

JANUARY 2026
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Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)



Resist Modi Govt's Attack On The Right To Guaranteed Rural Employment!



INTERNATIONAL JOINT STATEMENT

Stop the US Military Aggression in the Caribbean! Hands off Venezuela!

We, the undersigned organisations, are deeply concerned over the recent military escalation in the Caribbean and the aggression against Venezuela by the imperialist US.

We strongly condemn the US military deployment in the Caribbean and its military build-up and operations in the Caribbean Sea, blowing up boats and resulting in extrajudicial killings. The military build-up in the Caribbean under the pretext of combating drug trafficking and “narcoterrorists” since August 2025, is the latest attempt of the imperialist US to conduct a regime change operation in Venezuela. The intention of the imperialist US is clear, which is to remove the current Venezuelan government led by Nicolás Maduro, to reverse the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution, and to restore the pro-US oligarchical rule in the country, in order to serve the geopolitical interest of the imperialist US. Seizing Venezuela’s oil deposits, one of the largest in the world, is a critical consideration, demonstrated by the recent US seizure of a Venezuelan oil tanker.

The Venezuelan people already suffer dire economic conditions due to the sweeping sanctions imposed by the US in 2019.

The people of Venezuela have every right to defend their sovereignty and to determine their own path of development, without any intervention from foreign imperialist powers.

Hence, we call for:

- Stop US attacks on Venezuela!
- Stop the US military operations in the Caribbean.
- Stop all US interference and interventions in Latin American domestic politics.
- Shut down all US military bases overseas.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela in defending their sovereignty, free from imperialist intervention.

-issued on December 16 by PSM, Malaysia, PLM, Philippines, CPIML Liberation and other organisation from South Asia & South East Asia. For full list of endorsing organisations, visit: thinkleft.net

Statement on the Escalating Hostilities in Bangladesh

We express our deep anguish and grave concern over the rapidly escalating violence and organised public unrest in neighbouring Bangladesh. A disturbing wave of vandalism and targeted attacks has already resulted in significant loss of life and property.

Reactionary fundamentalist forces, mobilising youth along communal lines, have unleashed systematic assaults on religious minorities, opposition voices, and progressive cultural institutions. The attacks on leading media houses Pratham Alo and The Daily Star in Dhaka, and the ransacking of renowned cultural organisations Chhayanaut and Udichi, signal a direct

assault on democratic and secular values. The killing of student leader Osman Hadi of Inquilab Manch, the lynching and burning of a minority youth in Mymensingh, and the death of a minor girl in Chattogram following arson at a BNP leader’s residence, underscore the alarming brutality of the ongoing violence. Opposition party offices have also been systematically targeted.

This unprecedented spate of violence must be halted immediately. We urge the Bangladesh administration to act decisively, identify the perpetrators, and ensure justice.

We call upon the Chief Adviser of the Interim Government of Bangladesh to intervene to thwart this deliberate

attempt by fundamentalist forces to destabilise society and undermine the democratic process ahead of the scheduled general election in February 2026.

At the same time, we remain deeply concerned that the fascist and fundamentalist forces in India may seek to exploit these developments to stoke Islamophobia and communal polarisation, particularly in West Bengal, for electoral gains in the forthcoming Assembly elections.

We appeal to all left, democratic, and secular-minded citizens to remain vigilant against sectarian provocations and to actively uphold the constitutional commitment to communal harmony, pluralism, and democratic rights across religious and cultural lines.

-- Central Committee,
December 20, 2025



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Editor-in-chief

Dipankar Bhattacharya

Editor

Arindam Sen

Editorial Board

V. Shankar

Sanjay Sharma

Sucheta De

Ajit Patil

Clifton D' Rozario

Maitreyi Krishnan

Akash Bhattacharya

Editors' e-mail:

liberation@cpiml.org

Design: V Arun Kumar

Manager: Prabhat Kumar

Phone: 704287713

Website: liberation.org.in

E-mail: manager.liberation@gmail.com

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Let Us Make 2026 a Year of Recovery for India's Democracy

The year 2025 marked the 75th anniversary of the implementation of the Constitution of India. On the eve of the adoption of the Constitution on 26 November 1949, Babasaheb Ambedkar had made some very insightful remarks in his final speech as the chairperson of the drafting committee of the Constituent Assembly. One of those comments warned us about the quality of the people administering the Constitution. "However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot", warned Dr. Ambedkar. This was his way of calling upon "we the people of India" to remain eternally vigilant to protect our liberty, secure our rights and strengthen the constitutional foundation, secular democratic character and socialistic orientation of India's republic. Today every passing day reminds us how prophetic Ambedkar had been.

2025 witnessed some of the most insidious attacks on the Constitution even without effecting any explicit amendment. The subversion of the Constitution is taking place on multiple levels. The basic constitutional narrative is being shifted from empowerment of citizens, accountability of the state and separation of powers to an ever expanding code of duties for citizens enforced by unregulated digital surveillance power of the state and unmitigated centralisation of power in the hands of the executive. The executive today routinely overrules the judiciary and bulldozes the legislature, while the fourth pillar which is supposed to play the watchdog role and speak truth to power has been effectively refashioned as the propaganda arm of the executive.

Protests of the people and elections



We need to summon all the foundational strength of the republic - the quest for social equality, rationality and humanism, the strength of India's pluralist cultural ethos, the unity and dynamism generated in the course of India's protracted anti-colonial national awakening and the rich experience of a relatively functional democracy for all these years in the post-independence period - to overcome this biggest ever challenge to Indian democracy.

at regular intervals remain the only potential checks against this executive aggression. During the last six years India did witness some powerful popular struggles, the protests against the CAA and the historic farmers' movement against corporate takeover of agriculture being the most remarkable cases in point. Powered by these struggles and the growing popular determination to stop the BJP from amending the basic structure of the Constitution, the people of India also succeeded in dealing some hefty blows to the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, bringing the party's tally down to 240 seats and making it dependent on the support of allies like TDP in Andhra Pradesh and JDU in Bihar hold on to power in Delhi. Jolted by this 2024 setback to its 400-plus ambition, the BJP has since sharpened its twin strategy of state repression and electoral manipulation, taking the fascist offensive to an altogether higher level.

In 2025 we have witnessed an open campaign of extra-judicial extermination of the Maoist stream in the name of Operation Kagar coupled with indiscriminate invocation of draconian laws like UAPA against activists leading to protracted incarceration without any trial or bail. If senior Maoist

leaders are being executed in extra-judicial encounters, activists upholding a whole range of democratic concerns like land and forest rights, environmental protection, climate justice, social and economic equality, minority rights, cultural freedom or separate statehood are being implicated and incarcerated for months and years on end without bail or trial. Freedom of assembly and the right to protest by peaceful constitutional means are today severely restricted, and instead of upholding constitutional rights of citizens courts have begun discouraging and stopping citizens from exercising their rights, even suggesting what issues to talk about.

Accompanying this silencing of protests now is a systematic synthesis of electoral purge and electoral fraud being administered through a compliant handpicked panel of election commissioners. The first past the post electoral system always had its anomalies and the combination of money and muscle power always played a major role in Indian elections. But the mass disenfranchisement now being perpetrated in the name of Special Intensive Revision of electoral roll and complete abdication of transparency and accountability by the Election Commission have

rendered elections extremely unfree and unfair. The Sangh-BJP fascist game plan of turning India into a one-party state with manufactured mandates in election after election ensuring an assured permanent majority for the BJP/NDA to stay entrenched in power for decades now seems ominously in place.

How does the 75-year-old republic face this juncture? There is clearly no easy exit from this mess. We need to summon all the foundational strength of the republic - the quest for social equality, rationality and humanism, the strength of India's pluralist cultural ethos, the unity and dynamism generated in the course of India's protracted anti-colonial national awakening and the rich experience of a relatively functional democracy for all these years in the post-independence period - to overcome this biggest ever challenge to Indian democracy. It was a determined assertion of "we, the people of India" that had won us our freedom from the British colonial rule. We need another awakening of India on that scale to reclaim our constitutional vision of a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic. 2025 has been a year of major gains for fascism, let us make 2026 a year of recovery for India's democratic forces. ■

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Build Powerful People's Struggles against Anti-People Legislations

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The 2025 winter session of Parliament will be remembered as a textbook example of the BJP's mischievous 'politics of history'. The session was happening amidst India's most acute aviation crisis with hundreds of flights cancelled and thousands of passengers stranded in airports stranded for hours, a crisis which was entirely avoidable if only we had a measure of accountability and responsive corporate and state governance. And it was happening in India's capital city which had just three weeks ago witnessed a lethal car explosion near the iconic Lal Qila that claimed more than a dozen lives, and which remains the world's most polluted capital with most alarming AQI levels. Yet the Modi government's topmost priority was a ten-hour-long discussion on 'Vande Mataram' to mark the 150th anniversary of the poem.

If the intent was merely to observe the 150th anniversary of the poem which came to be adopted as India's 'national song' alongside the national anthem 'Jana Gana Mana' by the Constituent Assembly on the eve of the proclamation of the Indian Republic, then the government could have done it by issuing a stamp or hosting a commemorative event. But the government evidently had a different purpose, it wants to weaponize a fictitious narrative around the song to distort history and serve the Hindutva agenda today. The fiction peddled

by the Sangh-BJP establishment would have us believe that Gandhi wanted the longer version of Vande Mataram as India's national anthem, but Jinnah was opposed to the song, and the Congress truncated the song to appease Jinnah and the truncation of Vande Mataram became the precursor of the eventual partition of India!

Nothing could be farther from the truth of Vande Mataram. The original poem had only two stanzas and had first appeared in the historic Bengali periodical called Bangadarshan launched by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Tagore set it to music and sang it first before Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and then in the 1896 session of the Congress in Kolkata. The version of Vande Mataram that Bankim Chandra included in his novel Anandamath was an expanded version adapted to the text of the novel. It should also be noted that the 'motherland' invoked in the song was the undivided Bengal province of undivided India and the song and especially the chant 'Vande Mataram' became a rallying cry during the movement against 'Bangabanga' (Bengal partition) in 1905. Subsequently it acquired a pan-Indian interpretation and appeal and it was as a recognition of the historical impact of the slogan that stalwarts of India's national and cultural awakening including Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Maulana Azad recommended the original poem with two stanzas as the national song.

In Anandamath, the song got invested with Hindu religious appeal, but the actual historical impact of the song was as a rousing anti-colonial patriotic invocation of the motherland. The inclusive secular nationalism of India rightly recognized the first two Bangadarshan version stanzas. The expanded Anandamath version may have been appealing in the context of the novel, but was not suited to the requirements of a national song. The question of 'truncation' of the poem is thus entirely misplaced and mischievous. The original version which historically had nationalist resonance was recognized, the expanded version used in the novel was not found suitable for the purpose of national song of multi religious India. The RSS and its Hindutva ideology had nothing to do with India's anti-colonial national awakening and the freedom movement and the predecessors of today's BJP had therefore little association with the nationalist appeal and usage of Vande Mataram. Today they are keen to mischievously invoke the Anandamath version of Vande Mataram to malign India's anti-colonial legacy and serve their Hindutva agenda. Also, contrary to the BJP's claims, the strongest suggestion to choose the original two stanzas over the Anandamath version came from Rabindranath Tagore and not from Jawaharlal Nehru.

While distracting people's attention away from the burning issues of the day and bogging the people down in a misleading and divisive debate over Vande Mataram in the name of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the song, the Modi government once again used a truncated parliament session

to push its sinister legislative agenda. The government wants 100% FDI in the insurance sector and private participation in the strategic nuclear energy sector. The sphere of higher education is being sought to be brought under centralized control by setting up a single Higher Education Commission of India obviously with a view to weakening federalism, promoting commercialization and securing greater ideological indoctrination and influence of the RSS.

And finally, while subjecting workers to the corporate jungle raj of hire and fire, the government also wants to do away with India's biggest welfare legislation, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. The proposed replacement, the VB-GRAMG (Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill 2025 seeks to burden the states with disproportionate responsibility for funding while rendering the Act inoperative during the busy agriculture season. While farmers have been demanding greater linkage between agriculture and MGNREGA, the new law will suspend the very law during the agriculture season in the name of ensuring cheaper and more abundant supply of labour to agriculture. If parliament sessions are sought to be used for misleading debates on fictitious history and hasty sinister legislation to erode people's rights and subvert the constitution, the people of India will have to defeat this strategy by waging sustained and determined struggles on the streets.

Metamorphosis of MGNREGA into VB-GRAMG: Summary Execution of India's Best Known Social Welfare Legislation

For twenty years MGNREGA was being acclaimed as the world's biggest public works and social welfare programme. There have of course been concerns about irregularities and anomalies in the implementation of the Act and demands for more effective provisions to make the Act more purposeful. Of late, the vindictive and discriminatory approach of the Modi government made the Act rather dysfunctional in some states. Only the other day the Supreme Court upheld a High Court order to ask the Modi government to resume MGNREGS work in West Bengal. Now in yet another defiant move overruling the Supreme Court, the Modi government wants to scrap the very MGNREGA Act and replace it by a new legislation called Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill 2025!

True to its nature, the Modi government seeks to camouflage this dismantling of the employment guarantee framework as a 'benefit' for rural job seekers by presenting it as an increase in the scope of persondays from 100 to 125 per year. The reality is labourers have hardly been getting 50 days of work per year. Behind the veil of imaginary increase of workdays, the new bill actually erodes whatever right and guarantee job-seekers enjoyed under the previous arrangement. The operation of the Act will from now on remain suspended for a period of sixty days during the main agricultural season. States will have to bear a bigger burden of the wage bill, and panchayats will hardly have any say in the bureaucratically administered scheme of things. There will be no increase in wages or guaranteed payment of minimum wages. A demand-driven rights-oriented legislation will thus be replaced by another centrally manipulated supply-limited cash transfer programme subjected to the vagaries of the digital delivery system.

