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# Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

**US - ISRAEL'S  
WAR ON IRAN**



# Withdraw The Regressive 'Transgender Persons Amendment Bill 2026'

15 March 2026: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 is a regressive move by the BJP-led Central Government to thwart the queer rights movement in India. By replacing the principle of self-identified gender with mandatory medical certification, the Bill violates the bodily integrity, autonomy and dignity of transgender individuals. This move directly contradicts the Supreme Court's landmark NALSA vs. Union of India judgment, which ruled for self-identification of gender identity as an integral part of personal autonomy and dignity under Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Constitution.

Under the proposed amendment, the State refuses to recognize gender as a personal identity, instead subjecting individuals to invasive bureaucratic and

medical scrutiny. By limiting recognized identities to specific traditional communities, the Bill excludes many and deprives them of access to basic amenities like education, housing, and healthcare on state approval.

Furthermore, similar to the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act, these provisions frame gender-nonconforming communities as criminal threats rather than citizens deserving of protection. This shift transforms the State's role from a provider of rights to an agent of surveillance and control. To preserve the hard-won rights and dignity of the transgender community, this Bill must be condemned and withdrawn immediately.

-- Central Committee, CPI(ML) Liberation ■

## Protest by Delhi Cluster Bus Contract Conductors Against Illegal Job Termination



A large number of DIMTS/ Cluster bus contract conductors, under the banner of AICCTU, held a protest at the Delhi Labour Commissioner's Office on February 27 against illegal job terminations and the continued denial of basic labour rights. Thousands of contract conductors working in Cluster/DIMTS buses have been ensuring the smooth functioning of Delhi's public transport system for years. Many of them have been rendering continuous service for 10–15 years. However, the various private companies operating these contracts, along with DIMTS, have consistently denied contract workers their rightful benefits such as leave, bonuses, overtime wages, and equal pay for equal work.

All contract conductors have continued to serve the public despite rising pollution levels, risking their health on Delhi's roads. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they performed their duties without interruption. In Delhi's extreme heat and cold—when many hesitate to step outside—these workers have endured harsh weather conditions and continued to carry out their responsibilities with dedication.

At a time when the government should have announced their regularisation and ensured equal pay, the Delhi government has instead moved toward terminating the jobs of DIMTS contract employees. From April onwards, the Delhi government has decided to bring DIMTS bus operations under the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC). However, no policy or decision has been announced regarding the absorption of contract workers into DTC.

For the past several days, Cluster/DIMTS contract conductors have been attempting to raise their demands before the Delhi government in light of reports of impending job losses. The government has failed to address their concerns. Instead, peaceful protests by workers are being suppressed by the police and management.

The protesting conductors demanded an immediate halt to illegal job terminations, the absorption of all existing contract conductors into DTC and the guarantee of basic labour rights. They declared that the struggle will continue until justice is secured for thousands of workers who have kept Delhi's public transport running for years. ■

# Liberation

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## Uphold Bhagat Singh's Anti-imperialist Legacy and Oppose Modi Regime's Surrender to the US-Israel Axis



It is now ninety-five years since the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru that had galvanised India in the struggle for complete independence from British colonial rule. A lot of water has since flowed down the river Ravi. Lahore, the city where Bhagat Singh bid goodbye to his beloved motherland, has been part of Pakistan since 1947. But the message of Bhagat Singh continues to resonate ever more eloquently, whether in today's India or Pakistan. The chant of 'Inquilab Zindabad' (long live revolution) and 'Samrajyavad ka Naash ho' (down with imperialism) speaks to our current situation with ever greater relevance and urgency.

Bhagat Singh was a pioneering revolutionary of his times. As a young boy of twelve, he saw the most brutal face of British colonial rule in Jallianwalabagh. The year he was born, his uncle Ajit Singh led a peasant uprising in Punjab with the clarion call 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta' (take care of your turban, oh farmer). Much like the farmers' movement against the Modi government's pro-corporate farm laws in 2019-20, the pagri sambhal jatta movement, which marked the 50th anniversary of the great 1857 war of independence, succeeded in forcing the British rulers to repeal three colonial farm laws. And in

Kartar Singh Sarabha, the young Ghadar Party revolutionary who was hanged at the age of 19 in Lahore jail after a failed attempt at organising an anti-colonial revolt during the First World War, Bhagat Singh found his role model.

The impulses of the freedom movement came from across India, from the fields and factories, villages and towns, gathering strength from every quest for dignity and liberty in the face of all kinds of oppression, exploitation and bondage. Bhagat Singh and his comrades were also driven by the tremendous inspiration and hope generated by the victorious Russian revolution under the leadership of Comrade Lenin. Their patriotism was not just about freeing India from the clutches of British colonial rule, it was about establishing socialism in India and gaining real power and freedom for India's toiling millions. They knew India could not become really free in a world dominated by imperialism, hence their politics pulsated with the spirit of socialist imagination and anti-imperialism.

