pirpainti power deal? We perhaps got some hint through the corporate funded political expedition led by Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party and the massive use of money power by the BJP and its allies in these elections. In the coming days Bihar will have to deal with not just renewed feudal coercion and intensified communal hate and violence but also heightened corporate loot. The discourse on development in Bihar which has remained divorced from jobs, earnings, amenities and rights of the working people will become further infrastructure-centric with the growing penetration of Adani in Bihar.

In many ways, the outcome of the Bihar Assembly elections 2025 has followed the same pattern and scale as that of the Maharashtra elections in November 2024. In Maharashtra the MVA was reduced to 50 seats out of 288 and here the INDIA coalition has only 35 in a house of 243. The electoral roll updating exercise has now been weaponised as a systematic countrywide electoral purge, and the cash transfer tool of electoral engineering has now been taken to the next level. Bihar also witnessed an overhyped corporate-funded attempt to prevent the consolidation of the anti-incumbency public anger in the form of the Jan Suraj Party which eventually failed spectacularly but dominated the

media scene all through the pre-poll run-up.

Under-representation of Muslims in the electoral arena and the non-declaration of any Muslim name as a projected Deputy CM upset the Muslim opinion in a big way and the AIMIM once again emerged as a major centre of Muslim politics in Bihar winning all the five seats it had won in 2020. But the landslide victory of the NDA has obviously meant the lowest ever Muslim representation in the Assembly, down to 11 from 19 in the outgoing house. In 2010 when the NDA had 206 seats there were seven Muslim MLAs in JDU and even the BJP had one, but this time round the NDA has a lone Muslim MLA from the JDU while the remaining 10 Muslim MLAs come from the AIMIM, RJD and the Congress. In another significant trend reversal, upper/general caste MLAs (69) now outnumber OBC MLAs (66) in the NDA camp. It should be noted that the BJP list of 101 candidates contained not a single name from the 16-odd percent Muslim population while the 10.7 percent Hindu upper caste population had 49 representatives.

The CPI(ML) had contested twenty seats in these elections, but could win only two seats in sharp contrast to the twelve it had won five years ago even though the vote share of the party dropped only marginally. The party lost four seats by a narrow margin of less than three thousand votes, including one lost by only 95 votes. The party will of course have to review the results closely, draw necessary lessons and take corrective measures. The INDIA coalition will also have to go for an in-depth review, expose and challenge the whole gamut of

administrative manipulations, electoral malpractices and abuse of election machinery starting with the utterly arbitrary and partisan role of the Election Commission of India, but equally importantly, INDIA will also have to draw lessons from all its lapses and overcome its weaknesses.

More than ever before, the fifth term of the Nitish Kumar government is going to be dominated by the BJP and the Sangh brigade has made no secret of its plan to turn Bihar into a laboratory of bulldozer raj. Governments with abnormally high majorities have often unravelled quite rapidly, and an NDA government back in power with an abnormal majority against the popular mood for change is unlikely to be an exception. But having retained Bihar, the Sangh-BJP establishment will now train its eyes on Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the four states scheduled to go to the polls by May 2026 and Uttar Pradesh where an election is due by February 2027.

For the constitutional foundation of democracy to survive, India will have to urgently reverse the trend of centralisation of power around one party and concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands which has reached alarming levels after the Bihar elections. The battle lines between fascist consolidation and democratic revival now stand out in ever sharper relief and progressive forces across India must not allow the Bihar outcome to weaken their unity, resolve and strength. ■

People's Issues And Repressive Onslaught



In the 2025 electoral battle in Bihar, CPIML campaign as part of the INDIA Mahagathbandhan focused on raising people's issues and betrayal of promises by a government which has been in power for the last two decades. Destruction in the name of development, crime, loot and anarchy in the name of good governance, crumbling education and health systems, vicious cycle of poverty, consistently arrested development and increasing migration, violence against Dalits, minorities and women, acute unemployment were the issues being raised by common people in Bihar. Students and youth migrating out of state in search of employment and a secure future, farmers burdened with debt and women living under the double crisis of debt trap and social insecurity. The government had pushed Bihar into unprecedented desolation.

The socio-economic survey conducted during the Mahagathbandhan government exposed the dire situation in Bihar. Appallingly, almost 95 lakh families were found below the poverty line. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had announced aid of Rs 2 lakh each to these families, but to date, not a single person received even a partial amount.

As the election process began in Bihar, after the unconstitutional and exclusionary SIR, the state also experienced widespread administrative biasness, both on opposition candidates and voters. During the first phase nomination process, outgoing MLA Satyadev Ram of Darauli was arrested in an old fabricated case, a deliberate action carried out at the behest of the government. In Bhoire also, proposed CPIML candidate Comrade Jitendra Paswan was arrested after filing nomination.

Tarari in Bhojpur witnessed large scale repressive onslaught. Feudal-fascist elements fired upon and attacked the campaign convoy of CPIML candidate Comrade Madan Singh. On the day of polling, people protested the illegal influencing campaign in Bihta village. When people raised the issue and protested, armed police personnel pointed rifles at the people, to intimidate them, and also slapped those raising

concerns. Despite the issue being flagged to the CEO and ECI, no action was taken against these intimidation attempts.

Keeping People's Issues at the Forefront

Despite the intimidation attempts, CPIML campaign carried on with vigour. The campaign was not merely an electoral exercise but a mass resistance to reclaim Bihar for the poor, the workers, the landless and the marginalized.

At the core of the campaign stood the burning question of jobs. Bihar's youth have been pushed to the edge by years of vacancy backlogs, paper leaks and deliberate administrative sabotage of recruitment. CPIML attacked this betrayal, demanding immediate filling of all vacancies and a monthly unemployment allowance to provide relief to the youth abandoned by the regime. We insisted that education must not be handed over to private profiteers and demanded a Common School System to ensure equal access for all. We vowed to smash the nexus of exam mafia and administrative complicity that has destroyed the hopes of lakhs of young people.

The campaign was even sharper when it came to scheme workers, the backbone of Bihar's welfare system. The ASHA, Anganwadi, Rasoiya, Mamta, Jeevika and sanitation workers enthusiastically took part in the campaign and raised their demand for recognition as regular government employees with full wages, not treated as dispensable labour on meagre honorariums. The campaign demanded restoration of the Old Pension Scheme and expansion of MNREGA to secure two hundred

days of work at a living wage.

The struggle for land rights formed another powerful front of our campaign. Bihar's landless poor have suffered generations of dispossession. CPIML demanded allocation of five decimals of land for every rural landless family and threedecimals in urban areas, along with permanent housing and called for immediate implementation of the Bandopadhyay Commission recommendations and redistribution of twenty-one lakh acres of land that rightly belong to the poor. CPIML insisted on occupancy rights for families living on government and non-cultivable land and vowed that no eviction of the poor would be tolerated without full rehabilitation. We defended the rights of sharecroppers, demanded identity cards, protection from eviction and revival of agricultural market committees to ensure fair crop prices.

The campaign also highlighted social equality, women's rights, the rights of minorities and tribals, and the fight against corruption and police excesses. CPIML campaign asserted protection from violence, economic independence, relief from microfinance exploitation and the freedom to pursue education and employment. CPIML stood firm with minorities and tribal communities, demanding implementation of constitutional safeguards, forest rights and protection against displacement and communal violence.