The government would like us to believe that the new arrangement of pausing the operation of the Act during busy agriculture season is beneficial to both farmers and labourers. Actually farmers across India have been demanding a closer integration or linkage between rural employment guarantee and agriculture. The money the government distributes in the name of 'Kisan Samman' or honouring India's farmers does little to ease the burden of agrarian crisis and ever escalating cost of agriculture. Closer linkage between the employment guarantee act and agriculture would amount to an effective subsidy from the farmers' point of view while ensuring regular employment and minimum wages for agricultural labourers. The Modi government has chosen exactly the opposite route of divorcing the employment guarantee act from agriculture.

Renowned development activist and one of the key architects of NREGA in 2005 Jean Dreze has rightly described the VB-GRAMG Bill as not mere renaming of the old act and removal of the name of Mahatma Gandhi, but as outright assassination of the Act akin to the assassination of Gandhi himself. At a time when the country has been yearning for a stronger rural

employment guarantee act with an equivalent extension in urban areas to address the issue of acute urban poverty and unemployment, the Modi government has come out with this combo package of Labour Codes and VB-GRAMG sounding the death knell for employment guarantee and labour rights.

For the Modi government this is a long awaited surgical strike on a UPA-era signature legislation. From NREGA (later renamed MGNREGA) and RTI to Forest Rights Act and the Land Acquisition Act 2013 (Right to Fair Compensation and

Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act), the UPA period had witnessed a set of legislations which were all products of protracted struggles and dedicated public interest research and activism. The Modi era began with the attempt to kill the Land Acquisition Act with an Ordinance, but the farmers' movement and the opposition succeeded in foiling the move. Wiser from the defeat of that bid, the Modi government chose the path of subverting the legislations by sinister amendments. Now emboldened by the successful

hijack of the Bihar elections, the government has chosen the moment to kill the MGNREGA through a summary execution without any public consultation or parliamentary debate. It is now for India's agricultural and other rural labourers, workers and farmers to forge broad-based unity and wage a sustained movement against the disastrous combo package of Labour Codes and VB-GRAMG Act with the kind of tenacity, strength and determination that enabled India's farmers to win their historic victory over the now repealed farm laws. ■

Protest Against Modi Govt's Attack on MGNREGA

As part of the All India Protest Day on December 22, CPI(ML) Liberation, AIARLA, MNREGA Mazdoor Sabha, AICCTU and other Left organisations led militant protests across Bihar,

Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and other states against the Modi-led BJP government's assault on MNREGA and the right to guaranteed rural employment.

The protests condemned the BJP regime for destroying MNREGA,

advancing corporate-driven policies, and reducing workers to modern-day slaves of corporates. Protesters strongly opposed the stealthy introduction of the VB GRAM G Act and demanded its immediate withdrawal, expansion of MNREGA to 200 days of work, a minimum wage of Rs. 600 per day, and increased budgetary allocations. ■



India's Workers Will Resist the Four Labour Codes the Same Way India's Farmers Fought against the Three Farm Laws

On 21 November, 2025 the Modi government finally brought the four Labour Codes into force. Despite bludgeoning through these new laws in Parliament, without any discussion, in 2019 and 2020, the Modi government, faced with massive opposition from the Trade Unions, had to reluctantly withhold the enforcement of these Codes. However, having orchestrated the biggest electoral fraud of Independent India in the Bihar assembly elections, and emboldened by its total control over the election machinery, the Modi government has now declared that the four Labour Codes would come into force immediately.

Like the replacement of the IPC with the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, the government presents the new Labour Codes too as another act of decolonization, of doing away with the colonial legacy and colonial era laws. This is a blatantly false claim. The labour laws that had started taking shape in the colonial period - from the Factories Act 1881 to the Trade Unions Act 1926 and Trade Disputes Act 1929 and the like - were not colonial gifts but products of the great anti-colonial awakening and struggles of the Indian people. And one of the greatest champions of labour rights since India's colonial days was none other than Babasaheb Ambedkar who had gone on to become the Chairman of the

drafting panel of the Constitution of India. The Labour Codes do not attack India's colonial legacy, they only undermine India's anti-colonial and constitutional history.

Ambedkar's intervention in the late 1920s mill strikes and his founding of the Independent Labour Party in 1936 had signalled a militant commitment to freeing workers from exploitation while confronting caste as the primary obstacle to working class unity. He declared the ILP a fighting organisation for labour, advancing a legislative programme for secure employment, fair wages, regulated hours, social security and industrial rights. Rejecting the lie that caste is a "division of labour," Ambedkar had exposed it as a "division of labourers" and called for the united organisation of workers as an independent political force. Like the fight for abolition of landlordism and usury, the battle for working class rights too constituted a glorious and integral stream of India's freedom movement. The founding generation of India's communist leaders, Ambedkar and many Congress stalwarts were closely involved with the stirrings of the Indian working class for a life of dignity and for a just society in a free country.

The new Labour Codes subordinate the agenda of labour rights to corporate greed. In the name of abolition of Inspector Raj, the new Labour Codes abdicate the state's responsibility to enforce any kind of regulatory

framework to ensure compliance with the laws of the land, principles of fairness and justice and safety of workplaces. Subjecting the working class to more work for less wages, less security and less freedom is the real purpose behind the new Labour Codes which are being advertised as a great new deal for India's workers. While the state abdicates its responsibility to enforce labour welfare, the new codes are designed to stop workers from getting organised and fighting for their rights. The codes run counter to the constitutional foundation of liberty, equality and fraternity; and negate the clarion call issued by Ambedkar - "Educate, Agitate, Organise".

The four Labour Codes are dictated by the same agenda of corporate takeover that had earlier given rise to the three farm laws repealed under the pressure of the historic farmers' movement. The farmers' organisations succeeded in pushing back the Modi regime by their remarkable unity, stamina and determination. The power of this historic movement had attracted the attention and support of the whole country generating a great spirit of worker-peasant solidarity and broader social support. The working class movement too will have to follow the same path of forging broader class unity and waging a sustained struggle to defeat the onslaught of the four Labour Codes. The new laws seek to give an impression of addressing the core concerns of diverse sections of Indian working class while truncating their fundamental right to organise and fight.

Let us take the fight against

these codes of slavery to those very sections of workers - from casual, contract and outsourced workers, the expanding contingent of gig workers and IT employees to India's most

oppressed and exploited women workers - who will be most adversely affected by this new system. The four Labour Codes are all about subjecting India's workers to the dictatorship of

private employers and to the chains of corporate control. The battle against these codes will write a new chapter in the history of working class awakening and advance in India. ■

Workers and Farmers Rise in Unified Resistance on November 26



Workers, peasants and democratic forces across the country marked November 26 as a massive All-India Day of Protest in response to the joint call issued by the Central Trade Unions and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha. The nationwide mobilisation came just days after the Union Government's arbitrary notification on November 21 enforcing the four Labour Codes, despite years of consistent opposition and repeated appeals for democratic consultation.

Across India, November 26 witnessed fiery protests. A strong and united demonstration was held at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, where leaders of the Central Trade Unions and representatives of SKM addressed the gathering. AICCTU General Secretary Rajiv Dimri declared, "This government has handed the working class over to corporate masters. But

the working people of India have shown today that these anti-worker Codes will be met with the strongest, united resistance in our history."

The government's decision to implement 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) has drawn strong condemnation. Although branded as "labour reforms,"

these Codes dismantle essential rights of workers, dilute industrial safety norms and curtail collective bargaining, ultimately serving corporate profiteering under the banner of Ease of Doing Business. The Codes drastically weaken wage protections and welfare provisions and raise thresholds in favour of employers, leaving vast sections of workers vulnerable to informalisation and near-bondage conditions.

Speaking at the Kolkata demonstration, AICCTU leader Basudev Basu said, "By enforcing these Codes, the Modi regime wants to erase every right earned through workers' sacrifice. The notification, pushed through without consultation, defies all democratic ethos and undermines the very principles of a welfare state. The workers will resist this slavery with uncompromising determination."

Jharkhand, Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu saw workers-farmers march and rally, vowing to intensify

Update | General Strike | 12 February 2026

Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and Sectoral Federations / Associations resolve to call a General Strike on 12th February 2026 against the draconian Labour Codes and the multi-pronged attack by the Central Government on the people's rights and entitlements.

The strike date will be formally ratified at the National Workers' Convention to be held on 9th January 2026 at HKS Bhawan, New Delhi.

(issued by CTUs on 23 December 2025)

resistance. In Bangalore, Karnataka and in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand, protestors held mass burnings of the four Labour Codes, symbolising the workers' rejection of policies that strip away their rights.

The joint platform of ten central trade unions and independent industrial federations has been resisting these draconian Codes since their enactment, starting with nationwide protests after the passage of the Wage Code in 2019. The historic General Strike of January 2020, followed by the September 2020 agitations when the remaining Codes were passed, culminated in the massive joint workers-peasants actions of 26 November 2020 alongside the Delhi Chalo movement of the SKM. The July 9, 2025 General Strike, which saw the participation of over 25 crore workers, once again underlined the depth of public opposition. None of this deterred the government, which ignored demands to convene the Indian Labour Conference both in the November 13 consultation on the draft Shram Shakti Niti 2025 and in the November 20 pre-budget meeting.

November 26 has reaffirmed that India's working class refuses to surrender its hard-won rights. The united force of workers and farmers has once again demonstrated its resolve to defend democracy, dignity and justice against policies that seek to push the toiling masses into servitude. The struggle will continue with greater strength and unity in the days ahead. ■

Aravallis Under Siege

▲ V. ARUN KUMAR

The Aravalli range may not be as mighty as the Himalayas, but they are older than the Himalayas and older than most visible life on land. Without them, Delhi and the surrounding region would have turned into desert-like areas. For centuries, the Aravallis have acted as a natural barrier between the Thar Desert and the Indo-Gangetic plains. Their broken ridges and rocky outcrops slow desert winds, stabilise soils, trap dust, and regulate moisture, while their fractured rocks and shallow slopes capture rainwater, allowing it to percolate into aquifers.

This is why recent attempts to downplay the dilution of Aravalli protection, by invoking narrow definitions of what constitutes a "hill," are deeply troubling. In November this year, the Supreme Court agreed to the Central government's new definition of an "Aravalli Hill" as any landform in designated Aravalli districts that has an elevation of 100 m or more above local relief (including its slopes and enclosed contours). Furthermore, it stated that a "Aravalli Range" is where two or more such hills lie within 500 m of each other, and the entire area within those contours (including the land between hills) is treated as part of the range.

Recently, the Union Environmental Minister Bhupender Yadav defended this definition and claimed that there is no threat, saying 90% is still protected. He added that only 2 per cent can be mined, and that the Supreme Court has imposed a ban on any new mining licence until a detailed study is undertaken.

The crux of the problem here is exactly what is happening in the Himalayas, or for that matter, in forests in Chhattisgarh. The entire approach of the Modi government on issues of crucial ecological areas has not been from the environmental perspective, but from the outlook of mining, real-estate, and large corporates. It is important to mention that the Aravalli range is rich in minerals such as limestone, marble, quartz, copper, zinc, and other building stones, especially in Rajasthan and parts of Haryana.

Further, the narrow, short-term, and corporate-driven approach totally negates the impact of the climate crisis and the geological formations. We have seen the same outlook in the Himalayas, where rampant destruction and unplanned constructions and industries have led to disasters and increasing threats of glacier meltdowns. In Chhattisgarh, ecologically sensitive areas are being sold off to Adani and other corporates without any consideration for local ecology.

The recently adopted definition of the Aravalli Range, which relies primarily on height-based geomorphological thresholds, departs significantly from international standards used to identify, classify, and protect environmentally sensitive mountain and hill systems. Global institutions such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Convention on Biological Diversity define

and protect landscapes based on what they do, not merely on how tall they appear. Old mountain ranges across the world, like the Appalachians in North America or the Scottish Highlands in Europe, retain protection because of their geological continuity, hydrological function, ecological connectivity, and role in climate regulation, even where their present-day elevation is modest. To ignore these principles is to reject decades of scientific consensus.

The Aravalli system that spans approximately 670 km (420 mi) in a south-west direction, starting near Delhi, passing through southern Haryana and Rajasthan, and ending in Ahmedabad, is not made up of tall hills everywhere and is not uniform across states. At several places it has low ridges, broken hillocks, and shallow rises crucial for ecology. Many of these do not cross the 100 m threshold, especially in Haryana and Rajasthan.

The further issue is that the definition was created for the convenience of industry, before any comprehensive, landscape-scale ecological mapping of the Aravalli system, except in protected and wildlife zones. The 100 m hill and 500 m range definition completely ignores the ecological and hydrological importance of smaller ridges and other geological features.

The argument that a buffer between hills compensates for this restrictive definition is equally misleading. In practice, mining has fragmented continuous ridges into isolated remnants, many of which no longer qualify for protection once reduced below an arbitrary threshold due to constant weathering or

human-made activities.

Moreover, using a 100-metre benchmark and measuring elevation from local relief or profile (the immediate surroundings of a hill) rather than from a standardised baseline such as the state's lowest elevation would mean that a substantial portion of the Aravalli range would no longer be classified as part of the Aravallis.

The degradation of Aravalli in Rajasthan, from where the new definition is borrowed, is the prime example of how a narrow definition has led to rampant mining and destruction. As per a study by CU Rajasthan, this has led to an increase in sandstorms, and at least 31 hills in the upper Aravalli range (Haryana-northern Rajasthan) have disappeared in the last two decades, besides several other hills in the lower and middle ranges. In Haryana, similar stories are everywhere, with Aravallis degrading rapidly due to mining, stone quarrying, and other activities. These studies show that once a ridge is breached, erosion accelerates, vegetation fails to regenerate, and surrounding areas become vulnerable to further extraction. The consequence of this piecemeal destruction is visible in rising temperatures, intensifying dust storms, declining groundwater, and the slow but steady march of desert-like conditions eastward.