Bhagat Singh's message for India's youth in the 1920s has a special resonance for us in today's juncture. Political power in India today has been completely

taken over by the 'bhure angrez' against whom Bhagat Singh warned us, corporate profiteers and their political partners who are busy grabbing the resources of the country and mortgaging the interests of the people to the US-Israel imperialist axis of aggression and war. This has pushed the country into a state of deep uncertainty and crisis. Nearly ten million expatriate Indian workers are trapped in various corners of war-torn West Asia, while the whole country is reeling under the disastrous impact of fuel shortage, trade disruption and soaring prices. The trade deal with the US threatens to deliver a debilitating blow to India's agriculture by exposing India's crisis-ridden small and marginal farmers to an utterly unequal competition with the heavily subsidised and mechanised farm lobby of the United States.

It is time to reinvoke Bhagat Singh's spirit of anti-imperialist patriotism and resist the sellout of India's national interests and strategic autonomy by India's fascist rulers in the name of turning India into a Hindu Rashtra. By subordinating Indian foreign policy to the interests of the US-Israel axis, India has invited only increased isolation in the

international arena. Already alienated from neighbouring countries in South Asia, India now also stands isolated from Iran, one of its traditional friends in the Islamic world.

Notwithstanding the bankruptcy and betrayal of the Modi government, the present juncture signals the possibility of triggering the eventual decline of the hegemonic power of US imperialism. If Trump had thought that a regime change in Iran would prove to be as swift an operation as in Venezuela or Iraq, Iran has proven him completely wrong. The idea that a war on Iran would reinforce the unity of the western alliance around the US-Israel axis as during the Iraq war has also been exposed to be misplaced. The NATO allies have not only refused to get dragged into the Iran war, they have even started vacating their military bases in Iraq. When cracks begin to appear in the imperialist camp and anger mounts globally against the US-Israel axis, and the policies of a fascist government land India in acute economic distress and increasing international isolation, it is time for the heirs of Bhagat Singh to rise to the occasion. ■

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## The Forthcoming Assembly Elections: Challenges before Defenders of Democracy



**O**n 15 March, Election Commission announced the election schedule for Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and West Bengal Assemblies. Assam, Kerala and Puducherry will vote on 9 April, Tamil Nadu on 23 April and West Bengal will vote in two phases, on 23 and 29 April. The counting will happen on 4 May which means the people of Kerala, Puducherry and Assam will have to wait for nearly a month for their votes to be counted! Those who still support EVMs for polling for the belief that EVM-based polling facilitates faster counting of votes and declaration of results should take note of this time gap between voting and counting.

Like the Bihar elections in November 2024, the current round of Assembly elections is also being preceded by the exclusionary campaign of Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls. In every state SIR is resulting in large scale exclusion of voters and shrinking of the electoral roll. The reduction has been the lowest in Kerala, but even here the electoral roll has been reduced by close

to one million or 3 percent. By contrast, Tamil Nadu witnessed a massive 12 percent shrinking with the elimination of 74 lakh names bringing the electoral roll down from 6.2 crore to 5.5 crore. West Bengal has already witnessed deletion of more than six million voters, but the future of another six million voters is still 'under adjudication'.

Indeed, the opaque and arbitrary nature of the SIR process can be best understood in West Bengal. When the first draft roll was published after voters were linked back to the 2002 base electoral roll, 5.8 million names were excluded on grounds of death, permanent migration or duplicate entries. But what began after that initial phase was mass harassment and targeted exclusion of voters. In Muslim-dominated constituencies of Malda and Murshidabad, where only 2 percent voters were deleted in the first draft, the cases of half of the electorate now await adjudication for a second round of potential exclusion. And what is even more galling is that poll dates have been announced

keeping these six million voters on hold as though their voting right does not matter, their votes do not count in the much touted 'festival of democracy'. Voters who have survived the SIR purge must use their vote to punish the Modi government for this SIR assault on India's electoral democracy.

Of these four poll-bound states, the BJP is currently in power only in Assam. The Assam Chief Minister has emerged as one of the BJP's most toxic peddlers of hate, who now openly incites violence against Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. Under his government Assam has also turned into a grazing land for unregulated corporate plunder. In West Bengal the BJP is pulling out all the stops to grab power. Just before the announcement of elections, the Modi government transferred the controversial Tamil Nadu Governor N Ravi, who was condemned by the Supreme Court for his unconstitutional acts, to West Bengal. And immediately after the announcement, the EC has initiated a process of complete administrative takeover in the poll-bound state. Even in Tamil Nadu and Kerala where there is no prospect of a BJP victory in the foreseeable future, the aggression of the Modi government and the Sangh brigade is intensifying by the day.

For defenders of democracy and the Constitution, the Assembly elections must therefore be taken up as an anti-fascist platform of political mobilisation. From April 1, the government is going to enforce the new labour codes of slavery. There are already signs of growing workers' unrest against attempts to lengthen the work day. The agenda of the 12 February general strike should be taken up as the common election agenda. The disastrous implications of the escalating US-Israel war on

Iran are already being felt quite sharply in India. The surrender of the Modi government to the US-Israel axis is not just a blot on India's foreign policy, it is a direct blow to the interests of India and our common people - farmers who will be hit hard by the trade deal with the US, expatriate workers who are trapped in West Asia and every ordinary Indian who feels the heat of the fuel crisis and soaring prices. The elections must also be treated as an anti-war campaign platform.