On governance, the CPIML announced that Bihar needs a people's administration, not a regime that hides behind prohibition laws, police crackdowns and bureaucratic bias. The CPIML campaign called for recruitment in the health sector, expansion of

public services, effective steps against inflation and resistance to any attempt to weaken the Constitution or undermine India's federal structure. Our campaign also raised the demand for strong protection of the rights and welfare of street vendors, small shopkeepers, startups and disabled people, insisting that their livelihoods, dignity and survival cannot be sacrificed at the altar of elite interests.

Women Campaign Brigade

Another salient feature of our campaign was the launch of the statewide Women's Campaign Brigade, a spirited initiative led jointly by CPI(ML) Liberation and the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA). Under the banner "Badlo Sarkar, Badlo Bihar," the brigade became a force of resistance across villages, blocks and small towns, amplifying the voices and anger of Bihar's women who have borne the brunt of the current regime's failures.

Teams of the brigade, each comprising two to three members, fanned out across constituencies where CPI(ML) is contesting. Carrying songs of struggle and slogans demanding change, they held meetings, choupal discussions and street-corner gatherings, engaging women in direct conversations about their everyday hardships, their rights and the collective power they hold to overturn an anti-people government. The brigade confronted the ruling coalition's hypocrisy, especially its decision to bring leaders like Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accused of sexual harassment of women athletes into Bihar to campaign. As CPI(ML) Politburo member and AIPWA

General Secretary Meena Tiwari, who was campaigning in Tarari, asserted, when the BJP parades accused men on their campaign stage, our Women's Campaign Brigade stands with the courage, dignity and fighting spirit of Bihar's women.

The brigade forcefully brought forward the urgent concerns of women: rising gender-based violence, the crushing trap of microfinance debt, the exploitation of women workers and scheme workers, and the worsening unemployment crisis that threatens the future of the state's youth. Across meetings, women raised their anger against fraudulent schemes and hollow promises and demanded employment, freedom from debt and dignity. ASHA, Anganwadi and Jeevika workers used the campaign as a platform to assert their demand for recognition, fair wages and full labour rights, refusing to remain invisible any longer.

Across districts, AIPWA and CPI(ML) women leaders tirelessly mobilized rural and working-class women, turning the pain and struggles into an organized political force. The Women's Campaign Brigade strengthened the CPIML campaign and carried the demands for justice, dignity and a transformed, exploitation free Bihar to every corner. ■



The Extraordinary Victory of Zohran Mamdani

▲ SIKANDAR



Zohran Mamdani navigated through an ocean of hate, endured huge waves of bigotry, and challenged the influence of big capitalists' money in politics. His victory in the New York mayoral race has been extraordinary, to say the least. By defeating Andrew Cuomo, the former Mayor of New York City and former Governor of New York State, by eleven points, he has paved the way for the United States of America to grow beyond a two-party dictatorship. He showed the people of America and the world that the choice before us is either 'socialism or barbarism.' Ironically, New York, the capital of world capitalism, had witnessed a dip in real median household income. Between 2019 and 2024, the real median household income declined from \$85,420 to \$81,228, a 4.9% decrease.

At the lower end of the distribution, recent data from the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University indicate a worrying rise in poverty, based on a survey of about 3,000 NYC residents. The report found that the overall supplemental poverty rate (i.e., the proportion of people with incomes below 100% of the supplemental poverty line) increased from 18% in 2021 to 23% in 2022. While the supplemental poverty rate rose by 5% for adults in the survey,

it rose by 10 percentage points for children (from 15% to 25%). The report estimates that, in addition to the 23% of New Yorkers living below the supplemental poverty line in 2022, another 33% are living between 100% and 200% of the supplemental poverty line (a total of 56% of New Yorkers classified as "in poverty or low-income").

Poverty levels are so high that in 2024, more than three in four (76%) New Yorkers reduced their expenses on essentials and savings due to rising prices of goods and services, and more than three in five (61%) made multiple adjustments. About half of New Yorkers reported cutting back on food purchases (56%), savings (53%), transportation (49%), and electricity or utility use (49%).

Capitalism uses socialism as a scare tactic for the masses by claiming that under any form of socialism, people's private property will be confiscated and transferred to the state. Proponents of capitalism do not differentiate between personal possessions and private ownership of the means of production. Ironically, in New York City, which is currently the centre of global capitalism, the homeownership rate is only 25%. The homeownership rate in the United States is 65%. In London, it is 47%; in Amsterdam, 69%; in Tokyo, 45%; in New Delhi, 67%; and in Beijing and Shanghai, it is 85% and 90%, respectively. Among the world's major cities, Paris and Berlin have low homeownership rates of 17% and 33%, respectively. To make matters worse, Donald Trump has proposed extending the mortgage term from 30 to 50 years. President Franklin D Roosevelt helped

introduce 30-year mortgages after the Great Depression, when about 50% of mortgages, which were then fixed for a short term, were in default. The Roosevelt administration aimed to prevent this from happening again by enabling people to become homeowners through more predictable repayment plans with reduced risk. Trump's proposal would mean that New Yorkers would not be able to own their homes in their lifetimes. If they do, it would be at the fag end of their lives. Even worse are the machinations of the property developers and real estate sharks. By offering underwater mortgages (in which the buyer owes more than his/her home is currently worth), they have been draining New Yorkers' pockets. The playbook operates like this: builders advertise mortgage rates around 3.99%, even as the broader market remains closer to 6.3%. However, to make the figures work, they keep sale prices above what the property might otherwise be worth. Buyers secure a lower monthly payment but at the expense of taking out a loan that's already near, or above, the property's actual value. Between 2022 and 2024, 27% of home loans were underwater mortgages. The hardworking home buyers face a double whammy. As prices stabilise, the homeowner is in negative equity. Selling the house becomes difficult because it requires bringing cash to the closing table to cover the gap between the loan balance and the sale price, which can mean writing a check for tens of thousands of dollars. A Citizens Budget Commission report last year found that New York City lost 160,000 residents, an exodus in which housing costs were a huge

factor.

In such a bleak economic climate, Mamdani contested the mayoral election on class issues. He did not leverage his identity to garner votes; instead, he proclaimed himself to be an equal citizen in Trump's white supremacist America. This approach to politics transcended the rote and corrupt identity politics of American liberalism, where colour and race are used as a veneer of progressivism to conceal the persistence of neo-liberal economic policies domestically and imperialism abroad. He pledged a rent freeze and the construction of 200,000 new affordable homes for New Yorkers. This ignited a genuine class war. The real estate sharks began flooding Andrew Cuomo's campaign funds, Mamdani's primary opponent. The real estate industry group New York Apartment Association contributed over \$2.5 million to a Cuomo-aligned Super PAC in the closing weeks of the race. Other notable real estate donors include Douglas Durst of the Durst Organisation, whose family is worth \$8 billion, and Douglas Eisenberg of A&E Real Estate, who is currently being sued by the city for hundreds of outstanding code violations. Former billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg — who raised rent by 33% on rent-stabilised apartments while in office — contributed \$8.3 million to Cuomo's campaign.

On the other side of the class divide, hundreds of thousands of hard-working New Yorkers stood, fed up with the current system. With nearly 100,000 volunteers, Mamdani launched a sweeping campaign and reached out to New Yorkers in their homes. His

volunteers greeted families on their doorsteps and engaged them in honest conversation. In the bleak, individualised life of an intensely capitalist city, where citizens have been reduced to mere consumers, Mamdani's campaign touched the hearts and minds of New Yorkers. Mamdani also promised a significant increase in New York City's minimum wage. All Presidents so far have hesitated in signing the \$15 minimum wage bill. Mamdani has proposed to raise the minimum wage to \$30 an hour by 2030, starting at \$20 in 2027. Currently, the minimum wage in New York City is \$16.50. After 2030, under Mamdani's proposal, the floor will continue to rise every year. He reached this conclusion after accepting the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Living Wage Calculator. The latter also suggests that a livable hourly wage in New York City with one child should be \$52.57, with two children \$65.14 and with three children \$82.03. Between 2019 and 2024, the real incomes of the top 3% wage earners in New York City rose by 34%, whereas those of the lower, lower-middle, and middle-income groups rose by just 8.5%. New York City is also home to approximately 350,000 millionaires as of 2024, the highest number of any city in the world, with the city's millionaire population growing by 48% over the past decade.