In a region already facing acute water stress, the fractured quartzites, natural cracks and fissures, and weathered slopes of the Aravallis act as natural reservoirs, capturing monsoon rainfall and feeding aquifers that sustain agriculture and urban populations alike. Beyond

visible hills, the Aravallis give rise to a dense network of seasonal drainage systems—nalas, ravines, gullies, and ephemeral streams that carry monsoon runoff from rocky ridges into the plains of Haryana, Delhi, and eastern Rajasthan. International water-security frameworks treat such recharge landscapes as critical natural infrastructure, deserving of the highest level of protection.

The new definition, however, renders many of these areas invisible, opening them to mining, construction, and irreversible damage. The future opening up of "regulated mining" under the new definition will also adversely affect the forest-dwelling and forest-dependent communities, as well as pastoral communities. By excluding low hills, scrub forests, rocky plains, and pediments from the legally recognised Aravalli system, it removes protection from precisely the landscapes most used by forest-dwelling and pastoral communities, with mining companies taking over these areas and destroying livelihoods.

For Delhi and its surrounding region, which are at the receiving end of extreme heat, dust, and pollution, the Aravallis function as a critical climate buffer. Their forest cover, rocky terrain, and open scrublands moderate land-surface temperatures, reduce dust loading, and influence local wind patterns.

The Aravallis cannot be preserved through technical definitions or conditional buffers. In fact, the Forest Survey of India, particularly in its submissions to court-mandated committees and in internal mapping exercises

over the past decade, treated the Aravalli Range as a geo-ecological landscape, not just a collection of tall hills. Their submission (as reported by various news reports) revealed that only 8.7% of the Aravalli Hills, comprising 1,048 out of 12,081 hills, meet the 100-meter height criterion. It noted that the 20 m height cut-off is crucial for a hill's function as a wind barrier. FSI has been using a 3-degree slope yardstick to define Aravalli Hills since 2010, and a technical committee formed in 2024 modified the benchmark and proposed to identify as Aravalli Hills any landform with a slope of at least 4.57 degrees and a height of at least 30 m. The Indian Express reported that despite concerns from experts that "the 100-m cut-off would protect only a few guard posts while surrendering the fences below," the central government prescribed the 100-m definition to the SC.

In fact, the pseudo-scientific approach to questions of ecology and climate is not new for this government. In Uttarakhand, the Modi government divided the massive 900 km Char-Dham road into 53 smaller segments, each under 100 km, to bypass the mandatory, comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) required for large projects. Similarly, in the Great Nicobar Swap – compensatory afforestation, the government destroyed 130 sq km of pristine tropical forest in Great Nicobar Island for a mega development project and built "compensation" in the Aravallis of Haryana, a place 2,400 km away and in a totally different ecosystem and climatic conditions. And now the Modi government sells this as the Aravalli Green Wall Project.

The Modi regime's ploy for the destruction of Aravallis, under the guise of 'sustainable mining,' is being exposed as people rise in protests. The 'Save Aravalli' campaign is intensifying, and with protests from Gurugram to Udaipur, people see through the lies of the government.

A government whose entire premise of governance is exploitation of people and environment for corporate profit treats the Aravallis, like the Himalayas or vast forests across the country, as part of the "Ease of Doing Business" strategy. But for us and generations to come, as was for our previous generations, the protection of jal-jungle-zameen (water, forests, land, and hills) is vital and must not be sacrificed on the altar of profits for the rich. ■

The Nuclear Profiteering

On December 19, 2024, US President Donald Trump signed into law the national Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to establish and maintain within the U.S.-India Strategic Security Dialogue with India to alter India's domestic nuclear liability rules. It was just two days before, on December 17, Modi government ensured the approval of The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill 2025 from Lok Sabha. The bill itself was introduced stealthily as part of the supplementary agenda along with three more bills, including VB-GRAM G.

The timing is revealing. It now appears clear why the bill was suddenly introduced without prior consultation or proper intimation. The bill, which has now become an Act with the President's assent, was passed just one day before the NDAA, paving the pathway for a cartographic threat. The Act, which is nefarious and scientifically flawed at its core, has three major pitfalls:

- 1. Extremely low liability and compensation regime**, with little to no supplier liability, leaving the burden ultimately on taxpayers and the public.
- 2. Disregard for recent global experiences** in handing over energy sectors with wide societal impact to private players motivated primarily by profit.
- 3. Lack of robust regulatory oversight**, which becomes more dangerous in the context of Modi government's "Ease of Doing Business" approach, whose adverse impact was reflected in the recent Indigo crisis, where the DGCA was caught unprepared.

And it's just Modi's "dear friend, Trump", the government all-weather crony capitalist buddy Adani, who enjoys wide-range of monopoly, is eyeing to enter Nuclear power generation based on small modular reactor (SMR). The push for maximising nuclear power rapidly, including by Trump is aimed at feeding booming demand for energy hungry artificial intelligence data centres. With all dots connected behind the SHANTI Act's

objective and purpose, let's look into details.

Nuclear Energy Is Not Merely Another Industry!

Nuclear energy is not an ordinary industry. When it comes to energy, Nuclear power is an ultra-hazardous technology, where even minor lapses in design, operation, or maintenance can have irreversible consequences. Unlike a fuel or chemical leak, or other material dangers in other forms of energy generation, nuclear has continent-wide impact. This is precisely why India's nuclear sector was historically kept under strict public control through the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. Yet the Act opens the entire nuclear fuel cycle, from uranium mining to fuel fabrication, reactor operation, and reprocessing to private and foreign companies, while capping liability for accidents at figures that are minuscule compared to potential losses.

At the heart of the SHANTI Act lies its most dangerous feature: a severely diluted nuclear liability framework and creates a graded liability regime, where the operator's liability limit varies with the reactor's thermal power or generation capacity. Under the Act, operator liability is capped between Rs. 100 crore (Reactors up to 150 MW, fuel cycle facilities (other than spent fuel reprocessing, and transport of nuclear materials) and Rs. 3,000 crore (Reactors above 3,600 MW thermal capacity), figures that are absurdly inadequate when compared to the scale of potential nuclear damage. For context, the Fukushima cleanup alone has already exceeded \$180

billion, with costs continuing to rise.



The SHANTI Act institutionalises the very logic of 'Profit Over People' that allowed Bhopal, Fukushima and other tragedies to occur.

When the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) of 2010 was brought as part of US-India Nuclear deal, people across the country had protested against the dangers. Infact, the BJP itself had condemned the lack of liability and compensation and threat of Nuclear catastrophe. To quote, the then BJP leader and former Union minister Yashwant Sinha, on behalf of the party said in a letter "The liability under Price Anderson Act of the US is \$12.5 billion which is 23 times higher than the liability fixed for an Indian operator. Clearly, the life of an Indian is only worth a dime compared to the life of an American."

Now, the Modi led BJP regime retains the same liability architecture, merely adjusting numerical caps as per the reactor capacity with a maximum limit of 300 Million Special Drawing Rights (approximately ₹3,900 crore under present exchange

rates). The bill also omitted a provision in the CLND Act that allowed supplier liability and the right of recourse against suppliers to contractual situations. This means equipment manufacturers and foreign vendors can escape significant responsibility, even where equipment faults contribute to an accident.

With power plant capacity determining the liability of operator, with Adani planning to go nuclear with experimental SMR, small nuclear power generators, helps the operators to be at the lower end of the liability. Under the SHANTI Act, regulators can grant exemptions and relax safety requirements for SMRs, often citing vague categories like "insignificant risk," further weakening oversight. The SMRs will enjoy near-total legal and financial immunity under the new act, while being deployed closer to population centres, multiplying risk under the guise of innovation. But does it mean, the SMRs it will eliminate meltdown physics, systemic failure, or societal impact? No! There is no "insignificant risk" when it comes to nuclear and radioactive materials and even a small aberration can have cascading health, environmental, and socio-economic consequences.

The entire regulatory framework under the SHANTI Act creates immense loopholes, effectively setting the stage for a "waiting-for-disaster" scenario. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, even if given statutory recognition, remains subordinate to a government that is simultaneously promoting nuclear expansion, issuing licences, and underwriting liability. This conflict of interest undermines

independent oversight and leaves ordinary citizens exposed to the consequences of any accident, with no one truly accountable until disaster strikes.

Fukushima: Why Nuclear Energy Cannot Be Privatized

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of 2011 stands as the most damning real-world example of why nuclear energy cannot be entrusted to private, profit-driven corporations. The operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO, a private utility company was running the plant. It is interestingly, to note that, Japan's energy sector was privatized after the World War II under the pressure from the US.

Long before the earthquake and tsunami struck, TEPCO had a documented history of systematic regulatory violations, falsified safety reports, and ignored risk warnings. Independent investigations after the disaster revealed that TEPCO had been warned repeatedly, by its own engineers and by external experts about the inadequacy of tsunami defences and backup power systems. These warnings were disregarded.

During the crisis itself, TEPCO's conduct further exposed the dangers of privatization. One of the most shocking examples was the company's reluctance to inject seawater into the overheating reactors, despite clear scientific consensus that it was the only way to prevent meltdown. Why? Because seawater would permanently damage the reactors, rendering them economically useless.

Even after the disaster, TEPCO attempted to underreport

radiation releases, delayed evacuation orders, and sought to minimize its financial liability. Ultimately, the Japanese state had to nationalize TEPCO de facto, with public and taxpayers paying while privatized profits from decades of operation remained untouched. The government injected \$12.5 billion of capital into TEPCO in exchange for majority voting rights in the company, effectively signalling that for private operators and utilities it can be 'business as usual' after the disaster.

Several zones, especially around the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, remain no-go zones even today. Radiation levels are too high for permanent residence. Forests, mountains, and surrounding ecosystems were never fully decontaminated, so radioactive materials continue to circulate through soil and water.

The future cost of Fukushima disaster is expected to be around \$728 billion including long term decommissioning, environmental management and indirect economic impacts. It is not just Fukushima. Past nuclear disasters such as Chernobyl in 1986 and Three Mile Island in 1979 show the catastrophic human, environmental, and economic consequences of nuclear accidents. Chernobyl caused tens of thousands of long-term deaths and made entire towns uninhabitable, with cleanup costs exceeding US\$235 billion, while Three Mile Island led to evacuations, widespread fear, and cleanup costs of US\$1 billion. These cases underline that nuclear accidents, regardless of scale, have long-term impacts far beyond the liability limits

envisaged under the SHANTI Act.

Remember Bhopal?

India's own history provides a stark warning. The Bhopal gas disaster of 1984, though a chemical accident, offers a blueprint of what happens when government negligence meets corporate profiteering. Thousands died immediately, while hundreds of thousands suffered chronic illnesses, including respiratory disorders, neurological damage, and reproductive health problems. Environmental contamination affected soil, water, and farmland for decades.

Union Carbide, the parent multinational corporation, largely escaped liability, leaving the Indian government and victims to fight prolonged legal battles for compensation. Justice was delayed for decades, and settlements were grossly inadequate. While Bhopal was chemical in nature, a nuclear accident could be orders of magnitude more devastating, affecting millions, rendering land permanently uninhabitable, and creating health and environmental crises spanning generations.

The SHANTI Act institutionalises the very logic of 'Profit Over People' that allowed Bhopal, Fukushima and other tragedies to occur. By prioritising corporate profit and foreign interests over citizen safety, environmental protection, and national security, the Act turns India's nuclear program into a high-stakes gamble with the lives of millions. ■

Indigo Airlines Crisis: Who Will Take Responsibility?

The Indigo flight cancellation chaos gives us an MRI report on the state of not just this one aviation company but also the absolutely pitiable conditions of India's consumers in this era of crony capitalism. Airlines passengers across the world are used to occasional delays and disruptions, but mostly because of reasons beyond the operator's control like climate disaster, inclement weather, terror strikes or wars. But the Indigo chaos was entirely strategically engineered, with the operators holding the passengers hostage till the government backed down and relaxed the rules. The revised FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limit) norms which require pilots to have a mandatory rest period of 48 hours, and not 36 as before, had been notified in February 2024. Indigo Airlines were nowhere near complying with this order within the scheduled timeline and the government too must have been aware of the situation. Yet the crisis was allowed to explode with the customers paying the entire price.

From inordinate delays to hundreds of cancelled flights without any prior intimation, hapless passengers had to bear it all for days on end. What made it immeasurably worse was the criminal loot unleashed by other airlines, the Tata group's Air India in particular, and the hospitality sector, especially hotels near airports, by weaponising 'surge pricing'. It was only after several days of predatory plunder that the

government cared to announce a cap on surge pricing. While the Indigo Airlines is evidently at fault for non-compliance with the government regulation and its absolutely irresponsible and arrogant attitude to the customers, the Modi government is also equally complicit for its complete abdication of responsibility. Mere fixation of FDTL norms in accordance with international standards makes little sense if the government does not have the necessary preparation and firm leadership to ensure their enforcement. With the Indigo armtwisting the government into further deferring the implementation of the FDTL norms to end the disruption of flights, the concern for pilot fatigue and passenger safety again takes a back seat. The question also arises as to why the government did not defer the deadline earlier to avoid this huge crisis in this peak passenger season? Or has the whole crisis been allowed to enable some restructuring of India's aviation sector to enable some other big corporates to grab bigger slices of the aviation pie?