All the poll-bound states have been vibrant centres of Left movement in India. Beyond the immediate electoral context and outcome, we must work hard for strengthening the fighting capacity of the communist movement in all these states. There is no uniform alliance pattern in these states, but revolutionary communists must intervene in these elections to strengthen the people's movement and weaken the fascist grip over India. To this end, for the first time CPI(ML) will have a statewide electoral understanding with the CPI(M) and Left Front in West Bengal. In Assam the party will have partial understanding with the Congress, and in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala the party will field a few candidates in select constituencies while extending general support to the DMK-led coalition in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and the LDF in Kerala. ■

## Elections 2026: Meet the CPI(ML) Liberation Candidates

### West Bengal Legislative Assembly Election 2026

**C**PI(ML) Liberation is contesting in 10 constituencies across West Bengal with support from the Left Front. This is a people's panel rooted in struggles of workers, peasants, women, Adivasis, and minorities. The list includes 6 women candidates and 4 representatives from minority communities.

- 1. Phansidewa (ST) constituency, Darjeeling: Sumanti Ekka** is a leading organiser of the working class movement. A tea garden workers' leader from Taipu Tea Estate in Darjeeling, she stands at the forefront of Adivasi struggles and is a leader of the Adivasi Sangharsh Morcha.
- 2. Bharatpur constituency, Murshidabad: Jinnatun Nahar Gulsan Begam** from Sijgram, has long been part of the Left movement. As an AIPWA leader in Murshidabad, she leads struggles of mid-day meal workers, land rights, debt relief, and basic civic rights including electricity.
- 3. Berhampore constituency, Murshidabad: Abul Kasem Sk** began his political journey through the youth movement and people's theatre. He is a long-time organiser of bidi workers, ASHA workers, and mid-day meal workers in the district. He has consistently been part of struggles for wages, job security, and dignity of scheme workers, along with grassroots welfare and development struggles in Beldanga.
- 4. Krishnanagar South constituency, Nadia: Labani Jangi** is a well-known artist of resistance, using art as a tool to challenge injustice and highlight the voices of the marginalised. She is currently a researcher on Bengal migrant workers and is actively involved in mass movements and human rights struggles, connecting culture, labour, and resistance.
- 5. Naihati constituency, North 24 Parganas: Debajyoti Majumder** began his journey as a banking sector union worker and later played a key role in organising jute industry and unorganised sector workers. He is a well-known face in Naihati's mass movements, including the "Justice for RG Kar" movement, and various civil society struggles against divisive communal politics of BJP-RSS. He is State Committee member of the party.
- 6. Budge Budge constituency, South 24 Parganas: Kajal Dutta** became active in revolutionary Left politics during her student life at Budge Budge College. She currently plays a leading role in movements for women's rights, as well as struggles of construction workers and agricultural labourers, fighting for wages, dignity, and security. She is a State Committee member of the party.
- 7. Rashbehari constituency, Kolkata: Manas Ghosh** has been associated with revolutionary Left politics since his student days at Jadavpur University. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Film Studies at Jadavpur University and remains active in progressive, democratic, and anti-fascist citizen movements.
- 8. Dhanekhali (SC) constituency, Hooghly: Ruma Aheri** is an ICDS worker and a leader of the ICDS movement. She is also an organiser among rural poor women, unorganised workers, and agricultural labourers. She has

been at the forefront of struggles for 100 days' work, against microfinance exploitation of poor women, and for debt relief and livelihood rights.

**9. Bishnupur constituency, Bankura: Titas Gupta** is a former student of Visva-Bharati University. She has been associated with mass movements since student life and is currently a leader of sanitation workers in Bishnupur municipality, mid-day meal workers, and scheme workers. She is also a strong voice in women's rights and civic struggles across the district. She is a State Committee member of CPI(ML) Liberation.

**10. Purbasthali Dakshin constituency, Purba Bardhaman: Jiyadul Sekh** comes from a landless agricultural labouring family in Bardhaman. He has been part of struggles of agricultural labourers for wages and land rights since childhood, along with his family. Today he continues to lead struggles of sharecroppers, evictions resistance, and rural poor communities.

## Kerala Legislative Assembly Election

**1. Peravoor constituency, Kannur District: Comrade Aruvikkal Krishnan** is a prominent Adivasi leader from Aralam Panchayat with decades of experience in people's struggles. He has been at the forefront of movements on landlessness, homelessness, and human-wildlife conflict affecting forest-border communities. Rooted in both the Adivasi movement and the broader Left movement, he represents the struggles of Adivasi settlements and rural working people living along forest fringes.

**2. Kattakkada constituency, Thiruvananthapuram Rural: Comrade Jayakumar Theertham** is an advocate by profession, practising in various courts in Thiruvananthapuram district after 20 years of service in the Indian Air Force. He is a member of the CPI(ML) Liberation State Leading Team and is also a writer and poet. He has worked as a panel lawyer, legal clinic advocate, and legal resource person across several panchayats. He holds degrees in law, English literature, philosophy, and MSW (counselling).