Coming back to the point of identity, since Bernie Sanders's insurgent campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016, the accusation of "class reductionism" has loomed over left-liberal debates. Left-identitarians and centrist liberals have invoked this charge

not only to dismiss Sanders, but also to question a wide range of universally redistributive policies championed by him and the Democratic Party's left wing—including Medicare for All, free public higher education, a living wage, and collective bargaining rights. Mamdani took the baton from Bernie, asserted his identity instead of weaponizing it, fought and won on class issues. In the light of the recently concluded Bihar elections there are important lessons here for the Indian Left.

India remains a deeply conservative society, with a rigid (and graded) caste hierarchy deeply embedded in the consciousness of both the poor and the prosperous. More than three decades after the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, the politics of social justice has become entrenched, often reduced to the interests of caste blocs and their leaders who prioritize proximity to power above genuine reform. In Bihar, social justice as practiced was stripped of any real commitment to economic equity or caste annihilation. Despite claims of 'sushasan' (good governance) and a 'double engine' government, Bihar continues to lag behind all other Indian states on key socio-economic indicators.

The Bihar Caste Census (2022) starkly illustrated the deeply sectarian character of social justice politics in the state. Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), who together comprise 21% of Bihar's population, face acute economic hardship: 43% of SCs and 42% of STs earn less than Rs. 6,000 (\$68) per month. The World Bank sets \$90 per month as the benchmark for extreme poverty. Among these

groups, only 1.72% of SCs and 2.53% of STs earn more than Rs. 50,000 per month. The situation is similarly grim for General (Upper Castes), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs). Of those earning below Rs. 6,000 per month, Forward Castes make up 25.09%, OBCs 33.16%, and EBCs 33.58%. Altogether, over a quarter of Bihar's population lives below the World Bank's extreme poverty threshold. Only in the Rs. 50,000-and-above income bracket do upper castes significantly outpace other groups, with 9.86% of upper-caste households reporting such earnings, compared to 4.22% for OBCs and 2.28% for EBCs.

Despite the relentless hardship endured by its people, Bihar remains a fragmented society, lacking any meaningful cross-caste class solidarity. This absence is at the core of the state's persistent challenges. Here, Zohran Mamdani's perspective becomes crucial: for Bihar to experience true revitalization and genuine social justice, building alliances that transcend caste and unite classes is essential. This challenge is necessary because all segments of Indian capitalism—agrarian, mercantile, and industrial—have profited from the ongoing migration of impoverished Biharis. From the docks of Kolkata to the ports of Mumbai and the markets of Delhi, the exploitation of Bihari labour has fueled substantial wealth accumulation for the Indian capitalist class. It is imperative that the people of Bihar demand accountability from all these forces. ■

AISA-led Left Unity defeats ABVP in JNUSU Election

▲ NITISH KUMAR

The AISA-led Left Unity secured a decisive victory in the 2025-26 JNUSU elections held on November 4th, marking the second election in the same calendar year. Comrade Aditi of AISA won the post of President, along with Comrade Gopika of SFI as the Vice President, Comrade Sunil of DSF as General Secretary and Comrade Danish of AISA as the Joint Secretary. With an approximate voter turnout of 67.17% in this election, i.e., 5,818 out of the 8,657 voters, Comrade Aditi secured a total of 1970 votes, Comrade Gopika secured approximately 3,100 votes, Comrade Sunil secured approximately 2,005 votes, and Comrade Danish secured approximately 2,100 votes.

The previous election, conducted in April 2024-25 session, had been contested jointly by AISA and DSF, that captured the three key central panel posts of President, Vice President and General Secretary, while the ABVP managed to scrape through with the Joint Secretary post by a narrow margin. In the latest election, however, the entry of SFI into the alliance strengthened Left Unity and ensured a complete rout of the ABVP from all central panel positions as well as councillor seats across schools. The ABVP lost even those councillor positions in the School of Engineering, School of Physical Sciences and other science schools that had long been considered its strongholds. The student community, with remarkable clarity, rejected the

ABVP's politics of hooliganism, its pro-administration posture and its visible absence from everyday struggles of ordinary students.

This year saw large scale violence by the fascist student organization ABVP, who tried to sabotage the democratic election process by beating up students and disrupting school GBMs. The ABVP began its campaign with an intensity of violence that exceeded previous years. In almost every public event, its cadre targeted the AISA JNU Secretary and the then JNUSU President Comrade Nitish, other office-bearers and Left councillors, creating an atmosphere of intimidation. The former JNUSU President, Vice-President and General Secretary were subjected to public violence, verbal abuse including casteist, misogynistic, transphobic and islamophobic remarks being meted out against them. The Delhi Police, executing the orders of their masters RSS-BJP, beat up students who were seeking justice against the ABVP violence. The ABVP utilized their money and muscle politics in JNU, to ensure their victory. While common students turned to the Left for its consistent involvement in pro-student struggles, the ABVP seemed fixated exclusively on attacks against Left activists. Even in selecting its candidates, the ABVP fielded two of its most notorious lumpen elements for the posts of President and General Secretary, rewarding them for their lumpenism. Despite such surmounting fascist onslaught on the premiere public university in

the country, the students rose to the occasion to identify, isolate and defeat ABVP.

This election was a challenge to the powers that be. From eviction from hostels, dismantling of means-cum-merit scholarships, surveillance system in the library, in the five-month tenure of the previous JNUSU, and increasing privatization, HEFA loans and fund cuts in academic sphere, seat cuts, political appointments, and rise of Hindutva fascism on campus, students took up the task to preserve the 'debate and resist' culture of JNU.

A striking feature of the results was the overwhelming success of women candidates. Of the ten candidates fielded by AISA, seven were women. Eight of the ten candidates emerged victorious. While both the President and Joint Secretary candidates being women won their posts, Comrades Kashish, Comrade Kaif and Comrade Gulam Waris secured victories from the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies; Comrade Syeda Hafsa Bukhari achieved a significant win in the School of International Studies, marking AISA's return to this school after six years. Comrades Ajit and Nandani won councillor posts in the School of Social Sciences. A large number of anti-ABVP independent candidates were also elected from science schools, signalling a wider rejection of the ABVP's presence. The Left Unity registered substantial votes from science schools in the central panel vote share, breaking into a domain once dominated by the ABVP.

The outcome of this election underscores the fact that AISA has consolidated its organisational strength across different schools despite substantial hostility. It

also demonstrates that a coherent, principled and organic unity among Left forces is capable of defeating right-wing reactionary groups in university campuses. The experience suggests that similar alliances should be forged in campuses such as HCU, DU and other universities where comparable experiments may succeed and where students' democratic spaces are under threat.

Elections for Students' Representatives to the Internal Committee (IC) were conducted simultaneously with the JNUSU polls. Former AISA councillor from SLL&CS – Comrade Garvita Gandhi – received the highest number of votes in the IC election.