Beginning as one of India's several low-cost carriers in the 2010s, over the last decade Indigo Airlines has emerged as India's biggest player in the civil aviation sector. The group's graph jumped even as the aviation sector was hit badly by the Covid pandemic, facilitated perhaps by the group's generous purchase of electoral bonds. Indigo now has a whopping two-thirds market

share, operating on close to 80% routes in India (900 out of 1,131 sectors). In 514 of these 900 sectors, Indigo is the sole operator. The Air India group, now controlled by the Tatas, is the second in the domestic aviation sector with 26% market share. Between them Indigo and Air India thus command more than 90% market share of Indian skies.

India's domestic aviation sector is now the world's third largest market, next only to the United States of America and China. The number of airports has doubled in India in the last ten years, but safety, passenger amenities and corporate governance have already emerged as major concerns. In India, the airports are now increasingly being privatised and transferred to the Adani group while Indigo and the Tatas dominate the airlines. The government role is being progressively reduced from that of an operator to merely being a facilitator - more of a mute spectator complicit in profiteering than a proactive regulator ensuring fair play, quality and rule of law. And this pattern of privatisation and monopolisation now encompasses virtually the entire economy - if the Ambanis are all over the telecom and petrochemical sectors, the Adani group controls energy and infrastructure. The state still leads in banking and insurance only to prop up and bail out the corporate cronies of the government with mega loans, massive write-offs and generous purchases of shares and bonds.

Despite the Modi government's 'aam aadmi' rhetoric - the aviation promotion project is called UDAN (Ude Desh ke Aam Aadmi - let the common people fly) - India's air travellers still belong mostly to the privileged sections of the society from upper and upwardly mobile middle classes. If such consumers can be taken for granted, it is not difficult to understand how the government and India's corporate sector treat common Indians. Indeed, half the population has already been reduced to the status of disposable 'beneficiaries' who can now be disenfranchised at will through the ongoing campaign of electoral purge.

For far too long India has debated the relative merits of public and private sectors equating the private sector with efficiency and the government with accountability. The Indigo crisis should now open our eyes to the Indian reality in the Modi era, the mess that is created when the government abdicates all accountability and presides over unmitigated corporate inefficiency and profiteering in the name of 'ease of doing business'. Alongside the battle for saving the constitution and parliamentary democracy, we the people of India must also join hands to rescue the Indian economy from this crony corporate mess. It is time for India's farmers, workers, consumers - disempowered citizens at large - to forge a broad-based unity to prioritise people's welfare and people's rights over state-sponsored corporate profiteering and plunder. ■

PART TWO

Hundred-Plus Years of Aggressive Hindutva: An Overview

▲ ARINDAM SEN

The centenary year found the entire Sangh Parivar in a celebratory mood. And for good reason. Even with a reduced number of MPs in its own kitty, and in the face of many challenges, the RSS-BJP brigade has secured an unprecedented level of ideological domination in all wings of the state and in the apparently non-state/non-political domains like the judiciary, the armed forces, education and culture. Veteran journalist Dinesh Narayan accurately portrays this moment of joy:

"The RSS has largely crossed out items on its short term agenda -- the Ram temple is up, article 370 is gone, the education policy is now tailored as per its wishes, a new penal code is in place and a uniform civil code has been passed in at least one state. The champion of Hindutva even reports Ghar Wapasi numbers or the number of those who converted to Hinduism from other faiths, largely Islam, in its annual report. Government officials are now free to come out in the open if they are Swayamsevaks. A ban until now ensured that their RSS affiliation remained secret, albeit an open one as hundreds of government officials were actively involved with the Sangh anyway. That includes the judiciary. A Calcutta High court judge revealed his life long association with the RSS in his retirement speech.

"Metaphorically, the RSS's expansion and transformation in the Modi years is perhaps best captured by its New Delhi headquarters, Keshav Kunj. The ageing complex built in the 1960s has been replaced by twin towers each a dozen story high and equipped with modern facilities including meeting rooms, conference halls, library and living quarters. The chief himself has his office and living space near the top." ¹

Behind the stupendous achievements lies a history of phased political evolution, a long tortuous journey fraught with major challenges including three bans.

IV

A Long March to Power: A Diversified Lineage of Leaders

An interesting way to trace the evolution of the behemoth may be to check the lineage from the first sanghachalak to the present one. Walter K. Andersen and Sridhar D. Damle has given us precisely

[1] The RSS and the Making of the Deep Nation: Penguin Viking, 2018, p 261 Appendix IV: RSS Leadership

that in their scholarly work 'The RSS: A View to the Inside' . Drawing liberally on it, we are offering you the following brief account.

**Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (Doctorji), Medical practitioner,
Born in Nagpur ,
Head of RSS: 1925- 40.**

The founder leader had an intellectual stock-in-trade ready at hand in the works of Lalchand, and Savarkar, while the Hindu Mahasabha was already active in Nagpur. However, he had in his mind something special. He firmly believed that first it was necessary to unify the deeply divided Hindu community. To attain this goal, he developed a system to train a cadre (men only, of course) to bring about Hindu unity. More than an ideologue or propagandist, he was an activist and grassroots organizer hailed as '*Keshav Sanghnirmata*' (Keshav -- the Architect of the Sangh).

Hedgewar's most original and enduring contribution to the ideological and structural development of the RSS remains the ubiquitous *shakha* -- the basic building block on which rises the impressive superstructure of the Sangh. This bottom-up approach aimed to create cohesive communities capable of national revival, without overt political agitation. He described shakhas as daily gatherings focused on physical fitness, discipline, patriotism, and devotion to societal welfare—the core of the RSS's "Sangh Mantra."

Himself an ex-congressman though, he was emphatic about keeping his organisation aloof from politics, to focus all attention on building a militant, battle-ready formation as the basis of unifying the broader Hindu community against the Muslims. However, he sensed that a section of volunteers would in any case come from the major anti-British agitations. So, to keep his flock together, the pragmatist in him permitted members in their individual capacity to participate.

**MS Golwalkar (Guruji),
Biologist and professor of zoology, Born in
Ramtek near Nagpur, Head of RSS: 1940-73**

Hedgewar's handpicked successor and the longest-serving sarsanghchhalak, Golwalkar guided the RSS through the turbulent times of Independence and partition. Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the organisation was banned from February 1948 to July 1949 and Golwalkar was arrested, along with many others.

The Sangh's Unique Source of Strength

Every Sarsanghchhalak emphasized the central role of shakhas in different ways according to his priorities; here are a few samples.

The founder leader conceived shakhas as a direct response to the deep deficit of social capital in Hindu society, which he saw as divided by caste, region, and sect, lacking trust and collective action. He designed them as egalitarian, caste-blind spaces where young men from diverse backgrounds could build bonds through shared activities, gradually instilling a sense of civilizational responsibility. Deoras observed, "Shakha is not just a ritual that it is being made out to be by many people—it is the core of our work for social equality." He linked shakhas to eradicating untouchability and urged volunteers to practice equality in the daily gatherings. While Deoras was sincere in his urging, the incumbent chief was eloquent in his brand of smart politicking. During an interaction in Varanasi, he said all Indians, including Muslims, are welcome to attend shakhas provided they come as "sons of Bharat Mata, members of the Hindu society", chant "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" and show respect for the bhagwa jhanda. (TOI, April 07, 2025).

Scholarship on RSS also acknowledge the shakhas as the lifeblood of the Sangh Parivar. In an interview with Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay from The Federal on 9 October 2025, historian Tanika Sarkar observed, "The drills, including marching and coordinated displays, are rooted in tradition. They instill a sense of empowerment, discipline, and community participation." Extending the scope of the discourse beyond shakhas per se, she underscores the importance of grassroots activities in general: "For young women, marching alongside rituals like worshipping an eight-armed Durga reinforces a symbolic readiness to defend the nation, even if no actual combat occurs." Nevertheless, there is some decline in the role of the shakhas, she notes, "While its numerical and social reach has expanded, its role is no longer as critical as it was in the early decades up to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement."

The implications are clear. The old engine of physical grassroots mobilization remains the lifeblood and nerve system of the RSS, but in the age of smart phones and social media it has started losing steam. ■

It was under his supervision that several affiliates including the BJP were formed (see below).

Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras (Balasaheb), Law School graduate, Born in Nagpur, Head of RSS: 1973-94

Deoras pressed for involvement in politics and social reforms, which led to serious disagreements within the organisation. Nevertheless, in his early speeches after becoming *Sarsanghachalak*, he spoke of the need for the RSS to act assertively on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged. His denunciation of caste discrimination was a significant ideological shift within the RSS. In course of the formation of the Janata Party, he also prodded RSS leaders to initiate contacts with Muslim groups to foster friendship through inter-dining etc. However, this move proved to be primarily a pragmatic response to the need of building the broadest unity against Indira Congress rather than an ideological shift. No wonder, it had little practical impact.

Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhaiyya), Born in Shahjahanpur, UP, Doctorate in Physics, Head of RSS: 1994-2000

The first non-Brahmin and non-Maharashtrian head of the RSS, Rajju Bhaiyya continued the activism initiated by Deoras and stood out in shaping broader Hindu unity cutting across castes and sects. As general secretary of the organisation in Uttar Pradesh as well as at the national level, he was in a better position to interact with all BJP leaders. By the mid-1990s, the RSS head became much more entwined with the BJP. Therefore, Singh was a much more public persona than his predecessors

in terms of interacting with the media and taking direct interest in the BJP's functioning. With the rapid growth of the RSS affiliates, he also put in place the a mediatory mechanism to address policy differences among them.

KS Sudarshan, Born in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, Electronics and Telecommunications Engineer, Head of RSS: 2000-2009

Sudarshan oversaw the rise and fall of the Vajpayee government and an unprecedented rate of growth of the affiliates, especially the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh. He was sympathetic to the economic affiliates' call for self-sufficiency and their opposition to the BJP's increasing support for liberalisation – privatization – economic globalisation. In an effort to establish a dialogue with India's largest religious minority, guided the formation of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch in December 2002, soon after the Gujarat riots. He was instrumental also in the creation of the anti-globalist Swadeshi Jagran Manch. Known for being openly critical of the BJP whenever necessary, following the defeat of the BJP-led coalition in the 2004 elections he bluntly suggested that the old guard represented by Advani and Vajpayee should step down and let younger leaders take charge.

Mohan Bhagwat, Born in Chandrapur, Maharashtra, Trained in veterinary science, Head of RSS: incumbent since March 2009

Bhagwat's main emphasis seems to be to make the RSS a big tent that can accommodate many different views. A pragmatist and (unlike Sudarshan) a

diplomat, he intensified the use of the mediation system to handle policy differences, some of them significant, among the various RSS affiliates. He has sought to push the policy agenda of the BJP government in a more populist direction by accommodating the views of the economic and cultural affiliates. Referring to Modi, Bhagwat cautioned RSS members to be wary of a cult of personality, and reminded them that the first loyalty must be to the RSS. We have some other observations on his style of functioning elsewhere in this article.

The above account clearly shows that all six chiefs – not just a few of them – made distinct contributions to make RSS what it is today. Taken together, they displayed great adaptability, resilience and creativity - - and that without making even the slightest compromise with the final goal. They aimed at the sky and built modestly on the ground. They started with just seventeen volunteers in one shakha at Nagpur, and expanded the network to the entire country (according to Panchajanya and other official sources, RSS had over 4 million members and 73,000 *shakhas* as of 2024). They single-mindedly built the core body for decades and then pushed forward to form the necessary affiliates one by one. Not that all these was pre-scheduled: the new initiatives or shifts in policy were but responses to what they considered the need of the hour.



From Influence to Power

The rise of Narendra Modi in 2014 represents the BJP's as well as the RSS's political

apex. The distinction between cultural and political spheres has largely dissolved. RSS cadres are getting appointments in research institutions, universities, and various other bodies; books published by RSS affiliates are being prescribed in schools. Simultaneously, state institutions, media, and education are being recast to reflect a Hindu civilisational narrative. The RSS has wholeheartedly embraced the neoliberal economic theory that the Modi government is vigorously implementing, cutting taxes on the rich, cutting social welfare spending, opening doors to foreign capital, deregulating the economy and privatising public sector. This has led to a persistent economic crisis for the mass of the people while handing over super profits for the elite corporate sections.

By fusing religion and nationalism, the RSS claims to restore India's "true identity". Over the past 100 years, its ideology and politics have remained essentially the same, but the nuances of expression (aggressiveness versus moderation, for example) have swayed widely even within brief periods. Its politics is not just a series of episodic agitations/campaigns, parliamentary struggles and running governments. It seeks not only to rule India. The mission is to reshape the idea and social fabric of India from the grassroots and now from the seat of state power too.

Its politics today seeks not merely representation within liberal parliamentary democracy, but a redefinition of democracy along majoritarian religio-cultural lines with unmistakable fascist features. But the project remains riven with contradictions — between caste hierarchy and Hindu unity, traditionalism and modern

governance, moral discipline and populist politics.

VI

The Modi-Shah Regime: Fascism Front and Centre

In terms of ideological orientation, political complexion and organisational structure, the RSS has always been a communal Fascist organisation with peculiar Indian characteristics. However, it is only during the uninterrupted rule of the NDA government that the real contours of the specific brand of Indian Fascism are gradually unfolding before our eyes.

To start with the class character of the present regime. From day one, its brazenly anti-people pro-big-capital, anti-national pro-imperialist policies, schemes and legislations (the current nuclear bill for instance) -- not to speak of irresponsible measures like note ban and sudden lockdown -- are making life more and more miserable for the aam aadmi. The steady decline of our country in global indexes on economic inequality, budgetary provisions on health and education, democratic rights, etc. drive home the fact that ours is a government of big capital, by big capital, for big capital, which is closely aligned with unproductive and parasitic classes/sub classes like feudal forces and the land mafia.