**3. Thrissur Constituency: Comrade Arshad Azeez** is a young Left activist with a strong background in student politics. He completed his BA in History from Hansraj College, University of Delhi, and MA in Sociology from the Delhi School of Economics. As part of AISA, he was actively involved in progressive student movements across Delhi. His activism includes participation in the anti-CAA protests, the farmers' movement at Delhi

borders, the Pinjra Tod movement for women's freedom, and the Young India Adhikar Rally for employment and education rights. He was also active in struggles at JNU, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Delhi University against fee hikes, NEP, and communal-fascist attacks.

## Assam Legislative Assembly Election

**1. Behali (SC) constituency, Sonitpur: Comrade Gyanendra Sarkar**, a retired Assam Civil Service officer, has long been associated with progressive cultural and democratic movements in Assam. In his early years, he was active in the Bishnu Jyoti Jan Sanskritik Parishad in Behali during the 1980s and was also associated with the IPF movement. After joining government service, he worked across various parts of Assam. He has recently joined CPI(ML) Liberation, continuing his engagement with workers' and democratic movements. CPI(ML) is contesting this seat as part of the INDIA alliance.

**2. Howraghat (ST) constituency, Karbi Anglong: Comrade Rabi Kumar Phangcho** is a veteran leader of the Autonomous State movement and struggles for tribal rights and autonomy in the region. He is prominent voice against corporate land grab and corruption in the District Autonomous Council. He is a Central Committee member of CPI(ML) Liberation.

**3. Rongkhang (ST) constituency, Karbi Anglong: Comrade Pratima Engheepi** is a prominent leader of the Autonomous State Movement in Karbi Anglong as well as women's movement. She is actively involved in the ongoing struggle against corporate takeover of Sixth Schedule lands in the region. She is a Central Committee member of CPI(ML) Liberation.

## Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections

In the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections, CPI(ML) Liberation is set to contest in around 14 constituencies across the state. Comrades Anthony Muthu from Colachel, Sagayam from Thoothukudi, Dimitrov from Sivakasi, Muruga Boopathy from Ramanathapuram, Meyyar from Melur, R Ravi from Vendasur, Manimegalai from Pudukkottai, Kannaiyan from Thiruvaidaimarudur, Masilamani from Papanasam, C Gopi from Yercaud, Anbazhagan from Veerapandi, Stalin Babu from Veppanapalli, and Tamilarasan from Sriperumbudur are among the candidates. ■

# Oppose the US-Israel War on Iran, Stand in Support of Iran's Sovereignty

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

**T**he criminal US-Israel war of aggression on Iran has pushed West Asia into a state of acute crisis and uncertainty. The last time Israel had attacked Iran in June 2025, it did not go according to Israel's expectations and the US had to join the war to bail Israel out. This time round, Israel has dragged the US into a joint war from day one, but in spite of the military and financial muscle of the US-Israel axis and its political domination over much of West Asia, not to mention the western world, once again the war does not seem to be moving according to the wishful script of Netanyahu and Trump.

Trump is in no position to justify this war even to his own supporters in the US. In fact, in 2024 he had won the presidential election by promising to focus on the economy and not going to war. Nobody believes in the American lie which talks of Iran posing a security threat to the US or any of its Nato allies. After the June attack on Iran, Trump himself had claimed to have destroyed Iran's nuclear programme. If the issue was about reining in Iran's residual nuclear potential, Iran had been ready to negotiate a diplomatic resolution. Indeed an agreement was very much underway in Oman, until Israel and the US sabotaged the process and launched a concerted attack.

The world of course knows the real reason behind the Trump-Netanyahu "Operation Epic Fury". It is the familiar US quest for regime change. Ever since the ouster of the pro-US Shah regime in February 1979, the US had

been looking for an opportunity to regain control over Iran. After serial regime changes in Iraq, Libya, Syria, the US-Israel axis thought Iran was ready for a similar expedition. Iran has indeed been witnessing powerful struggles for change and the Khamenei regime has unleashed brutal repression to hold on to power. The courageous struggle of Iranian women against Iran's patriarchal theocratic order evoked enormous global goodwill. But Trump's invitation to the Iranian people to take over the reins of power after the assassination of Iran's supreme leader and several other key individuals around him did not trigger any revolt within Iran.

For all the scenes of jubilation among sections of the Iranian diaspora in western countries, inside Iran we see a mass outpouring of grief and anger over the 'martyrdom' of Ayatollah Khamenei and the massacre of Iranian girls in a primary school, a pattern of violence that is akin to the genocide of children and women in Gaza. The Iranian people are clearly not going to surrender their sovereign right to shape their own future to a regime change conspiracy scripted by Israel and its protector, the US. Having withstood the economic sanctions and military pressure exerted by the US-Israel axis for decades, and the Iranian people are unlikely to succumb to the current phase of vicious military aggression by America or the sinister operations of Mossad and the CIA.