It must also be acknowledged, however, that the overall increase in voter turnout fell short of expectations. Even with SFI joining the alliance, the rise in total votes was modest, a trend that warrants careful and dispassionate introspection within the Left. Despite these challenges, JNU has yet again shown that the hateful and violent face of Hindutva and Sangh Parivar can be rejected and defeated, and will continue to be the beacon of hope and resistance. ■

Comrade Aditi (President)

Aditi Mishra hails from Benaras, Uttar Pradesh where she finished her schooling. In September 2017, when protests erupted at BHU to defeat the undemocratic and patriarchal women's hostel curfew timings, Com. Aditi, who was then a UG student, was an integral part of this movement. In 2018, the year Aditi enrolled in Pondicherry University, the campus witnessed a wave of saffronisation in the form of systematic installation of banners quoting Hindutva ideologues. Com Aditi participated in a gherao of the Vice Chancellor's Office. In 2019, the administration exorbitantly hiked the tuition fee across courses in the university, resulting in a student-led lockdown of the administrative block. Com Aditi actively participated in protests against the arbitrary fee hike as well as in solidarity with the ongoing anti-CAA protests. The anti-fee-hike protests intensified in 2020, and Com Aditi's voice rang loud against this disenfranchisement of marginalised students.

She is currently pursuing her PhD research at the School of Internal Studies at JNU, on Gendered Violence and how the women of Uttar Pradesh have been mounting a resistance to it since 2012. As a second year PhD student, she was elected as the IC representative and worked to make it accountable and approachable to the student body of JNU. Com. Aditi has been part of AISA since her time in JNU and has long stood for gender justice. The fight to preserve and strengthen the culture of JNU as a place that stands for progressive values and justice for all is fortified in her leadership.

Comrade Danish (Joint Secretary)

Danish Ali, is a 1st year PhD student at the Centre for Historical Studies in School of Social Sciences and hails from the small village of Bandarbaru, in Narsinghpur district of Madhya Pradesh. She finished her schooling from Gadarwara, a nearby town. She has been a state-level throwball and cricket player during her school education. Her father is a retired government school teacher and mother is the principal of another government school.

Com Danish, finished her UG in History from SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi University. In December 2019, when Delhi Police unleashed violence against the students of Jamia Millia Islamia who were protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act, students of DU shut down their university in solidarity and protest, Com. Danish led the students in the shutdown of the administrative premises. She enrolled in the MA course at CHS in the 2022-2024 batch. The RSS backed ABVP goons had turned official class groups into platforms for opposing the progressive and anti-caste politics of JNU by hailing Ranveer Sena, the feudal caste army in Bihar which was responsible for the massacre of poor Dalits and Muslims in over a dozen villages. Com Danish along with the progressive students of CHS firmly protested against the agenda and carried out signature campaigns and protest demonstrations to set the record straight that CHS does not stand on the wrong side of history and rejects any association with feudal murderers.

Com. Danish is steadfast fighter with her fierce opposition to feudal and casteist violence. She represents all those young students who look at JNU as an alternative to the hate and bigotry that has the nation in its grip and wishes to engulf JNU. ■



Indonesia: Suharto Is a Criminal, Not a National Hero

▲ RIZKI OKTARA PUTRA



On 10 November 2025, Indonesia officially conferred the title of National Hero on former President Suharto, a move that has sent shockwaves through civil society, human rights activists and the families of those who suffered under his decades-long authoritarian rule. The ceremony, presided over by President Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's former son-in-law, marks more than symbolic recognition. It risks reopening old wounds and rewriting a difficult chapter of Indonesia's history.

The National Student League for Democracy (LMND), born out of the 1998 Reformasi movement, sees this not as a historical misjudgement but as a direct assault on the values of democratic resistance. For

LMND, Suharto's name should not be enshrined in golden ink but should stand as a warning that unaccountable power always corrodes justice. LMND rejects this narrative of heroism outright and vows to continue mobilising, educating and resisting any attempt to whitewash the past.

Suharto's Crimes Against Humanity Cannot Be Erased, Nor the Call for Justice

Raising Suharto's name to the rank of national hero is not an act of honour. It is a betrayal of history and a distortion of the spirit of reform. It is not a tribute but an attempt to bleach the brutality of a regime built on the blood and suffering of its own people. To elevate Suharto is to preserve history in the formalin of deception.

For LMND, awarding Suharto the title of hero suggests that Indonesians should thank a ruler who, in their view, surrendered national sovereignty to foreign interests and presided over mass atrocities and killings against communists, dissenters and progressive voices during the 1965 to 1967 genocide, as well as the tragedies of Tanjung Priok, Talang Sari, the Petrus killings and the disappearances of activists such as Wiji Thukul, Suyat and Bima Petrus Anugerah. For LMND, Suharto's legacy is not only one of human cruelty but also of economic, social and political suffocation that kept citizens far from the decisions shaping their future.

LMND itself was born out of resistance to the New Order. The regime's crimes are the trauma that shaped its ideological foundation. To understand LMND's position is to reopen the dark pages of Suharto's rule, an era defined not only by authoritarian governance but by a systematic architecture of oppression.

Suharto's crimes were against humanity. His regime rose over mass graves, beginning with the anti-communist purges of 1965 to 1966 that killed hundreds of thousands and imprisoned or exiled millions. The violence continued through military operations in Aceh, Papua and East Timor, the Petrus shootings and the bloodshed of Tanjung Priok. Under Suharto, violence became a political tool that was normalised and institutionalised.

He cultivated corruption, collusion and nepotism as the core of state management. Wealth flowed through monopolies, foundations and mega-projects into the hands of his family

and cronies, who controlled the nation's strategic sectors. The deep inequality Indonesia still faces today is rooted in this system.

His regime is known for the deliberate silencing of political life, where parties were forced to merge, Golkar became the machinery of power, the single principle of Pancasila became a tool to enforce uniformity and the press and university campuses were suppressed. Dissent was criminalised and the people were turned into passive subjects of an authoritarian state.

Under the banner of development, forests were destroyed, mines were handed to foreign corporations and business cronies, and indigenous communities were driven from their land. Indonesia's ecological crisis today is part of this legacy.

The centralised and corrupt economic management pushed the nation into collapse in 1998. When the crisis hit, it was the poor who suffered most as prices soared, industries collapsed and unemployment surged.

With such a record, Suharto is not a hero. He is a warning. History must not be bent to serve the nostalgia of power. Honour belongs to those who defend humanity, not those who violate it. LMND rejects any attempt to sanctify Suharto's legacy and remains committed to resisting the rise of authoritarianism. The lessons of the New Order must not be forgotten, and the struggle to protect democracy must not be allowed to fade.

(The author is the Secretary General of the National Executive of the National Student League for Democracy, Indonesia (Sekjend EN-LMND). ■

Hands Off Venezuela! In Solidarity with the People of Venezuela against US Imperialist Threats!

The Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) Liberation extends its unwavering revolutionary solidarity to the people of Venezuela, to the comrades of the PSUV, and to the comrades of the popular movements who stand at the frontline in defence of national sovereignty, peace, and the Bolivarian process.

We firmly condemn the latest imperialist provocations carried out by the United States under President Donald Trump. The deployment of nuclear submarines, warships, and other aggressive military assets near Venezuelan territory is a deliberate act of intimidation designed to destabilise the country and pave the way for regime change. These actions form part of a long and ruthless campaign of economic strangulation and political sabotage, including a brutal blockade aimed at breaking the resolve of the working people and forcing Venezuela to relinquish its sovereignty and its natural wealth to imperialist interests.