Secondly, Fascism entails extreme centralisation of power. Under the Modi Shah regime, this tendency expresses itself in numerous ways. We are witness to the centre usurping federal powers of the states through different schemes and legislations, governors obstructing bills passed by state legislatures and other means. Persistently disturbing

the scheme of division of powers in the parliamentary form of government, the executive is always busy bypassing the legislature and confronting the judiciary, simultaneously trying to promote RSS people to higher positions. Within the BJP itself, the Modi Shah duo has ensured that there exists no other power centre within the party. This is why in the high seat of party president, which used to be graced by veterans like Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari and Amit Shah, we now find non-entities like JP Nadda followed by Nitin Nabin.

Thirdly, Fascism means unfreedom and fear. In India, the bedrock of our democracy – free expression, independent thought and transparent governance – is under attack. We are witnessing a quiet, continuous erosion of freedoms, both online and offline, even as the bogey of "national security" is routinely invoked to justify illegal use of Pegasus and prolonged confinement of dissenters.

As for other general features of Fascism -- such as mass surveillance combined with special intensive surveillance over supposed "Urban Naxals" and others -- mention must be made of Fascists' fear of free and fair elections. After consolidating his power, Hitler simply abolished elections. This is what the Fascists in India also wants to do, so that they can enjoy power for 40 - 50 years, as Amit Shah famously said. Since they do not have the power to do that, they are trying to change the rules of the game with proposals like One Nation One Election. Even that is not immediately possible, so they are taking recourse to measures like SIR, manipulation of voter lists,

possibly also EVMs, and other underhand, unethical means.

In addition to such patently Fascist techniques, the BJP has used many other clever methods to push up its numbers in the parliament and state assemblies by employing authoritarian means including blackmailing. Since 2014, it systematically leveraged political defections, emerging as India's most successful 'poacher' of political birds. This strategy has fueled its pan-India expansion, particularly in the South, East, and Northeast, by absorbing opposition leaders—often under pressure from central agencies or electoral incentives. However, success rates for defectors have been mixed, with recent joiners facing higher rejection by voters.

VII

It takes Two to Tango

Historically, the RSS as the ideological progenitor has enjoyed a special status of reverence from all the affiliates, the more so because most of the senior office-bearers in the front organisations are RSS products. This remains true to this day.

However, Modi's popularity and uninterrupted rule has, at least in public perception, significantly tilted the delicate balance between the parent body and the all-important political front in favour of the latter. Occasional frictions between the powerful heads of the two organisations are also open secrets. Nevertheless, objectively they are very much interdependent, growing on the basis of mutual symbiosis. Subjectively, both leaders, belonging to the same age group and having decades of experience as RSS *pracharaks*, are mature enough not to upset the applecart at the summit of success.

So it looks like (caveat: nothing is certain in politics) occasional false steps notwithstanding, the Tango show will go on, at least till the Sun shines.

A clear signal of this was sent out in late November last year, when Modi and Bhagwat ceremonially hoisted the *Dharma Dhwaj* atop the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The Prime Minister described the event as a "turning point" in India's cultural consciousness, while the Chief Minister of UP remarked that the saffron flag was a symbol of India's national religion. According to *The Hindu*, 25 November 2025, the joint appearance, something quite rare, is perceived to be a public display that old wounds are healing.

Achilles' heel

In this brief overview, we have attempted to gain an objective understanding of the RSS and its evolution over the last hundred years. In a recent lecture in Kolkata Mohan Bhagwat has once again said that the job of the RSS is not to be one more Hindu organisation but to organise the Hindu society in its entirety. Bhagwat even added that viewing the RSS through the lens of the BJP is a big mistake. In other words, he would like us to believe that while the RSS specialises in organising the society, the BJP deals with political power and the state, and the two should be treated separately and not as an integral whole. On a superficial plane Bhagwat may sound right because the RSS has now been working for the last one hundred years while the BJP was formed only in 1980. But that does not separate the RSS from the BJP or the BJP from the RSS. The BJP, as much as its predecessor, the Jan Sangh, is nothing but the political

arm of the RSS.

Like the RSS phrase of 'cultural nationalism', this 'social vs political' dichotomy is another clever RSS attempt to camouflage the intimate connection between the RSS and the BJP. The RSS has always not just worked in tandem with its political arm but has also controlled it and benefited immensely from the state whenever and wherever the Jan Sangh and the BJP came to power. Let us not forget that while the Jan Sangh had merged into the Janata Party in 1977, it was the issue of the continuing loyalty of the erstwhile Jan Sangh section within the Janata Party to the RSS that led to the collapse of the Janata Party government and creation of the Bharatiya Janata Party precisely on the basis of its identification with and allegiance to the RSS.

The enormous growth of the RSS and its activities and its increasing control over the entire range of state institutions, governance apparatus and academic and policy-making architecture of the country are a direct outcome today of the Modi government's continuing stint in power since 2014. The centenary of the organisation which was banned by the state in the wake of Gandhi's assassination has been openly celebrated by the state in 2025. How long will the 'social' and 'cultural' camouflage of the RSS be able to serve as a safety net or safety valve for the BJP whose continuing reign in power proves itself increasingly disastrous for the people in the economic and governance domains, not to speak of the social and cultural spheres the RSS prefers to reserve for itself? ■

Comrade Vinod Mishra and the Quest for Socialist Democracy in India

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



It is heartening to note that a collection of Comrade Vinod Mishra's writings is being published in Telugu. Comrade VM passed away twenty seven years ago when the NDA's stint in power at the Centre had just begun. His writings spanned three decades from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. Through VM's writings - polemical pieces, articles, speeches and reports to successive Congresses and conferences of the CPI(ML) from the 1979 special conference of the underground period to the Sixth Congress in Varanasi in 1997 - we get not just an account of the revival of the CPI(ML) following the setback suffered in the early 1970s but also deep insight into

the churnings in contemporary Indian and international politics.

From the rise and fall of the Indira era Emergency to the ascendance of the Sangh-BJP brigade in the early Advani-Vajpayee period, from the anti-feudal assertion of the people of Bihar to the quest for a progressive democratic alternative across India, Comrade VM captures it all with the sharp gaze and profound commitment of a revolutionary communist. Comrade VM gave us a paradigm of class struggle which rejects economism and abstract idealism and draws its strength from the lived reality of the classes in India where class meets caste and gender, and is deeply influenced by culture and

generation shifts.

While starting with the reorganisation and revival of the CPI(ML), Comrade VM never took a narrow and isolated view of the communist revolutionary stream. For him the focus was always on reorienting and rejuvenating the entire communist movement along revolutionary lines by overcoming the illusion and inertia generated by the parliamentary trajectory, acquiring a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of India's complex and diverse social structure and developing a set of policies to ensure a dynamic communist intervention in the ever changing situation.

VM's political journey had begun against the backdrop of the great debate in the international communist movement powered by the ever inspiring impact of the Chinese revolution. But he was never a votary of the so-called Chinese path, always paying due attention to the Indian specificities. He knew revolution in India will need an Indian path, but he did not advocate any pre-determined trajectory as the ultimate path. The path, he would often say, is only formulated with the strength of hindsight because in real life one must be ready to navigate uncharted territories in unforeseen situations.

The last decade in VM's momentous political journey, where he covered so much ground in a short span of three decades, was marked by major social and political upheavals in India and the world. The Soviet Union eventually collapsed, disintegrated and disappeared after years of domestic stagnation and unsustainable superpower rivalry with US imperialism. This marked the onset of a new phase

of imperialist aggression in both politico-military and economic spheres. In Gulf War we saw the beginning of a new series of most unequal wars of modern history where Iraq had to face the combined might of a US-led western coalition. The IMF and World Bank imposed a neoliberal policy regime across the world with liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation becoming the new global paradigm replacing the post-war welfare state model.

In India, the juncture was marked not just by corresponding paradigm shifts in economic and foreign policies but most crucially by the rise of aggressive Hindutva which started using latent faultlines in Indian history and culture to script a new chapter of unprecedented rise and consolidation that has now brought India to the brink of a well-entrenched fascist takeover. With partial implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations concerning OBC reservations, the social and political balance in North India also underwent a turbulent shift.

In several parts of Bihar, the CPI(ML) had already emerged as the leading centre of a powerful upsurge of the oppressed rural poor for their basic rights to land, wages and dignity. VM's visionary leadership gave a national dimension, forward-looking political perspective and deeper ideological impetus to this historic assertion of the oppressed in Bihar. The question of right to vote soon acquired its due place in the agenda for the effectively disenfranchised poor of Bihar. The quest for autonomy in the hill districts of Assam added a powerful new streak.

While remaining an

underground organisation, under VM's inspiring leadership the CPI(ML) had created a unique mass political platform in the shape of Indian People's Front. By the end of 1980s and early 1990s, the IPF and its ally Autonomous State Demand Committee in the hill districts of Assam had emerged as significant electoral forces in Bihar and Assam. As the daylight demolition of the Babri Masjid announced the onset of fascism on 6 December 1992, VM realised that the time had come for the CPI(ML) to become overground and lead from the front. The CPI(ML) came into the open on 28 December, 1992 at a historic mass gathering on Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground.

Meanwhile, the collapse of the USSR and the Tiananmen Square massacre in China had already made it imperative for communists in different parts of the world to confront the new juncture and demonstrate their readiness to rise to the occasion. Communists in Nepal made an encouraging advance in the struggle for a democratic republic turning the Himalayan kingdom into a multiparty democracy, albeit first within the limits of a constitutional monarchy. Under the dynamic leadership of Comrade VM, the CPI(ML) launched wide-ranging initiatives to address the emerging set of challenges.

Mass organisations started taking shape and gaining strength on diverse fronts by challenging the growing convergence of neoliberalism and Hindutva. VM knew India could no longer take the Constitution, parliamentary democracy and the nationalism that had taken shape through the freedom movement for granted. India needed new energy

and vision to reinvigorate the secular pluralist anti-imperialist nationalism that could overcome the hate and violence unleashed by aggressive Hindutva, and a new awakening and assertion of the working people to resist a complete corporate takeover of the Indian economy. When he passed away most prematurely on 18 December 1998, just six years after the party had come out into the open, he was busy fleshing out a clear anti-fascist revolutionary direction and a vigorous course of action for the party. All his speeches, articles and notes in the 1990s, right from his Brigade Ground rally speech in Kolkata on 28 December 1992 to his last note which he had presented in the meeting of the Central Committee in Lucknow in December 1998, reflect this growing concern and single-minded focus

The writings of Comrade Vinod Mishra are a storehouse of movemental energy, political wisdom and ideological clarity coming from one of the richest experiences in the Indian communist movement of integration of theory with practice and application of Marxist philosophy to the concrete conditions of Indian reality. As Indian communists take up the challenge of combating the heightened fascist offensive of the Modi regime and the Sangh brigade, and both communists and fascists complete their first centuries on Indian soil, Comrade VM's writings and his legacy will remain a powerful source of light and inspiration for the forward march of the communist movement.

(Introduction to the Telugu Edition of Collected Works of Vinod Mishra.) ■

9th Andhra Pradesh State Conference of CPIML



The 9th State Conference of Andhra Pradesh unit of CPIML concluded on 7th December after a two day session on 6th and 7th December 2025 in Kadapa. The Kadapa town was named after Com. Sattar and the hall was named after Com. Seshagiri Rao and the stage was named after Com. PV Ramana Reddy.

The two day conference began with a massive rally in Kadapa town which was led by the Party General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, PBM and the senior leader Swadesh Bhattacharya, PBM and Incharge of the party affairs in Andhra Pradesh Shankar, the Central Observer to the conference Chandra Mohan, CCM and Incharge of Telangana state party Murthy, Telangana state secretary Rameshraj, the AP State Secretary Bangar Rao and CCM Nagamani and other leaders of state also marched in the rally. Party leaders paid respects to the statue of Dr. BR Ambedkar on the eve of Maha parinirwana Diwas.

Addressing the inaugural session, Comrade Dipankar said, we took anti-feudal struggle as the key link for the party. India is still largely rural, largely agricultural, and it is the assertion of the oppressed rural poor, the landless and marginal farmers, which constitutes the main social base, main arena of emphasis of the communist movement. This is what we did in Bihar and in many other parts including parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Our areas of work are basically the pockets developed through anti-feudal struggle, land struggle. That is the source of the party's main strength. We built an all-India party on the basis of these struggles which works on every front - students, youth, culture, state government employees, railway, organized sector workers, unorganized sector workers, women, tribals, autonomy movements, etc. This combination of theory and practice, local and national, the present and the future is our success story.

"Today, when we talk about fascism we must understand

the link. Our anti-feudal struggle has today grown into anti-fascist resistance. Because those feudal forces who had been defeated politically and socially, who had been pushed back, are trying to come back in this new fascist era. When you see the bulldozers at work, the bulldozers are not just some officer or some district administration but the local feudal forces, who want the land, who want to evict the poor, are directing these bulldozers. Basically, those feudal forces who suffered one step back, who faced defeat locally, are trying to make two steps forward, trying to make a come back with the help of the state and the fascist aggression. In order to strengthen such an anti-fascist resistance, we are trying to strengthen our own party, and at the same time, we are also trying to develop various kinds of United Front experiments," Comrade Dipankar noted.

In the concluding statement, he said "I hope that this conference, the ninth conference, will pave the way for a stronger, bigger, a more dynamic, more active CPI(ML) across Andhra Pradesh in every district, and especially retaining all our old bases, expanding the mass base. This is a time for expansion, time for dynamism, greater unity and greater struggle.

The open session following the Rally was addressed by the guests from left parties including Comrade V Srinivasa Rao, the state secretary of CPIM and Comrade G Eswarayya, the state secretary of CPI along with the state committee members of CPIML. Comrade B Bangar Rao presided over while Uday Kiran coordinated the session and Obaiah, the district secretary welcomed the gathering.

Comrade Dipankar delivered the inaugural address of the conference. A book of Vinod Mishra's selected works in Telugu was released by comrade Dipankar. The publisher Ramanamurthy spoke introducing the publication.