The Iranian counter offensive against American bases around Iran has definitely started posing

challenges to the US-Israel war machine. The US has already had to acknowledge some major losses, including three military aircraft which it claims to have lost to 'friendly fire' in Kuwait. The Trump-Netanyahu dream of a quick regime change in Iran has given way to the grudging recognition of a war which would last at least several weeks and cost some American lives, something that Trump now says is only to be expected in a war. The Gulf countries have begun to express their disquiet over the military and economic cost of the war, not to speak of the potential destabilisation of their own US-dependent regimes.

The longer the war continues, the bigger will be its disastrous impact on the world economy. Oil and gas prices are liable to soar and the supply lines to be disrupted. The war already looks like a regional war and if China truly means what it has said about supporting Iran in "defending its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, and national dignity" the world could well be looking at a build-up towards a potential WWII. India's concerns are much bigger and more specific as India's energy supply depends overwhelmingly on the volatile West Asia region and some ten million Indians work there.

The question of India's energy security and the physical safety of this huge contingent of expatriate Indian workers should thus require India to work proactively for an immediate end to the US-Israel aggression on Iran. But all initial indications suggest not just a

deafening silence on the part of the Modi government but even a degree of complicity. The attack on Iran started shortly after Modi's brazen hobnobbing with Netanyahu in a shocking state visit to Israel and even after the assassination of Iran's supreme leader, the Modi government failed to utter a word of condemnation or even concern. There are even reports of India being indirectly dragged into extending military cooperation to the war.

The sinking of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena as a result of a US submarine attack close to India's maritime boundary with Sri Lanka raises serious questions of the war already reaching close to India. The Iranian frigate had sailed into Visakhapatnam port on 16 February at India's invitation to take part in an international naval exercise and was torpedoed on its way back home after the exercise. Of the 180 people aboard IRIS Dena, 87 bodies have so far been recovered by a Sri Lankan rescue mission while 78 persons have been rescued wounded, 31 of them in a critical state. In spite of being the host country, India has failed to condemn the criminal action of the US submarine.

Beyond the ties of diplomacy, India and Iran, have had a long history of close cultural bonds and interaction. In the realm of contemporary international relations too, Iran has been a trusted friend of India. India siding with the US-Israel axis at Iran's worst hour of crisis is an indefensible foreign policy failure and abdication of responsibility on India's part towards a friend and fellow BRICS member country. Coupled with the Modi government's ignominious role on the question of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and genocide of the Palestinian people, the support to the US-Israel axis in its war on Iran is a blot on India's foreign policy and betrayal of India's own national interests. We the people of India must stand with the people of Iran in support of their sovereignty and dignity, insist on an immediate end to all violence against Iran and hold the Modi government to account for its irresponsible and indefensible role. ■

## Hollow Assurances And Empty Cylinders



“ Now do you understand why people were protesting Trump, Israel, or the wars?” a man in his 50s asks his friend aboard a bus from Pathanamthitta to Kottayam as they discuss the LPG crisis. He adds, “The struggles of people across the world are interconnected.”

The ripples of US-Israeli aggression against Iran have now reached even the Indian kitchen and domestic sectors. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has called the impact on the global energy sector the worst in history, surpassing even the turbulent 1970s.

Liberation correspondents spoke to small street vendors, restaurant owners, and migrant workers across Kerala, Karnataka, and Delhi, where the impact of the LPG shortage is clearly visible. Many restaurants have shifted to using wood or other primitive fuels, while reducing their menus. Those with no alternative have been forced to shut down. A roadside tea shop vendor said he now sells only lime juice due to the shortage. Most small vendors had similar stories. A well-known tea shop in Bengaluru reported that it now prepares tea only once a day and stores it in a thermos due to limited gas supply. In areas where enforcement is weak and corruption is rampant, some manage to obtain cylinders on the black market, but at prices ranging from Rs. 3000 to 4000 per cylinder for non-commercial use.

India, like crude oil, is highly dependent on imports for LPG, which is a mix of butane and propane, and Liquefied Natural Gas, LNG, which is methane. These imports largely come from West Asia, especially Qatar, and pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Nearly 60 percent of India's LPG consumption, around 30 to 32 million tonnes annually, is met through imports, with about 90 percent sourced from Gulf countries such as Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, about 45 to 50 percent of India's natural gas demand is met through LNG imports, with Qatar alone accounting for over 40 percent of supplies. More than 80 percent of LPG and over 50 percent of LNG imports pass through Hormuz.

The impact is visible in the data as well. State LPG company figures show that gas sales fell to about 1.15 million tonnes in early March, marking a 17 percent year-on-year decline and over 26 percent drop from the previous month.

While the Modi government, which abandoned Iranian and Russian fuel supply chains under pressure from the US during the Trump regime, continues to assure that there is no shortage of LPG, the ground reality across the country tells a different story.

Migrant workers are once again the first to bear the brunt. A recent report by the Indian Express highlighted the plight of thousands forced to return home due to lack of LPG, rising prices, and hunger. The BBC Hindi has reported similar stories from Delhi, where migrant workers face a stark and uncertain future while the government continues its denial.