These hostile manoeuvres cannot be separated from the wider imperialist offensive unfolding worldwide. The genocidal war on Gaza, the mass displacement of Palestinians, and the unconditional political and military support provided by the United States to Israel expose the same imperial strategy that now targets Venezuela. From Latin America to West Asia, the imperialist agenda remains consistent: military domination, economic blackmail, the suppression of any people who refuse submission, and the seizure of vital resources for profit-hungry capitalist corporations.

Against this violent global order, the resistance of the Venezuelan people stands as a powerful example of dignity and determination. In this critical moment, we reaffirm that the CPI(ML) Liberation stands shoulder to shoulder with the Venezuelan people and with all forces fighting imperialist aggression. The right of people of Venezuela to determine its own political and economic course is absolute and non-negotiable. Long Live International Solidarity. ■



Inside India's Kafkaesque Justice System: A Review of *The Cell and the Soul*

▲ SOMENATH GUHA

The circumstances that led to the arrest of Anand Teltumbde was bizarre. Teltumbde, internationally renowned academic as well as an acclaimed social activist, who has penned several books on the caste system writes in his prison memoir, *The Cell and the Soul* that his ordeal started with a letter allegedly written by a Maoist and addressed to him. The letter was so comical and clumsily worded that it became immediately clear that it was fabricated. Moreover it was based on an international seminar in which the keynote speaker was Prof. Etienne Balibar, a celebrated Marxist thinker who had been a student of Louis Althusser. Prof. Teltumbde's dissertation in the seminar was 'The Political Economy of Caste'. The letter was presented in a press conference, widely circulated and even debated in media. Teltumbde was taken aback, was this happening to him, he asked himself! He filed a defamation case. The Supreme court sternly reprimanded the police for sharing evidence with the media. What's more even when he was under the protection of the Supreme Court, he was arrested on 2nd February, 2019 blatantly violating the court's orders. This leads the author to note that, "...our courts make all kinds of moralising observations during hearings but do nothing against delinquent officers for wilful violation of rules and laws."

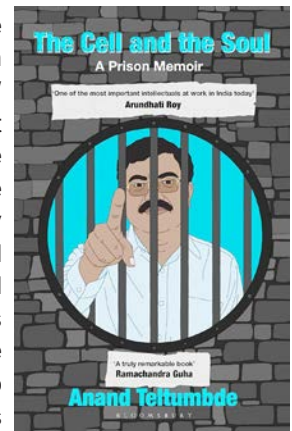
But then the Bhima Koregaon

episode itself is Kafkaesque, reading about the arrest and incarceration of the lawyers, professors, human rights and cultural activists is like wading through Franz Kafka's celebrated novel *The Trial* all over again. If one follows the BK or the Delhi 'Riots' case, this is the pattern throughout, a system of courts, police, jails, investigative agencies manipulated to suit the diabolical designs of the rulers. Take the case of Stan Swamy who could not drink water without a sipper but was not allowed to bring one into the prison. Only after several appeals to the court and national and international outrage, he was allowed to have it that too after two months had already elapsed. Jail authorities found out devious ways to torment the prisoners. In a malaria-prone jail like Taloja, suddenly one day all mosquito nets were confiscated. All incoming or outgoing letters were vetted not only by the jailor and superintendent but also the NIA and the Anti-Terrorism cell thus grossly invading one's privacy. Inmates faced severe water shortage as they were allowed only one bucket of water (roughly 15 litres) instead of the mandated 135 litres. Sagar Gorkhe of 'Kabir Kala Manch' who was implicated in the same case wrote a letter to Maharashtra home minister comparing the jail's condition to a torture camp. He along with all the BK accused went on a day's hunger strike. Teltumbde and others even petitioned the court to allow the use of mosquito nets. Strangely the court concurred

with the prison officials' argument that the nets were a 'security threat' and advised the inmates to use mosquito repellents instead,

and to add salt to the wounds, asked them to buy it from the canteen, making it accessible only to prisoners who could afford it. Other demands too were not fulfilled. Water supply improved only temporarily, and letters continued to be vetted.

Teltumbde recounts the plight of Stan Swamy, Varvara Rao, a prisoner named Bhola and mourns the death of his brother Milind to whom the Memoir is dedicated. We have a first-hand account of how gross and systematic negligence led to Stan's death and severely endangered Varvara Rao's life. Bhola's case is emblematic of lakhs of undertrials (94% of prisoners in Taloja jail were undertrials, much higher than the national average of 77.1%) languishing in India's prisons. He didn't even know why he was arrested. Always smiling, he helped the inmates by doing several odd jobs. At night his cries moaning his desolate, helpless mother pierced the prison's walls. One such night he hanged himself and was summarily dismissed as 'mental' by the jail authorities. This only underlines the heartlessness of the prison environment. Not much is known about Milind Teltumbde who died in a major police offensive in the Gadchiroli forest. While he was



vilified in the media as an extremist, we come to know that he was an upright young man brought up in extreme poverty, who later took up political activism. We learn of his valiant role in the protests against the Khairlanji massacre, and various workers' movements in the Chandrapur district.

The author makes a case for abolition of prisons. He cites the example of various Nordic countries and developed countries like Switzerland where reintegration into the society by education and skill-building has reduced crimes and led to the abolition of prisons. In New Zealand Maori cultural practices have been incorporated into rehabilitation programmes as they are over represented in the prison population. However considering the Himalayan problems that exist in Indian society, the mere thought of abolition of prisons here seems to be a utopia.

Most importantly are the author's thoughts on Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy. According to the author followers of Ambedkar revelled in symbolic gestures but show little concern for real-life atrocities. As per the NCRB, 2022 report on an average three dalits are killed and a dozen dalit women raped every day. But the Ambedkarites are not much concerned about this. Instead they become agitated when the author is arrested because he happens to belong to the great man's family. For instance even the gruesome Khairlanji massacre in September, 2006 failed to move the community. But two months later when a statue of Ambedkar was desecrated thousands of protestors stopped the Deccan Queen train and burnt its bogies. The author argues that any

disrespect shown to Babasaheb must be opposed but the same alacrity should be shown to oppose atrocities on dalits. Teltumbde writes two major currents define Ambedkar thought - statism and anti-communism. As Ambedkar authored the constitution, it is assumed that the state operates according to its guidelines, hence one must support the state. Any wrong doing of the state is blamed on the Manuwadi nature of the bureaucrats. The second current stems from historical division between Ambedkar and the communists. He realised this ideological bias when his brother Milind was killed. At that time the jailor in Taloja jail happened to be a dalit. When he came to know that Milind was author's 'real' brother he was surprised. According to him dalits were supposed to be only Ambedkarites and not communists or anything else!

An inmate who was very influential, probably involved with some gang, one day asked the author why he writes 'Ambedkar' and not 'Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar'. He was initially taken aback but then he realised that the perception among many dalits was that he was not respectful enough to the chief architect of India's constitution. He explained that honorifics like Mahatma, Babasaheb, Lokmanya were sparingly used and avoided in serious writing. Gandhi is simply written as Gandhi. And many PhD holders, including he himself did not use the prefix 'Dr' in their names. The root cause of the person's question lies in hero-worshipping Ambedkar. The fact is Babasaheb himself warned against Bhakti. The author quotes his final speech to the Constituent Assembly: "Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics,

Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure way to degradation and to eventual dictatorship." Again in a speech 'Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah', delivered in 1943 he cautions, "Heroes and hero-worship is a hard but unfortunate fact in India's political life ... we ought to be more cautious in our worship of great men." As a nation we obviously have not heeded his words, otherwise how can one explain the bhakti cult sweeping through our political landscape creating non-biological demi-gods.