The Delegates session began on 6th afternoon. The conference elected a 9 member presidium comprising comrades Malleswar Rao, D Harinath, Nagamani, Aruna, Ramdev, Bhaskar Rao, Arjun Rao, Venkateswaralu and Chenniah. A 5 member steering committee was also formed. The delegates session began by paying tributes to the departed leaders of state and other leaders who martyred in the past four years. The secretary of the outgoing state committee, Bangar Rao placed the work report with a detailed plan for the future course of action and development of Party in Andhra Pradesh. Com Swadesh Bhattacharya delivered his message of greetings to the conference.

A 39 member state committee was elected and B Bangar Rao was re-elected as the new state secretary. A total of 329 delegates including observers and guests attended the conference. More than 30 percent of delegates were women.

Comrade Swadesh Bhattacharya, the PBM, in his special address of the conference, welcomed the new comrades joining the party. He called upon the entire party to rise up to the occasion and turn the CPIML Liberation as a centre of revolutionary movement in the state. He was hopeful that the party in Andhra could prepare to thwart the designs of fascist forces with the influx of youths and students into the organisation. He appealed to comrades to build a united and strong party with a large mass base in the state.

The party Incharge for the state, comrade Shankar delivered the concluding address. He called upon the party to build waves and waves of struggles of the people, strengthen the party at the grassroots and to organize district level struggles on people's issues of land, wage, housing, liberation from loans, etc. He also appealed to the newly elected state committee to gear up towards a Chalo Vijayawada rally in the next budget session of the assembly. He called upon delegates to work towards routing out communal forces from the soil of Andhra, unseating the pro-corporate Chandrababu Naidu and TDP from the echelons of power and teaching an appropriate lesson to Pawan Kalyan who preaches Sanatan Dharma against the secular and progressive values and culture of Andhra Pradesh and its people. ■

12th Tamil Nadu State Conference of CPIML

Tamil Nadu state 12th state conference of CPIML was inaugurated by comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya on 12 Dec 2025 at Thoothukudi (Tuticorin) through an open session held against the SIR 2.0 in Tamil Nadu and against the anti-worker Labour Codes. Tamil Nadu state Minister of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment department, Ms Geetha Jeevan of DMK, the founder president of Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi (VCK) comrade Thirumavalavan, the state secretary of CPI(M) comrade Shanmugam, the state secretary of CPI comrade M Veerapandian, the state secretary of Makkal Adhikaram comrade Chezhan addressed the gathering along with comrades Shankar V, the Politbureau Incharge for Tamil Nadu, CC members Balasundaram and Balasubramanian. DMK MP Kanimozhi sent her message of greetings to the conference which was read out. The state secretary Asaithambi presided over the open session while Chandramohan proposed the resolutions. Comrades Simpson, Sankara Pandian, Anthony Muthu and Suseela coordinated the session while Sagayam welcomed the gathering and Murugan delivered vote of thanks.

Comrade Dipankar said that Thoothukudi inherits the great legacy of VOC, a great freedom fighter, who challenged the domination of the British imperialism by launching India's first indigenous Swadeshi Navigation Service. At the same time, he fought for workers' rights too. The people who fought against colonial rule, who fought for independence of India, most of them, also fought against feudalism, for the rights of the depressed classes and against capitalism, for the rights of India's workers. Before 1947, India's national liberation went along with the call for nationalization. When Ambedkar wrote 'States and Minorities', he indicated the kind of constitution that he actually wanted to draft for India, but couldn't do it in the given situation. He wanted complete



nationalization, nationalization of all the productive forces and land resources. Before 1947, nationalism and nationalization went hand-in-hand. Today Narendra Modi wants to impose a model of nationalism which actually is denationalization and privatization. Everything for Adani, Ambani, a concentration of wealth in ever fewer hands. That is what is the nationalism, hyper-nationalism, hidden nationalism of the BJP.

Speaking about the unconstitutional SIR, he said the SIR is a denial of our universal voting right. India's electoral democracy rests on two pillars. One is Universal Adult Suffrage, Universal Adult Franchise which is being destroyed by SIR. The other one is a free and fair elections which needs an impartial election commission which is transparent and which works according to the Constitution. But we have an election commission which is aligned to the government and it doesn't care for the Constitution, transparency and accountability. The elections are becoming more and more uncertain, more and

more unfair and more and more difficult for the people of India. But I'm sure the people of Tamil Nadu, with the experience of Maharashtra and Bihar, will be able to resist the BJP, defeat the BJP, give it a resounding kind of defeat.

DMK minister Geetha Jeevan expressed her best wishes for the conference of and called upon people to fight against the BJP's conspiracy to convert secular Tamil Nadu into a land of communal strife like UP. She emphasised on the BJP led union government denying funds for the welfare schemes in Tamil Nadu.

Comrade Thirumavalavan came down heavily on the SIR 2.0 saying that the Election Commission is disenfranchising the people and violating the constitution. Universal adult franchise is the fundamental proposition of the constitution which is being taken away now. Another most important basic tenet is secularism. But, the BJP want to convert the country into a Hindu Rashtra by replacing the existing secular constitution with Manu Smriti. Ambedkar's statues

are being erected while the soul of Ambedkar's contribution to the country, the constitution, is being destroyed. Unlike communists, Dr Ambedkar believed in a revolution and change through parliamentary path and parliamentary democracy. He was never against socialism. There is a need for a much closer interaction between communist movement and the dalit movement in the country. Communists, instead of branding dalit movement as an identity based one, should work towards Left orientation of the dalit movement, he said.

Comrade Shanmugam, the state secretary of CPI(M), emphasised on the organic unity of the left, democratic and progressive forces of the country. He placed utmost emphasis on the unity of the left that is the need of the times. He called upon the people and left forces to unitedly fight against neoliberal policies, communal forces and for a progressive democracy.

Comrade M Veerapandian, the state secretary of CPI, explained in detail the Hindutva design of converting individual religious belief into politics of hate. Whatever be the design of communal forces, ultimately the socialism, the humanism, the science, the unity of the Indian people will emerge victorious.

Comrade Chezhan, the state secretary of Makkal Adhikaram, said that the SIR 2.0 is nothing but a mass disenfranchisement. The BJP is ruling the country in favour of the corporates and particularly in favour of Adanis and Ambanis and against the workers, toilers, agricultural labourers and poor farmers. He said that there is a need to form a democratic coalition

with alternative perspective on everything, including economy, politics and culture.

The open session was named after VOC (VO Chidambaranar), who was a freedom fighter and jailed for more than four years. He was the first Indian to operate the first Indian Navigation company against the British by raising funds from among the people. The session was also dedicated to the memory of Sterlite Martyrs, 13 of whom lost their life in the struggle against pollution by Vedanta's Sterlite company in the city.

The conference resolved to carry forward the legacy of anti-colonial struggle of the city represented by VOC and other freedom fighters and the spirit of 13 Sterlite martyrs. Criticised the SIR 2.0 that was being implemented to favour the BJP and aimed at denying voting rights to the minorities, dalits, poor and the downtrodden. The conference decided to undertake a mass struggle independently and jointly with other likeminded forces. The open session resolved to wage an uncompromising struggle to withdraw the Labour Codes of slavery. The conference decided to defeat the RSS conspiracy to convert Madurai (Thiruparangunram hills of Lord Muruga) into an Ayodhya of South India by inciting communal passions. It also welcomed the Impeachment motion advanced by INDIA bloc in the Parliament against the judge Swaminathan of Madurai Bench of Madras High Court who misused his offices to favour communal forces. Passed resolutions against the anti-farmer Seed Bill and Electricity Amendment Bill and demanded implementation

of Swaminathan Committee report. The conference also demanded installation of a Sterlite Martyrs Memorial, withdrawal of all false cases and stringent actions recommended by Aruna Jagadeesan Commission against officials responsible for the police firing in favour of Vedanta. The conference appealed to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Mr MK Stalin to personally intervene to amicably resolve the issues of sanitation workers of Chennai. It also expressed its solidarity with the campaign demanding minimum wages and extension of meal scheme to sanitation workers across the state and also liberation from debt trap and Rs 25,000 to each family with a ration card. The open session also demanded immediate closure of three fish waste factories that destroy the environment, agriculture and the ground water. The conference also resolved to undertake a campaign for the release of Pricol workers, comrades Manivannan and Ramamurthy who are languishing in jail for more than ten years under fabricated cases.

The delegates session inaugurated by comrade Dipankar began in the evening of 12th Dec. Comrade Asaithambi, the secretary of the outgoing state committee presented the draft report of the conference. The 13 member presidium led by the veteran comrade Simpson invited delegates to share their opinions on the draft.

In the context of the state politics, the delegates cautioned about the growing influence of communal forces that invoke Hindutva in the name of Tamil God Murugan and noted the politics of social engineering being played by

the BJP. The conference resolved to focus on uprooting BJP and its communal Hindutva ideology from the soil of Tamil Nadu. The political tactics of defeating communal forces as the central task was consented by most of the delegates and suggested various actions consistent to the anti-fascist political line.

The conference also noted the emergence of the TVK led by actor Vijay that exhibits an overwhelming tendency of anti-DMK than anti-BJP in spite of claims against the politics of the BJP. The conference also cautioned the potential of opportunism in proclamations of equi-distance with DMK and BJP alliances, without identifying BJP alliance as the main danger to the people, constitution and the democracy. The conference suggested an approach of wait and watch as the TVK is in its infancy now, yet to come up with a comprehensive political framework.

The conference duly acknowledged the DMK alliance's contributions in the struggle for state's rights, social justice, interests of Tamils and against the politics of Hindutva represented by the BJP. At the same time, it also criticised the DMK government for its pro-corporate approach against workers, agricultural labourers and farmers in the name of transforming Tamil Nadu into a state of a Trillion dollar economy. It also noted the growing atrocities against dalits, against women and the increasing number of honour killings. Resolved to carry forward the uncompromising class struggle into the arena of politics.

More than 70 delegates out of 369 participated in the deliberations. Comrade

Asaithambi summed up the debates and the draft was unanimously adopted by the house with some amendments.

Comrade Shankar, the Incharge of Tamil Nadu party affairs delivered the concluding address of the conference.

The Central Observer comrade Maitreyi Krishnan, conducted the election of the new state committee in a most democratic atmosphere adhering to the principles of the party constitution. 65 member state committee was elected by the conference and comrade Asaithambi was re-elected as the state secretary.

Comrades Kumarasami, advisor to AICCTU, Barathi, state president of AICCTU, Bhuvana, editor of the workers magazine, Solidarity, in Tamil, Kerala state secretary Johnson Ambatt, Puducherry state secretary P urushottaman and CC member Balasubramanian addressed the delegates session of the conference. CCM Balasundaram clarified basic political positions of the draft while Chandramohan read out the resolutions. ■

First Maharashtra State Conference of CPIML



The first Maharashtra state conference of the CPIML was held on 20th and 21st December at Kolhapur. Organised 6 months after the historic unity conference of two communist streams with the legacy of anti-imperialist struggles and close ties with the social justice movements, the conference gave a call of struggles against challenges emanating from the fascist onslaught in India. It stressed on efforts to unite the left assertion and a genuine left, democratic political united front in the state.

On the eve of the conference, an open discussion of 80 intellectuals, social, professional and cultural activists was organised with Com. Dipankar. The meet was a frank, cordial exchange of the anxious concerned activists and citizens. The meeting concluded with a resolve to a social action forum in the near future.

On the 20th afternoon as the delegates arrived from 17 districts, a rally of red flags with the participation of activists and members from Kolhapur and nearby areas started from Dasara Chowk after offering salutations to statues of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Shivaji Maharaj and Shahuji Maharaj. It concluded at the venue of the open session. After hoisting the party flag and offering salute to the martyrs the session was inaugurated by Comrade Dipankar. It was addressed by Subhash Lande, State Secretary of CPI, Uday Narkar, the former State Secretary of CPI(M), Bhai Bhausaheb Devkar of PWP, Kishore Dhamale of Satyashodhak Communist Party, Sampat Desai and Dhanaji Gurav of Shramik Mukti Dal (Democratic). CPIML PBM and MP Rajaram Singh also attended the conference. All the leaders while extending their best wishes to the first conference expressed the need to unite in struggle and a desire for communist unity in times of fascism while appreciating our party's efforts and contributions in the contemporary political arena.

After the conclusion of the open session, the delegates arrived in the Com. Santaram Patil hall. A presidium of Comrades Mukta Manohar, Uddhav Shinde, Vandana Meshram, Vijay Kulkarni and Balasaheb Surude conducted the proceedings from the D S Kulkarni- Ashok Manohar manch. After paying homage to the martyrs and tributes to Com. VM, Uday Bhat presented the report of the state

party before the delegates. 25 Delegates from various districts participated in the ensuing discussions and offered various suggestions, areas of concern and additions to the report. The report was accepted by the delegates unanimously. A new State Committee of 47 members and 7 invitees was elected unanimously. The committee then elected Comrade Uday Bhat as the State Secretary.

Com. Dipankar in his inspiring speech to the delegates took a historical review of the two important streams of the communist movement, elaborated on the contemporary political situation and expressed satisfaction on the progress made by the state unit. He alerted the delegates to the challenges on all fronts in the view of the renewed concerted attacks by fascist corporate Hindutva combine post Bihar elections. He expressed confidence that the party in the state will make all efforts to build itself, the united left and an anti-fascist political alliance.