### **Why No One Believes the Assurances Anymore**

The lack of trust in the Modi government's assurances is visible nationwide. People have not forgotten the impact of demonetisation and the COVID lockdown. Just days before the nationwide lockdown, the government had claimed that COVID was not an emergency. Soon after, millions faced hunger and chaos, and migrant workers were forced to walk thousands of kilometres to return home. Similarly, the 8 pm demonetisation announcement by PM Modi in 2016

turned into a nationwide crisis despite assurances that people would not suffer.

Unlike crude oil, where India maintains a dedicated Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), there is no equivalent strategic reserve for gas. The country relies only on storage terminals meant for day-to-day operational supply. These terminals hold around 1.9 million tonnes, which provides a buffer of barely 20 to 22 days of consumption. While the physical properties of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) make long-term storage more complex, this cannot be used as an excuse. The absence of any serious move towards building strategic gas reserves reflects a clear apathy of the government towards the basic energy needs of millions of people. Technologies ranging from salt caverns to refrigerated storage tanks exist, yet India has failed to invest in them at the required scale, despite widespread dependence on LPG for everyday survival. Even efforts to increase domestic production remain minimal and structurally limited. LPG is produced only as a by-product of crude oil refining in small quantities, or extracted from limited natural gas basins. These measures are grossly inadequate, and the crisis will only deepen if the war continues.

Diversification of supply is also weak and poorly planned. For example, imports from the United States (US), the world's largest producer, take 40 to 45 days to reach Indian ports, compared to less than a week from the Gulf, and are more expensive.

### **From Fuel Crisis to Food Crisis**

With no end in sight to the Trump-Netanyahu war on Iran, the disruption of energy supplies is no longer confined to kitchens and transport. It is now seeping

into one of the most critical sectors, agriculture, with serious implications for India's food security.

India's most widely used fertiliser, urea, is heavily dependent on imported gas, that is Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Nearly 85 percent of the natural gas used in fertiliser production is imported, and the sector itself consumes a substantial share of the country's total gas imports, making it highly vulnerable to supply disruptions. Amid the gas crisis, supplies to fertiliser plants have been cut to around 70 percent of their requirement, forcing several units to scale down operations or shut temporarily. The import of fertilisers, including urea, around 25 to 30 percent imported, and Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), around 50 to 60 percent imported, from regions affected by the war is also witnessing severe disruption and rising prices.

This crisis is set to intensify in the coming weeks as the Kharif sowing season begins, sharply increasing demand for fertilisers. Any shortage will put immense pressure on the agricultural sector and inevitably push up food prices.

### **A Foreign Policy Adrift**

Despite this, the Modi government and the Godi media (lapdog media) continue to push propaganda to downplay the situation. The arrival of a few LPG tankers is projected as a major achievement, even though it is insignificant compared to national demand – with a single tanker catering to less than two days of total consumption. Similarly, ships passing through Hormuz are portrayed as foreign policy success, when in reality this access granted is rooted in India's long-standing foreign policy of non-alignment, which has now been abandoned by Modi government.

Reports indicate that Iran has raised the issue of three of its "US sanctioned" tankers seized by India under Trump's pressure and has demanded their release to ensure secure access through Hormuz. This exposes the extent to which India's sovereignty in decision-making has been compromised under external pressure. Shockingly, the government even had to wait for US approval to purchase already loaded Russian oil after the outbreak of war.

While the current crisis stems from US-Israeli aggression, the Modi government's alignment with these imperialist interests has deepened India's vulnerability. The abandonment of fuel supply arrangements from Russia, along with the Modi government's exit from its partnership in Iran's Chabahar port, has further eroded the country's strategic position. The government's refusal to condemn the war on Iran, despite Iran being a BRICS member and India holding its current chairmanship, its failure to call out the aggressors, and its continued silence on the genocide in Gaza have further eroded India's standing among Global South countries.

With a directionless and compromised foreign policy, the Modi government, has not only distanced India from its neighbours but has also decimated the country's strategic bargaining power, pushing the country into deep uncertainty and towards the brink of a larger crisis. ■

## INTERVIEW | This is a War of Hegemony by US and Israel for Control Over Arab World

In this first part of an interview series on developments in West Asia, **Liberation** spoke to **Reem Hazzan**, Head of the International Relations Committee and a Politburo member of the Communist Party of Israel. A political activist and interpreter, she was raised in the CPI youth and student organisations and is a former director of Al-Itthad newspaper. The discussion focused on the US-Israeli war on Iran, the attempt to impose a colonial world order, and the domestic movement in Israel against the occupation of Palestine and the ongoing war.

**LIBERATION:** Israel and the United States have launched a military aggression against Iran, resulting in significant civilian casualties, including children. What do you think are the main objectives behind this war?

**REEM HAZZAN:** The objective of this war is not what they are saying. It is obvious that there are other goals that are not made explicit. The continuous violations by Israel and the United States of every international law that exists show that these are two countries with no respect, no boundaries, no limits. This is not only a war to topple the Iranian regime; it is a war of hegemony by Israel -- to complete the Abraham Accords so that all of West Asia is controlled by Israel, and in this way to eliminate the Palestinian right to self-determination, annex the West Bank, and maybe negotiate a Palestinian state.