The author confesses to a dilemma he regularly faces in his life. In Ambedkarite circles he is known as a Marxist and in Marxist circles as Ambedkarite. There are two aspects to this: the tendency to label a person by some ism; and the unfortunate rift between 'Ambedkarism' and Marxism. Teltumbde refuses to be identified with any ism. He describes two types of isms: "ideological (liberalism, socialism, fascism) and eponymous (Marxism, Gandhism, Ambedkarism)." He believes such identity-based isms foster ideological inertia. Followers of these isms presume that faithfully following a great personality or his ideas is sufficient to solve all problems. This attitude can turn dynamic ideas into a dogma. The author believes in today's rapidly evolving world no single ism is comprehensive enough to unravel modern complicacies. These thoughts are valuable resources but not road maps.

As regards the historical genesis of the divide between Ambedkarism and Marxism, he traces it to the ideological rift within the Republican Party of India (RPI) in the late 1950s. "The 'correct' faction identified constitutionalism as Ambedkar's legacy, disavowing

the 'incorrect' faction's agitational methods as communist-influenced. Thus, Ambedkarism was born not merely as a tribute but in direct opposition to Marxism." This trend persisted with the split among the Dalit Panthers. Instigated by the state this trend only got inflated in later decades. However, Teltumbde urges these two traditions to introspect and to come closer by burying their differences. Citing three instances from history, he shows that significant impact was created when the two trends have worked together: in the anti-Khote movement of 1938; in the working class strike against Industrial Disputes Bill also in 1938; in the land satyagraha of 1959 led by Dadasaheb Gaikwad. All three movements have been discussed in more details in the author's celebrated book *Iconoclast*.

Finally the author questions the relevance of nationalism in today's world. He says the concept has become a tool in the hands of the power-hungry politicians. Since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 the tribe of anti-nationals has grown exponentially. Anybody who dissents, opposes the government is an anti-national. By that argument 60% of Indian electorate who did not vote for BJP are anti-nationals. Owing to this ism, wars are being fought, millions are dying in riots, terrorist attacks, coups, and are being displaced from their homes. Vital resources are being frittered away in fuelling jingoism, turning the poor against the poor. On the other hand vast sections of the population continue to languish in perpetual misery. The author opines that a global movement of people declaring themselves as anti-national could erase fear, the most potent weapon of authoritarian regimes. He states, "Only by transcending the artificial constructs of nationalism can we hope to build a world that prioritises humanity over narrow, exclusionary identities." ■

Modi Government Must Desist from Taking Direct Control of Chandigarh

The Central Committee of the CPI(ML) strongly condemns the Modi government's latest move to bring a bill in Parliament aimed at placing Chandigarh under the direct control of the Union through the President's powers. This move represents not merely an administrative reshuffle but a direct assault on federal principles and a continuation of the historic injustices committed against the people of Punjab.

Chandigarh was built as a planned city after the forcible displacement of several Punjabi villages. Conceived through the architectural imagination of Le Corbusier and projected as an emblem of modernism, the city has, since its inception, remained tied to the political and cultural aspirations of Punjab. As the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, its transfer to Punjab has been a long-standing and legitimate demand. This issue formed a core component of the injustices that the Punjab movement raised, and its resolution was once agreed upon in the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. Yet the Centre has repeatedly reneged on its commitments, deliberately keeping the issue unresolved for decades.

The Modi government's current attempt to bring Chandigarh entirely under Union control places a final seal on this historic injustice. It also fits into the larger pattern of the present regime's systematic centralisation of power and weakening of federal structures. From the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir, its bifurcation into UTs to the enactment of the CAA-NRC, from repeated assaults on democratic institutions to the authoritarian push of the three Black Farm Laws, this government has consistently trampled upon people's livelihood, states' rights, regional aspirations, and the constitutional framework itself.

The people of Punjab have offered one of the most resolute and inspiring resistance to these authoritarian attacks. Whether in opposing the CAA-NRC, defending the autonomy of Punjab University's senate, or leading the historic farmers' movement, Punjab has repeatedly forced the Modi regime to retreat. This new attack on Chandigarh will undoubtedly evoke a similarly determined and wise response from the people. It's noteworthy, that Punjab is one of the rare states where a joint front of farmers and workers organisations held a huge protest against the abrogation of article 370 from J & K back in 2019.

The CPI(ML) stands firmly with the people of Punjab in defending their democratic and constitutional rights. We call upon all progressive, democratic forces—across Punjab and throughout the country—to launch a united struggle against this latest authoritarian move. Defending Chandigarh's rightful status is part of the broader struggle to defend federalism, democracy, and justice in India today.

(23 November, 2025) ■

Statement on Blast Near Delhi's Red Fort

Deeply shocked by the trail of death and destruction caused by the blast near Lal Qila. We express our profound sympathies with the bereaved families who have lost their loved ones in this blast and hope for the swift recovery of the injured victims and safety of all concerned.

Investigation into the Lal Qila blast now seems to suggest that it was an act of terror. A terror attack in a crowded area of Delhi which has killed at least 13 people and injured several others is a matter of serious concern.

What is of greater concern is the utter failure of the Modi government to tackle terrorism and ensure public security. At the time of Pahalgam terror strike, Narendra Modi cut short his trip to Saudi Arabia only to go to Madhubani to address a rally in poll-bound Bihar. Now at the time of the Lal Qila blast, Home Minister was busy managing Bihar elections for the BJP while Narendra Modi went to Bhutan to celebrate the 70th birth anniversary of the Fourth King of Bhutan without caring to extend support to the families of the blast victims in Delhi.

National security and public safety have become empty rhetoric for the Modi government or excuses to persecute activists like Sonam Wangchuk. It is time Amit Shah was held accountable and asked to resign.

-- Dipankar Bhattacharya,
General Secretary, CPIML
(12 November 2025) ■

West Bengal State Conference of CPIML



The CPIML's 13th West Bengal State Conference was held from 18–20 November 2025 at Oikotan Bhavan in Naihati, North 24 Parganas, with a strong pledge to revive left resurgence and democracy in Bengal. On the birth centenary of legendary Tebhaga movement leader Ila Mitra, Naihati town was renamed Ila Mitra Nagar. The conference opened with the hoisting of the red flag by Comrade Meena Pal, followed by floral tributes at the martyrs' memorial by General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Central Observer Manoj Bhakt, State Secretary Abhijit Majumdar and other state leaders. A public discussion titled "Bengal Needs a Left Resurgence" was held with prominent leaders of Left parties, after which a short cultural program by the Paschim Banga Ganasanskriti Parishad was presented. Songs by Tagore and Salil Chowdhury resonated with slogans calling for unity to defend democracy and resist fascist attacks in Bengal.

The delegate sessions began with the presentation of the draft report by outgoing State Secretary Abhijit Majumdar. On 19 November, representatives engaged in extensive debate on the draft report. A significant presence of young activists—students, youth, workers, Adivasi activists, project workers, women, minorities and cultural workers—along with veteran organizers. Many delegates shared inspiring accounts of struggles: An Adivasi delegate from Bankura described battles for forest land rights and the continued exclusion of Adivasis from basic benefits. Murshidabad delegates spoke of successful struggles of fisherfolk to regain rights to the Dwarka river. Research scholars from Kolkata highlighted campaigns against the communalization of education. Adivasi women, microfinance loan protesters, tea garden workers, disabled activists, environmental campaigners, and others narrated their struggles—from anti-eviction movements to resistance to corporate takeover of public sectors. In total, 83 out of 371 delegates and observers participated in the discussion.