Com. Prabhat Kumar, central observer for the conference, while concluding the conference thanked the activists who made the conference a success taking forward the legacy of the working class movement in the state. Com. Rajaram Singh noted the progressive social, political legacy of the place and the state. He alerted the delegates of ever growing challenges on all fronts which will need a relentless, consistent and untiring efforts of the entire party to meet those challenges. The conference concluded with the singing of Internationale. ■

Bihar: Protest Against Mob Lynching in Nawada

On December 16, CPI(ML) and Insaaf Manch organised a statewide protest across Bihar against the brutal mob lynching of Mohammad Athar Hussain. Hussain, a Muslim cloth vendor, in Bhatta village under Roh police station of Nawada district was brutally attacked on December 5. In the state capital, a protest meeting was held near Buddha Smriti Park, Patna, with the participation of a large number of activists, representatives of civil society and people's organisations.

Addressing the protest in Patna, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari said that the incident exposes the serious erosion of the rule of law in Bihar. She said that a sustained communal atmosphere is being created in the state by the BJP. Athar Hussain was brutally beaten, branded with a hot object, his ears were cut, a finger was broken and petrol was poured on his private parts. After being left in a critical condition, a false case of theft was lodged against him. He died during treatment on December 12.

CPIML MLA Sandeep Saurav pointed out that incidents of mob violence and bulldozer action have increased after Samrat Choudhary took charge as Home Minister. Any attempt by the NDA government to impose the so-called Yogi model in Bihar would be disastrous for social harmony and democracy and would be strongly resisted. CPIML MLC Shashi Yadav said that Mohammad Athar Hussain was targeted merely on the suspicion of being Muslim and was subjected to inhuman torture. She held the police, district administration and medical negligence directly responsible for his death.

The protesters demanded immediate arrest and strict punishment of all those involved in the killing of Mohammad Athar Hussain, security and adequate compensation for the victim's family, withdrawal of false cases, action against guilty police personnel and officials, an immediate halt to bulldozer actions and mob rule. Protest marches and demonstrations were also organised in Nawada, Nalanda, Darbhanga, Ara and several other districts.

CPI(ML) - Insaaf Manch Fact Finding Team

Earlier on December 5, a joint state-level team of CPI(ML) and Insaaf Manch visited Nawada on to investigate the incident. The team reported that Mohammad Athar Hussain was attacked after being identified as a Muslim and was subjected to extreme cruelty. They further observed that Bhatta village and nearby localities are gripped by fear in the aftermath of the incident. The team noted that after the incident an atmosphere of fear prevails in Bhatta village and surrounding areas. The accused are allegedly being given protection and no serious investigation into their background has been carried out so far.

CPI(ML) and Insaaf Manch appealed to the people of Bihar to come forward to defend the Constitution, democracy and justice, and asserted that the struggle against mob rule, hatred and repression would continue. ■

Adieu, Comrade Raja Bahuguna

Comrade Raja Bahuguna, Chairperson of Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and one of the founder leaders of the party in Uttarakhand, passed away on 28 November 25 at a hospital in Delhi. He had been suffering from liver and biliary cancer since 2023. We pay our solemn tribute to a comrade whose entire life was woven into the struggles of the masses. Comrade Raja Bahuguna was the national General Secretary and UP State President of the Indian People's Front. He spearheaded many struggles and was sent to jail many times during these struggles.



The 11th Party Congress held in Patna in 2023 elected him Chairperson of the Central Control Commission. His passing leaves a deep void, but the example he set through his humility, commitment, and unwavering dedication to people's movements will continue to inspire us for years to come. ■

Remembering Raja Bhai

▲ RAJENDRA PRATHOLI

With the passing of Comrade Raja Bahuguna, a towering voice in Uttarakhand's people's movements comes to rest. A defining force in the region, he helped shape and consolidate the revolutionary current of the communist movement in the region.

Born in Nainital, Rajeshwar Prasad Bahuguna or Raja Bhai as he was fondly called began his political life as a young Congress activist and was soon seen as a promising leader within the party. His father worked in the postal department. The year 1977 proved decisive in his political evolution. Disillusioned with the Congress and influenced by the JP movement during the final phase of the Emergency, Raja Bhai plunged wholeheartedly into the Janata Party campaign. However, his disenchantment with

the Janata Party followed soon after it came to power.

As popular anger mounted against the auctioning and plunder of forests, Raja Bhai emerged as a key organiser of resistance. Under the banner of the Parvatiya Yuva Morcha, a campaign against forest loot was launched, culminating in the historic Nainital Club incident. The movement succeeded and expanded. Soon, there was the formation of the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini, of which Raja Bhai was a founding member. He later played an active role in the Chanchridhar and Dhyari movements in Almora district.

Between 1980 and 1981, Raja Bhai came into close contact with the communist movement. Alongside comrades Bahadur Singh Jangi, Man Singh Pal, Bhuvan Joshi and others, he became a central force in building the historic Bindukhatta peasant

struggle. With efforts underway to form the Indian People's Front (IPF), the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini became its constituent unit after the IPF's formation in April 1982. During this period, Raja Bhai's primary field of work was the Terai region.

In 1984, the "Nasha Nahin, Rozgar Do" movement against alcohol and for employment was launched from Chaukhutiya and soon spread across Kumaon. Raja Bhai played a leading role in this agitation and later spent extended periods in Almora jail along with leaders of the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini and the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal.

The IPF's second conference was held in Kolkata. Internal differences weakened the Sangharsh Vahini, after which the IPF began functioning independently. During this phase, the Terai Kisan Sabha was formed, covering areas from Nainital district (including present-day Udham Singh Nagar) to Lakhimpur Kheri. Raja Bhai drafted its founding document in Nainital. A regional

committee combining the hill and Terai regions of Uttar Pradesh was formed under the Party Central Committee's supervision, with Raja Bhai acting as a vital link between the two regions.

In Almora district, Raja Bhai helped build the Mazdoor Kisan Sabha in the Takula, Someshwar and Dhauladevi blocks along with comrades Chandrashekhar Bhatt, Khadak Da and others. Several large-scale mass mobilisations were organised during this period. The organisation later evolved into the Mazdoor Kisan Jan Sabha, expanding its work to Bhikiyasain and attempting to extend it to the Gauchar region of Chamoli. Raja Bhai also played a decisive role in organising a major conference of Lisa workers in Someshwar and sustaining their movement.

In Nainital, Raja Bhai was instrumental in organising the boatmen's movement. Many of these boatmen hailed from regions of Almora which had an impact on the forest conservation movement. He also initiated the Marxist Study Forum in the city, bringing together university teachers, cultural activists, students and workers, thereby laying an organisational foundation for Party work. During this time, he expanded political contacts in Srinagar and Pauri as well. The Progressive Students Organization (PSO) was in the process of its formation in Srinagar.

Elected to the Party's Uttar Pradesh State Committee at the 1987 Gonda conference, Raja Bhai worked under the leadership of state secretary Comrade Ramjatan Sharma, for whom he always expressed deep respect. His responsibilities within the IPF steadily expanded.

The Mahtosh Mor movement of 1988–89 against violence against women became one of the largest agitations in the then Nainital district, which included the present-day Udham Singh Nagar. Led by Raja Bhai, the movement spread widely despite severe repression, prolonged imprisonment and harsh winter conditions. In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, Raja Bhai contested from Nainital as IPF candidate—marking the organisation's first major electoral intervention in Uttarakhand. The campaign, conducted alongside Comrade Bahadur Singh Jangi's assembly election campaign from Haldwani, was marked by remarkable energy and mass outreach. Raja Bhai also contested the Nainital Lok Sabha seat in the 1998 and 1999 elections.

Raja Bhai served as IPF's Uttar Pradesh President and later as the National General Secretary until 1993, when IPF was dissolved. He played an important role during the turbulent period surrounding the demolition of the Babri Masjid. After the Party's Fifth Congress in Kolkata in 1992, open Party functioning began, and the IPF was gradually wound up. A separate party committee for Uttarakhand was formed by the Central Committee.

Comrade Raja Bahuguna played an important role in the Uttarakhand statehood movement, and he mobilised a huge rally in Nainital in 1992. When the Uttarakhand movement was at its peak in 1994, he wrote a booklet highlighting the future framework for a separate state and also launched the Uttarakhand People's Front in 1993–94, a platform to give voice to democratic sentiments for the separate statehood. Raja

Bhai assumed an increasingly active role in the statehood movement. After the resolution of a separate state movement, ill health forced him to spend some time in Lucknow, where he remained closely associated with the Party office. He was part of the leadership team that organised the Party's Sixth Congress in Varanasi in 1997 and was elected to the Central Committee.

After Uttarakhand's formation in 2000, Raja Bhai remained actively engaged in addressing emerging political challenges. At that time, AISA was a prominent students organization in Uttarakhand. Several AISA leaders contested in Assembly Elections as CPIML candidates. Raja Bhai shared a close and enduring bond with student activists, particularly Comrade Yogesh Pandey. After the formation of the state, initiatives in the form of protests, conventions and seminars were undertaken in Dehradun. He continued to play an active role in movements across Bindukhatta, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar.

From preparing a booklet on the Kedarnath disaster to serving as National Vice President of AICCTU and later as Chairman of the Central Control Commission of the Party, Raja Bhai remained politically active until his final days.

Known for his simplicity, clarity, moral courage and deep commitment to justice, Raja Bhai connected effortlessly with people across generations. He spoke truth to power, raised his opinions boldly at party forums, mentored young activists, and worked consistently to transform movement participants into organised political forces. Not only was he an agitator par excellence,

he saw to it that emerging elements were organized into local units. Grooming young comrades by close interaction with them was an integral part of his workstyle.

He carried out tasks such as building movements, intervening within ongoing struggles, and setting the focus of movement with remarkable ease. Once the direction and issues are decided, his discussions would remain firmly centred on it. Whether in internal meetings or joint forums, he was always clear about what

needed to be emphasised.

He had a natural ability to strike up conversations with people on the move and to turn those interactions into friendships. In our politics, it is not easy to bring one's own family and relatives firmly into one's circle of support, but Raja Bhai succeeded in doing this to a great extent—a fact that became evident in his final days.

Spontaneity and an uncompromising refusal to tolerate injustice lay at the core of his personality. Whether it was the

near-fatal attack by hired goons during his college days in Nainital, when he confronted the college administration over irregularities in fee waivers, or the physical assault he suffered in Someshwar, Almora, while trying to stop people attacking a member of a minority community with communal abuse, these incidents show that a deep commitment to justice lay at the heart of his character. It was this commitment that transformed Rajeshwar into the revolutionary communist leader Raja Bahuguna. ■

Those Tumultuous Seventies and Making of an Activist

▲ GIRIJA PATHAK

Our beloved comrade has left us. His passing is a profound blow to our party, CPI(ML), and to the revolutionary movement of this country. Raja Bhai—as he was known to his comrades, friends, and family alike from the very beginning—had grown into a people's leader from his earliest student days.

Raja Bhai began his higher education at Kumaun University, Nainital, and from the outset became a natural bearer of the politics and culture of resistance. In the post-Independence period, this mountainous region of what was then Uttar Pradesh witnessed its first organised movement in 1971–72, demanding the establishment of a university. This struggle resulted in the creation of Garhwal and Kumaun Universities. At that time, Kumaun University's Nainital campus emerged as a major centre. It drew

youth from relatively prosperous farming families of the Terai region of Nainital district. As a result, the contradiction between "locals" and "outsiders" became a defining feature of campus politics. Muscle-power groups routinely interfered in student affairs, exerting pressure on the administration.

It was in this context that Rajeshwar Prasad Bahuguna enrolled as a BA student at the DSB Campus of Kumaun University, Nainital. Raja Bhai would later recall, "The moment I entered the university and saw what was happening there, I decided that it had to be resisted." Campus facilities—allocation of textbooks from the library, fee waivers for poor students, the student union, and cultural and literary bodies—were monopolised by strong-arm student leaders who ensured that only their own associates benefited. The administration,

maintaining the status quo, allowed this to continue.

Confronted with this injustice, Rajeshwar Prasad Bahuguna decided to intervene. Alone, he went to the office of the Dean of Student Welfare (DSW) and formally registered his protest. When the dominant student group learned of this, they lay in wait. The next day, as Bahuguna arrived at the DSW office, he was brutally beaten without any discussion and thrown into a room, nearly unconscious. Such was the atmosphere of fear that neither students nor teachers intervened. Yet this act of repression only strengthened Bahuguna's resolve to resist oppression.

Reflecting on this period, Raja Bhai would later say that after the assault, he realised the necessity of organisation and a political party. In search of this, he initially came into contact with the Congress and socialist currents

within it. He developed close ties with senior leaders in Nainital town associated with the United Socialist Party and the Congress—figures such as Shyamlal Verma, Pratap Bhaiyya, Devi Dutt Sanguri, Harish Chandola, and Vishambhar Nath Sah ‘Sakha’.

The Emergency soon followed. Raja Bhai was then associated with the Youth Congress, yet he remained restless, searching for a politics genuinely aligned with the interests of the people. Speaking of that time, he recalled that although he was formally with the Congress, the excesses of the Emergency forced him to distance himself. At a meeting organised by senior Congress leaders in Nainital, when the young Bahuguna spoke openly against the Emergency, he was silenced and removed mid-speech.

The nationwide resistance against the Emergency drew him forward. He associated with the Janata Party and actively opposed authoritarian rule. Despite being 30–35 years younger than many leaders, his relationships with senior activists were such that he participated as an equal in discussions shaping the movement. Vinod Pandey, one of his close contemporaries, recalls that even after being beaten on campus, Raja Bahuguna remained constantly active on student and civic issues, deeply impressing those around him.

Many young people drawn to the anti-Emergency struggle—including Vinod Pandey and Nirmal Joshi—decided to meet Raja Bahuguna. From the very first meeting, they became comrades. Together they joined a student-youth journey from Almora to Gopeshwar, gaining first-hand exposure to the conditions and

struggles of the hill people. Gradually, this evolved into a collective, with Raja Bahuguna emerging as its central leader.