The 1947 partition plan (which was itself unjust to the Palestinian people) proposed a two-state solution with defined borders. None of the UN resolutions have been respected by Israel since then. If a Palestinian state had been established alongside Israel, perhaps we would not be seeing these wars eighty years later. Palestinians would not have become refugees, nor suffered this genocide.

Of course, we do not support the Iranian regime, which has hunted, tortured, and killed communist comrades and the progressive left in Iran. But this war is about hegemony -- about oil, trade routes, and control over South-West Asia and the Mediterranean. The US has many bases that it has been nurturing for years. What is the purpose of these bases, if not to control Arab countries and deny them sovereignty? The US and Israel are either arrogant or believe the rest of the world is naive if they think they can do this under the pretext of regime change in Iran. But the world is beginning to question the real motivations behind this war.

Last June, in what they called the "12-day war," the stated goal was to destroy Iran's nuclear capability. Netanyahu then declared victory and claimed that Iran's nuclear capabilities had been destroyed. However, Iran's alleged nuclear threat continues to be invoked. There are also persistent claims that Israel itself has nuclear capabilities, but it does not admit this, as it is not interested in being part of any nuclear agreements limiting such weapons, in continuity to not abiding with international law.

The US and Israel assassinated the negotiating Iranian delegation they were meeting with the night before. Negotiations were progressing, and a consensus seemed possible -- but then what excuse would Israel have had for war? A similar incident occurred earlier with the assassination of a Hamas negotiating delegation in Qatar. Not that we support Hamas, but this is a blatant violation of international law. You do not act this way if you intend

to resolve conflicts. Israel does not want a resolution. Otherwise, how will it justify continued military aid and support for its wars?

**LIBERATION:** And how do you see this war in the broader context of imperialism in the Global South?

**REEM HAZZAN:** As we speak of hegemony in West and South-West Asia, the pattern is similar everywhere. Imperialism requires these bases, like Israel. The Israel and the US both clearly agree on control and hegemony. Over the past years, we have seen the weakening of the UN and international institutions, and how the lack of implementation mechanisms did not serve people under Israeli and American aggression.

Imperialism in the Global South is not only direct. Look at Congo, Sudan, and across Africa – as mechanisms to gain access to natural resources. The same applies to Latin America -- Venezuela and Cuba. This is about imperialism seeking global dominance while repressing resistance by people, by sovereign nations. You cannot understand the attack on Iran and the resulting oil shortage without understanding what happened in Venezuela. The US sought to secure oil supply -- others may face shortages, but not the United States. You cannot ignore the blockade of Cuba or the siege of Gaza for twenty years before October 7, 2023. These fundamental processes of imperialism -- the subjugation of peoples, the subjugation of nations -- are interconnected. They come from the same logic: control of natural resources, subjugation of peoples, and denial of self-determination -- of Palestinians, Iranians, Cubans, Venezuelans. For us, this is all connected. When we protest the war on Iran, we also carry the Cuban flag -- because it is the same system of aggression.



Anti-war and anti-occupation protest in Tel Aviv | Photo: CP Israel

This is one very big war. I remain optimistic, they will not succeed. This is a system consuming itself.

**LIBERATION:** The Netanyahu regime is simultaneously trying to erase the Palestinian question through continued settlement expansion, starvation, and military assaults on the people of Gaza. How do you understand the war with Iran in the context of settler-colonialism and imperialism in Palestine?

**REEM HAZZAN:** Since this war began, more than ten people in the West Bank have been killed by settlers. Since October 7, 2023, settler attacks in the occupied Palestinian territories -- especially the West Bank -- have escalated unprecedentedly. The displacement of Bedouin communities from the Jordan Valley has become a major challenge, even for the Israeli solidarity groups trying to defend them. This is becoming a major tragedy -- effectively, the ethnic cleansing of the West Bank. This has intensified since the war with Iran began. In Tammun, a week ago, an entire family was killed by the occupation army; only two brothers survived. Yet

no one is held accountable. As with other Israeli actions, neither the settlers nor the army face consequences. No one has been held accountable for the genocide in Gaza. Ministers who incited genocide remain unpunished. This is the atmosphere we are living in right now. That incitement, hatred, and violence are very much legal here if you are a Jewish citizen. You can openly incite against Palestinians, including citizens and elected representatives like our parliamentarians and local authority members and mayors. During the war on Gaza, before the ceasefire, the protests of the Israeli public were mainly about returning the hostages, which, of course, is important. But on the other hand, the public opinion in Israel is brainwashed, and it took a long time for people in Israel to realize what we were speaking about and to start demanding an end to the genocide and war in Gaza.

In the past three weeks, demonstrations against the war on Iran have grown -- from fifty people initially, to hundreds now. Elections are approaching, and there is hope of defeating Netanyahu. However, the

alternatives are not fundamentally different. They seek to replace him, not the policies of war, occupation, and settlement and neoliberalism. This is our central challenge: how to shift political discourse and public opinion to recognize that democracy cannot coexist with occupation, settlement and fascism. We are working towards broadening the mobilization. March 28 marks four weeks of this war. We must widen the anti-war front in Israel and the world.