Responding to the debates, the outgoing State Secretary assured incorporation of positive suggestions. The report was adopted unanimously, and a 67 members State Committee was elected. Comrade Abhijit Majumdar was re-elected as State Secretary. 18 new comrades from various background -- students, women activists, sanitation worker, minorities, peasant activists, Adivasi, cultural activists were incorporated in the new state committee. In his concluding address, comrade Abhijit Mazumdar called upon the ranks to intensify struggles for land, livelihood, and democracy, and to strengthen the Left resurgence in Bengal. The conference concluded with the singing of The Internationale.

For a Left Resurgence in Bengal

The inaugural session of the Conference was the open session where leaders of left parties emphasized the need for a revival of left politics in Bengal. CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, CPI(M) State Secretary Mohammed Salim, CPI State Secretary Swapan Banerjee, RSP State Secretary Tapan Hore, Forward Bloc State Secretary Naren Chattopadhyay and SUCI (Communist) State Secretary Chandidas Bhattacharya addressed this session. In his welcome address CPI(ML) West Bengal Secretary Abhijit Mazumdar spoke briefly on why it is necessary for the Left to break the bipolar situation in state politics and re-emerge as a force.

RSP State Secretary Tapan Hore, said "When the RSS-BJP maligns the name of Rabindranath, speaks ill of Vidyasagar, calls Rammohan a stooge of the British,

we understand how dangerous the RSS-BJP truly is. No single Left party's movement alone will be enough against them; we need a united Left movement."

CPI State Secretary Swapan Banerjee said, "The BJP is a seditious political party. They used to openly say they were not against British rule—they were only against Muslims, Christians, and Communists. The RSS knows that only Communists poses a challenge to them they always fear Communist ideology. They want to make the Manusmriti the Constitution and establishing Brahminical supremacy is their goal. A broader political unity can be achieved if we first achieve a strong Left unity. The initiatives taken by CPI(ML) Liberation to build Left unity is extremely positive."

SUCI (Communist) State Secretary Chandidas Bhattacharya said the arrogance of the RSS-BJP has grown to a extent that a BJP minister in Madhya Pradesh now had the audacity to call Rammohan Roy a stooge of the British. The Left unity must be premised on the dialectic of struggle and unity. The anti-fascist struggle must be centred on the struggle against the capitalist class.

Forward Bloc State Secretary Naren Chattopadhyaya emphasised to eliminate the gaps and weaknesses inside left movement.

CPI(M) State Secretary Mohammed Salim said that a strong left resurgence is needed to counter the attacks on the democratic space in the society. Across the country the deterioration of the electoral system is evident. In West Bengal too, the frightening state of electoral democracy was visible in municipal and panchayat elections.

The RSS is working in multiple ways to create a Hindu Rashtra. It has many more faces—many masks, many different activities. The RSS attacks the greatest sons of the Renaissance—Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath because they want to remodel the country on fascist idea. Against this, the Left must unite with a class perspective and based on movements and struggles. Movements for the right to education, the right to health, the right to a safe environment are essential.

CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya reminded the audience that during the anniversary month of the Russian Revolution, one good piece of news came from New York in the United States: in the mayoral election there, Mamdani's victory was a major achievement for the Left-democratic camp. For someone like him to win amidst billionaires in a place like New York, especially in Trump's era, is remarkable. Another good news came from Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, where Left student organisations fought together and won all the positions on the central panel. It was hoped that some good news would come from Bihar as well. That did not happen. However, it is also not true that the Left suffered a massive disaster in the election. The vote share increased. CPI(ML) received 1.4 million votes—around one hundred thousand more than last time. CPI and CPI(M) received another six lakh votes together, making the total Left vote in Bihar around two million. However, even though the vote share increased, the number of seats dropped sharply. The Left went down from sixteen seats to three; CPI(ML)'s own seats fell from twelve to two. This outcome was both unexpected

and astonishing.

Many are now saying that there is no point contesting elections under the Election Commission's biased system. Dipankar found such talk—widely circulating on social media—quite surprising. He said: "This is exactly what the rulers want—that we withdraw. If we walk away from elections or from the country's political arena, they will be delighted." Regarding the unexpected results in Bihar one important reason was certainly the SIR. There was widespread manipulation in the election—more than before, and in an organized manner. There should also be a ban on cash transfers in the months preceding elections; otherwise, governments will do nothing during their entire term and then buy votes with cash at the last moment.

When the Supreme Court cancelled electoral bonds, it raised a question: vast amounts of money were being given by companies to political parties, but the underlying interests were concealed. Hence the bonds needed to be scrapped. Now the reverse question arises: the government gave Adani huge tracts of land almost free—what did Adani give the ruling party in return? The money Adani secretly gave was used openly by the ruling alliance in the election. A small portion of this money also went to Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party. Prashant Kishor himself admitted to receiving many crores from Navayug Construction—linked to Adani—"in exchange for two hours of consultancy." Using this money, they entered the election with an entirely new style, completely alien to our electoral tradition: without any movement, without any membership campaign, they created party officials by paying ₹10,000, ₹20,000, ₹30,000 or more

per month, and fought the election based on this structure. Dipankar described this as a "corporate political project." He believes that alongside feudal-communal violence, Bihar also now faces the danger of direct corporate plunder.

In the Lok Sabha election in Bihar, AIMIM had little impact, but this time they won five seats again. With the declining number of Muslim MLAs and MPs in Bihar, and the fall in Muslim candidates, there is a sense of fear and anger among the Muslim population. AIMIM gained many votes and seats from that resentment. The opposition alliance failed to address this issue properly. When Mukesh Sahani was being proposed as Deputy Chief Minister to represent marginalised groups, it would have been better if a Muslim representative had also been named as Deputy Chief Minister. This was not done.

After analysing the Bihar results, Dipankar moved to West Bengal politics. He highlighted two issues: on one side, the alarming rise of BJP-RSS in Bengal as in the rest of the country; and on the other side, the misery of the people under Trinamool Congress's corruption and misrule. He spoke on how the Left can break the TMC-BJP binary that dominates Bengal's political space and re-emerge as a strong third force.

Dipankar said that if one reason for BJP's rise in Bengal is TMC's misrule, anarchy, and aggression, another reason is the Left's weakness. To break Bengal's TMC-BJP political binary, the revival of the Left is essential.

BJP is attempting to put pressure on the Left in Bengal—demanding "proof" that the Left is anti-TMC. And that proof, they say, must come by voting for BJP

to defeat TMC. This election, they argue, must be fought under the slogan "No Vote to TMC." The Left will certainly fight against TMC's misrule on every issue—against attacks on women, corruption, terror, fraud—and will remain active in mass movements. But the Left will not bow to BJP's pressure. The Left will fight both TMC and BJP in its own way, and assert itself as an independent, strong force.

There is no reason to think BJP is not eager to win Bengal. "Anga-Banga-Kalinga"—the entire eastern region—is on their target. After Anga and Kalinga, they will again try for Bengal. The Left must fight on issues of Bengal's heritage, attacks on Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Rabindranath; attacks on the Bengali language; and on Bengali migrant workers. If BJP comes to power in Bengal, liberal people and intellectuals will be the first to be targeted. Bengal will become like Assam or Tripura in no time. We will of course say: do not vote for BJP. But we will also say: vote for the Left.