While the national political landscape was shaped by resistance to the Emergency, Almora simultaneously witnessed the rise of a group of revolutionary youth influenced by the Naxalbari movement. At its core were activists like Shamsheer Singh Bisht, Chandrashekhar Bhatt, P.C. Tiwari, Pradeep Tamta, and others, who represented a revolutionary current in student politics. Chandrashekhar Bhatt was organising Lisa (resin from pine tree) workers in Manaana, building a workers’ organisation and leading struggles around their demands.

According to Comrade Chandrashekhar Bhatt, underground revolutionary groups also periodically sought contact in the region. One of the earliest links was through a lecturer at Almora campus associated with CPI(ML) (Central Team). On his initiative, a meeting was organised in Manaana village of Almora district, attended by leading student activists from Almora and Nainital. Raja Bahuguna participated as well. This meeting marked Raja Bhai’s first organised introduction to the Marxist-Leninist stream. The eyes of all present were filled with dreams of revolution. They pledged to link themselves with the revolutionary struggle underway in India and to work toward dismantling the feudal-capitalist system and building an egalitarian society.

After the Manaana meeting, Raja Bahuguna participated in workers’ and peasants’ struggles across Chametola, Manaana, Naini-

Silpad, and Kanda in Bageshwar district.

On the night of 14–15 August 1977, after relentless rainfall, a massive landslide in Tawaghat caused extensive loss of life and property. While activists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Shamsheer Singh Bisht reached the affected area, Raja Bahuguna, Vinod Pandey, and other youth convened a public meeting in Nainital at the Savoy Hotel, Tallital. It was decided that a movement would be launched in Nainital in support of the disaster victims, including a call for a city shutdown if demands were not met.

Vinod Pandey recalls that Raja Bahuguna was uniquely connected with leaders across Nainital and adept at mobilising resources. He ensured paper, paint, and brushes for posters by persuading shopkeepers, explaining that this not only helped procure materials but also politically connected people to the movement. Raja Bhai’s ability to mix effortlessly with students and ordinary citizens made mobilisation and resource gathering natural for him. Understanding the organisational needs of sustained struggle, he built close ties with Meghdoot Hotel owner Mahendra Bisht, securing a room in the Tallital area of Naintal that became the movement’s operational centre.

Throughout this period, struggles to protect forests were ongoing across the hill regions. While forests were a major revenue source for the state, they were essential to villagers’ livelihoods. After the Emergency, in 1977, forest auctions were announced in Kumaun. Student-youth from Nainital and Almora

resolved to oppose them. On 6 October—chosen deliberately as a date for auction, because schools and colleges were closed—the first protest was organised. Despite Section 144 being imposed, activists associated with Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini marched from Tallital and protested at the auction site in Rink Hall, Mallital, leading to arrests. As recalled by Vinod Pandey, Raja Bahuguna insisted beforehand that not everyone would court arrest—some must remain outside to carry the movement forward. Some of the activists were arrested and taken to the nearest police station. There the SDM asked them whether they would like to be released on a personal bond or would like to go to jail. This was a first-of-its-kind experience for those young and energetic team. They preferred to go to jail. But after some time, hundreds of students and townspeople surrounded the police station, the administration was forced to release the detainees unconditionally and suspend the auction.

A public meeting that evening at the Ramlila Stage, convened by Raja Bahuguna, resolved to resist every future auction attempt and asserted people's rights over forests. Demands included forest-based industries in hill regions, cancellation of pine wood and Lisa allocation to Star Paper Mill, and abolition of the contractor system in the forest.

The cancellation of the auction process humiliated the state government and the administration. Chief Minister Charan Singh and Forest Minister Shri Chand—the latter hailing from this region made it a prestige

issue and announced a second auction on 28 November. The administration considered Raja Bahuguna a key leader of the resistance movement and on its directive, the chief conservator of the forest department met Raja and told him to disassociate from the movement. Vinod Pandey writes that when the conservator realized that the student would not withdraw, an offer to bribe him was given- "we will give two lots of the pine tree to you". The Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini leadership stood steadfast and launched a campaign in the colleges of the city to garner support for the movement. The local administration braced itself for the showdown. For the first time in Nainital's history, one thousand PAC jawans conducted a flag march and section 144 was imposed. Arrest warrants were issued, many leaders went underground, and Nainital was turned into a police camp. From hiding in Tallital and then in a house in Mallital, Raja Bahuguna helped draft a pamphlet that was to be secretly printed. He told a comrade to get it printed in the Rajhans press in Tallital. Since by that time Rajiv Lochan Sah had been arrested, the pamphlet could not be published there. The draft pamphlet was then handed over to Vishwanath Pandey, the elder brother of Vinod Pandey, who got it printed in Kansal press in Mallital. In the meantime, the underground leaders started coming out in the open and organized themselves in a march to the Shailey Hall, Mallital where the auction was to be held. A song sung by the revolutionary poet Girish Tiwari 'Girda' – 'aaj himaal tuman kain dhatyoonchh jaago jaago ho mera laal' (Today the Himalayas are calling out to

you, wake up, wake up, my son!) initiated a number of youth in the march. The police arrested the protestors. As the news of the arrest spread, students from CRST and GSI schools took out a protest march. The university students also later joined the march. The administration resorted to repression. There was a lathi charge and police firing—unprecedented in Nainital's history. Then came the news that the British era Nainital club had been set on fire. Cornered once again, the second auction was also cancelled by the administration. The Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini and Chipko Movement gained national prominence and made news headlines.

The leadership of the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini had earned national recognition through its militant interventions. Influenced by Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, formed during the anti-emergency movement of Jay Prakash Narayan, the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini, included people of diverse ideological backgrounds. While Sarvodaya had a strong presence, the youth leadership was influenced by the Naxalbari movement and leftist ideology.

Raja Bahuguna consistently made conscious efforts to link up with revolutionary left politics and all-India movements. Wherever a people's movement emerged, he was drawn to it and joined in.

Subsequently, the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini called for intensifying the Chipko Movement. Raja Bahuguna and other youth travelled across villages and towns of Garhwal and Kumaun, taking the movement's demands to the people. On 7 December 1977,

youth associated with the Chipko Movement— including Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Shamsheer Singh Bisht, Raja Bahuguna, Girja, Nirmal Joshi, Pradeep Tamta, Vinod Pandey, and Shashti Datt Joshi— while traveling from Nainital to Joshimath, consulted local residents such as Vipin Tripathi and Trilok Singh Rautela and decided to struggle to save forests at Chanchridhar, where the Forest Department had marked 6,000 trees for felling.

As the Chipko activists travelled from Nainital through various villages and towns to Joshimath, they resolved to oppose the forest-felling contract

at Chanchridhar near Dwarahat. After nearly two months of public outreach, meetings, sit-ins, and demonstrations— and following a successful Uttarakhand bandh on 24 February 1978— the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation was finally forced to withdraw from cutting the forests. In a similar manner, from Doodhatoli and other locations, Raja Bahuguna continued, along with comrades of the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini, to participate in struggles and advance people's movements.

During this same period, a land occupation movement was also underway in Bindukhatta of Nainital district. Various ML

groups across the country were drawn to this movement and made contact with the activists from time to time. Leaders of CPI(ML) Liberation from Uttar Pradesh, who were underground, also sent comrades to this region for the first time to explore possibilities and contacted Raja Bahuguna and his associates. In 1979–80, Deepak Bose contacted Raja Bahuguna and Bahadur Singh Jangi. After this meeting, both of them joined CPI(ML) Liberation. As the party was underground, Raja Bahuguna continued to work with the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini ■

Comrade Raja Bahuguna Shall Always Remain Our Source of Inspiration

▲ BAHADUR SINGH JANGI

A land struggle had been going on in the Bindukhatta area of Nainital, Uttarakhand in 1976–77 under the leadership of Left and democratic forces. In 1980, Raja Bahuguna - an intellectually sharp, energetic student of Kumaun University - arrived in Bindukhatta to join and strengthen this struggle. My first meeting with Raja lasted several hours and revolved around people's movements and communist revolutionary ideology.

In 1979, CPI(ML) Liberation sent Comrade Deepak Bose to Uttarakhand to build contacts. In 1981, Raja Bahuguna and I together took party membership and pledged themselves to the revolutionary path. From that moment on, Comrade Raja Bahuguna remained inseparable from the struggles of the people.

Beginning in 1981, Comrade Bahuguna worked in Bindukhatta, providing leadership to the peasant comrades at the forefront of the land struggle. Alongside organisational work, he regularly conducted political classes, helping landless peasants consciously embrace communist revolutionary ideology.

The Bindukhatta land struggle faced relentless repression. From its early phase in the seventies to the year 1990–91, the Forest Department, police, PAC, paramilitary forces, and successive Congress governments launched repeated attacks on the movement. In 1997, the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh under Chief Minister Kalyan Singh prepared a multi-crore plan to forcibly evict Bindukhatta. Time and again, the state machinery— backed by both

Congress and BJP— attempted to uproot the landless poor through brute force. Lathis, tear gas, bullets, and mass arrests were unleashed. Hundreds of landless women and men were injured; hundreds were jailed. Dozens of CPI(ML) leaders and activists were repeatedly imprisoned, often after being brutally beaten. False and fabricated cases of serious criminal charges were imposed, dragging on for years as a tool of repression.

In 1983, police and PAC patrols were reportedly ordered to capture Comrade Raja Bahuguna and other activists "dead or alive." Even while suffering from a life-threatening fever, Bahuguna evaded arrest, took shelter in another area, and continued to lead the movement. That same year, a statewide campaign was



Comrade Raja Bahuguna leading a procession during the 1984 "Nasha Nahin, Rozgar Do" movement against liquor.

launched across Uttar Pradesh against the detention of key leaders—myself, Subedar Bahadur Singh Chufal, and Ambadatt Kholiya—under the National Security Act. A writ petition was filed in the Allahabad High Court, and the case was pursued by Raja Bahuguna along with Kamla Pant, a lawyer and convenor of the Uttarakhand Mahila Manch. After seven months of sustained struggle, all three detainees were released unconditionally.

In 1988, following a brutal case of violence against women—widely known as the Mahatosh Mor gang-rape case—a powerful resistance movement erupted in Terai region of Nainital district under Comrade Bahuguna's leadership. Instead of punishing the perpetrators, the Narayan Dutt Tiwari-led Uttar Pradesh government targeted the movement itself. Raja Bahuguna and many activists—Deepak Bose, myself, Prakash Chandra Phuloria, Bhuvan Chandra Joshi, Madan Singh Dhama, Jagdish Singh Bisht, Gajendra Shah, Krishna Adhikari, Vidya Rajwar, Nandini

Joshi, and Man Singh Pal—were arrested and jailed in Nainital and Haldwani. Massive pressure from across Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh forced the government to retreat. After 40 days, all activists were released unconditionally, and the accused criminals were finally arrested.

Comrade Raja Bahuguna played a vital role in the Uttarakhand statehood movement. In 1994, he helped carry forward a campaign of people's unity across the region through pamphlets, meetings, and mobilisations. On 30 May 1997, a massive state-level demonstration demanding a separate Uttarakhand was held in Almora, with large participation from women and men from across Kumaun and Garhwal.

On 7 March 2006, continuing the long tradition of resistance, more than 1,000 residents of Bindukhatta, and dwellers from many forest settlements, gathered at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi for a two-day sit-in under the leadership of Comrade Raja Bahuguna and Girija Pathak. The demand was clear and



100 Days of the Modi Regime, 2014: Raja Bhai leading a protest against Corporate Raj and repression of workers.

uncompromising: recognition of these settlements as revenue villages. A memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister's Office. On 25 May 2006, the central government responded in a letter addressed to Comrade Raja Bahuguna, stating that the Uttarakhand government had been directed to initiate action on this long-pending demand.

Until his last breath, he carried forward the torch of mass movements and the communist revolutionary current with unwavering resolve. His life continues to inspire today's struggles and those of generations to come. ■

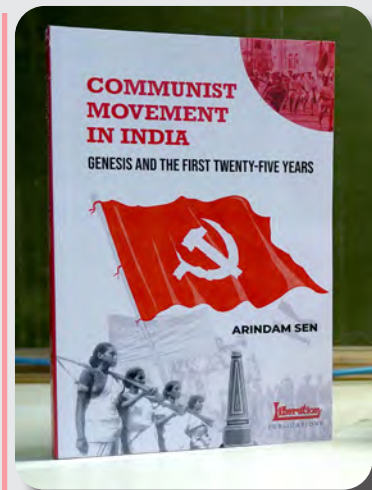


On 17 December, the Deputy Speaker Hall, Constitution Club, Delhi reverberated with the revolutionary legacy of a century of Communist struggle as CPI(ML) Liberation organised the convention marking 100 years of the Communist movement in India. Rooted in anti-colonial resistance and built through uncompromising workers' and peasants' struggles, the Communist movement has been central to winning democratic rights and challenging exploitation in all its forms. Held in remembrance of Comrade Vinod Mishra on his 27th death anniversary, the convention critically assessed both the historic contributions of the movement and the ongoing attacks on democracy, labour, minorities, and constitutional values under the present Modi regime.

Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary, CPI(ML); Uma Chakravarti, historian; Navsharan Kaur, social activist; Pradeep Shinde, faculty, JNU; Ravindran Gopinath, faculty, JMI; Sucheta De, CCM, CPI(ML) and CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad addressed the convention.

The convention was followed by the release of "Communist Movement in India: Genesis and the First Twenty-Five Years" by Arindam Sen, adding an important contribution to the documentation of people's struggles and revolutionary ideas.

As India marks 100 years of its Communist movement, CPI(ML) Liberation reiterates its resolve to intensify struggles against inequality, corporate plunder, communalism, and the corporate-fascist rule.



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liberation@cpiml.org
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