On the question of Left revival, he stressed the importance of the struggles of the working class. But to organise workers today, to build movements, one must think from the ground reality. It cannot be understood only in the labour-capital framework. A worker's existence is not limited to the factory. Class, caste, and culture must all be understood together. Gender and generation are also two crucial components of social justice.

The Left needs unity. It is important to see whether the Left can fight the upcoming election together. And it must be ensured that the Left's struggles and movements find representation in the Legislative Assembly. ■

Subjugation and Exploitation of Labour: AICCTU Slams Modi Govt's Shram Shakti Niti 2025

In a letter to the Union Minister of Labour and Employment on October 27, the AICCTU had called for immediate withdrawal of the anti-labour Shram Shakti Niti 2025. AICCTU slamming the policy said that the central theme of the draft labour policy is aimed at institutionalizing the subjugation and exploitation of labour under the guise of moral and religious duty, grounded in the principle that "labour is a sacred and moral duty" in accordance with Dharma and ancient texts, including the Manusmriti. This is a deliberate and insidious attempt to re-establish centuries-old caste-based hierarchies and occupational slavery. The assertion that "work is not merely a means of livelihood but a contribution to the broader order of dharma (righteous duty)" has historically served as the ideological foundation of the caste system, where communities systematically subjugated for centuries, and it is this system that the policy seeks to institutionalize.

By embedding the labour policy within this framework, it is a clear attempt at institutionalising aspects of Manu Smriti in violation of the Constitution. Such an approach constitutes nothing short of a direct attack on the Constitution. While the Constitution envisions dismantling centuries of social and economic subjugation, this policy is an attempt to institutionalize caste-based hierarchies and reinforce social and economic subordination, thereby undermining the very principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity that the

Constitution stands for.

The Central trade union further noted that the policy has been released only in English, and not in any of the other Indian languages. This, in itself, reflects a serious exclusionary approach. How can workers from across the country, who come from diverse linguistic, cultural, and regional backgrounds, be expected to understand, engage with, or respond meaningfully to a policy that is available only in English? India is a nation characterized by its rich linguistic diversity, with the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution recognizing 22 distinct languages, and many more widely spoken across the country. By restricting the policy document to English alone, the government effectively denies the majority of workers, particularly those from marginalized and non-English-speaking backgrounds, the opportunity to participate in the process of policymaking.

AICCTU also noted that the policy proposes a type of new Employment Exchange in a sense, where AI would be used to link workers with job opportunities through the Ministry. The Ministry would also engage itself in resume generation and credential verification as per the policy. It is pertinent to note that the Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959 is still in force, though effectively defunct. The proposal for "AI-driven labour-governance capacity in all States" in the policy does not appear to be well thought out. At a time when

lakhs of workers are losing jobs across the globe due to influx of AI, and AI is being used to increase surveillance, AI must not be integrated into core regulatory mechanisms.

The union also slammed various misleading terms in the policy, where dubious promises and commitments are made, but the spirit and intent of the policy is to subjugate and exploit the workers. Regarding welfare of workers, no tangible outcome has been envisioned in the policy and all the promises are an eyewash.

Further under the Ease of compliance and formalisation, the policy seeks to further the dismantling of the inspection system and allow managements ample leeway to violate the law without regulation. It is a fact that even today the most basic statutory right of minimum wages is routinely violated with impunity. Lakhs of workers across sectors are forced to work for less than the legally prescribed minimum wages, while enforcement authorities remain grossly inadequate and inactive. In such a context, the idea of self-certification is nothing short of a cruel mockery of justice.

Rejecting the Shram Shakti Niti, AICCTU demanded that the policy be immediately withdrawn, labour codes be scrapped and that any labour and employment framework be re-envisioned in a manner that genuinely upholds the Constitution's transformative vision, ensuring equality, dignity, security, and justice for all workers. It is also necessary that such labour policy should be discussed and evolved only through the Indian Labour Conference. AICCTU has called for immediate convening of ILC. ■

Manoj Yadav

CPI(ML) deeply mourn the untimely and tragic passing of Comrade Manoj Yadav, a young and dedicated member of the CPI(ML) Darbhanga District Committee, who lost his life in a road accident on the night of November 7 while travelling to his village. Comrade Manoj came into the movement in his student days through AISA, and from the very beginning proved himself to be an energetic and committed activist.

Red Salute to Comrade Manoj Yadav. We pledge to carry forward your mission and strengthen the struggles you devoted your life to. ■



Visheshwar Yadav

Comrade Visheshwar Yadav, a senior member of the CPI(ML) Bihar State Committee, Secretary of the Vaishali District Committee, and President of the Bihar unit of the Kisan Mahasabha, passed away on the morning of November 12. He had been suffering from cold and fever for the past few days. As his condition worsened last night, he was admitted to the hospital. He was working in Supaul as the Party State Committee's in-charge for the Pipra Assembly constituency election.

Comrade Visheshwar had been a dynamic party organiser for decades and had worked in different parts of Bihar. A native of Vaishali district, he functioned as party secretary in rural Patna as well as in Siwan and Darbhanga. In spite of not having any prior experience of working in Supaul he became closely integrated with the local organisation in just a few weeks and led a powerful campaign mobilising the entire strength of the INDIA coalition. His passing is a profound loss to the Party and to the people's movements to which he dedicated his life with unwavering commitment. Red Salute to Comrade Visheshwar Yadav! ■



Sachhidanand Sinha

Sachhidanand Sinha, one of the oldest surviving stalwarts of India's socialist tradition, passed away on November 19. A stalwart of the socialist stream in India, writer, and lifelong advocate of democratic values, he was born in Musahari, Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

As a teenage student, he took part in the Quit India Movement, an experience that shaped his political consciousness and commitment to justice. Throughout his life, he remained deeply engaged with India's political developments, offering sharp insights rooted in decades of struggle and reflection. Even in his later years, he remained unwavering in his belief that the Indian people would overcome fascist challenges and continue to advance the country's democratic journey. His generation of freedom fighters, witnesses to the defeat of British colonialism served as a living reminder of the resilience and courage necessary to confront and defeat forces of oppression.

With the passing of Sachhidaji, India loses a principled voice of its socialist stream and a bridge to the freedom movement's legacy. His life and convictions will continue to inspire generations. ■



25 OCTOBER PROTEST



Resolve Issues of Sanitation Workers of Chennai Corporation! Protect Wages!

Thousands of sanitation workers of the Chennai Corporation, led by the Uzhaippor Urimai Iyakkam (Toilers Rights Movement) affiliated to the LTUC-AICCTU, are continuing their determined struggle demanding the restoration of their employment status and the intervention of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to resolve the ongoing crisis in a just manner.

On 25 October, the workers marked the eighty-sixth day of denial of employment with a day-long hunger strike that drew widespread attention from the media, trade unionists and the general public. Leaders from several political parties, including the CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and VCK, joined the protest to express their solidarity. Representatives from Tamizhaka Vazhvirimai Katchi (Tamil Nadu Party of Livelihood Rights), Manithaneya Makkal Katchi (Humanist People's Party), SDPI and the RSP were also present.

The hunger strike was inaugurated by Comrade S. S. Balaji, MLA of the VCK, and concluded under the leadership of Comrade Shanmugam, the state secretary of the CPI(M). Comrade Asaithambi, state secretary of CPI(ML) Liberation, addressed the gathering and called upon Chief Minister M. K. Stalin to intervene immediately to resolve the workers' long-pending issues. Comrade Kumarasami, Advisor of the AICCTU, also spoke at the protest, while the state president of AICCTU presided over the programme. Former Madras High Court judge Hari Paranthaman joined the demonstration to extend his support to the workers' struggle.

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