**LIBERATION:** What is the state of the anti-war and broader anti-occupation struggle in Israel?

**REEM HAZZAN:** Public opinion in Israel does not want to face reality. Netanyahu took power in December 2022, and protests started immediately, especially against the proposed judicial overhaul. From then until now, many of these measures have been implemented, weakening the separation of powers and giving more control over the judiciary to politicians. From January to October 2023, the communist party and Hadash began to influence public discourse, raising

slogans against occupation and apartheid, and demanding equality for all. Apartheid -- as a Palestinian citizen of Israel, I have fewer rights and a lower status than my Jewish neighbors or colleagues. However, after October 7, there was a sharp backlash. Hundreds were arrested; people faced persecution at workplaces and universities. Suddenly, everything changed. Even before this war, we were protesting settler violence and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. But the war with Iran has overshadowed everything. Settler violence, or "Jewish terrorism" as it is officially called, continues unchecked. These are militias. They are criminal people. Administrative detention still applies to Palestinians, but it effectively ended for Jews since October 7. With the army busy in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran, settlers act with more impunity. The occupation army does nothing in the West Bank in opposition to this ethnic cleansing. When they don't kill the Palestinians themselves, they protect the settlers who do. This is a deeply militarized society. Both in Israel and in the

settlements. The normalization of violence makes anti-war activism very difficult.

**LIBERATION:** Finally, what is your message to progressive movements, particularly within Israel and internationally, in building anti-war, anti-occupation, and anti-imperialist solidarity?

**REEM HAZZAN:** I think this is a very important question and a struggle for all of us. Whether in India, Israel, Germany, or the United States, similar processes are at work. We need to see the big picture as communists, and we are good at connecting the dots. But if we do not do the work we are required to do in our own countries, this will remain at the level of slogans. We need to broaden our fronts- anti-war, anti-fascist, anti-occupation- through coalitions and alliances. This is what we do as a Communist Party. Because if we do not change the government of Israel, we will not be able to end the occupation. We will not be able to do our part for the Palestinian people, or even for the Israeli people. This is true for all countries. ■

### Government Claims on LPG Cylinder Availability Unrealistic

On March 12, CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad joined INDIA bloc protests at Parliament against the government's failure to ensure the availability of LPG and fuels for common people amid escalating US-Israeli aggression against Iran and the uncertainty at the Strait of Hormuz. The MPs said that while the government continues to claim that there is no shortage of LPG, the ground reality tells a different story. Across the country, small restaurants and street vendors are on the verge of shutting down due to lack of LPG availability, while reports of hoarding are widespread.

The silence of the Modi government on the rising fuel prices and the non-availability of LPG cylinders, shows a complete abdication of responsibility by the government.

Meanwhile, in Uttar Pradesh, the CPI(ML) State

Committee criticised state government's claims on LPG cylinder availability terming it unrealistic, pointing to a widening gap between official statements and the situation on the ground.

UP State Committee said that while ministers and officials continue to deny any shortage and label reports of scarcity as rumours, consumers are facing long waiting periods and queues at gas agencies. It added that disruption in supply has forced several small food establishments to shut operations.

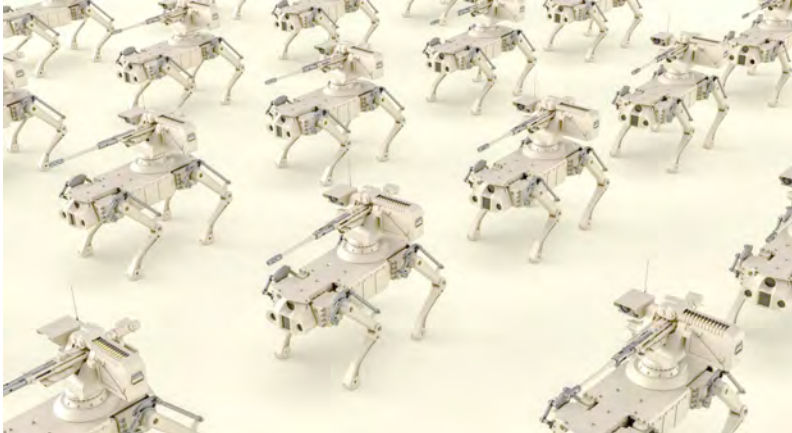
The CPIML statement drew parallels with the Demonetisation, stating that similar scenes of hardship are being witnessed, with people standing in prolonged queues for essential commodities.

Referring to a recent incident in Farrukhabad district's Lal Sarai area, CPI(ML) said a 75-year-old man died after falling ill while waiting in line at a gas agency warehouse to collect a cylinder, raising concerns over the human cost of the shortage. ■

# IndiaAI Mission: Under Multinationals' Strategic Control

*Who'll Bear Ecological and Public Health Costs*

▲ DR. NUZRATH JAHAN



In February 2026, the Government of India convened the India AI (Artificial Intelligence) Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, bringing together government officials, tech corporations, and researchers to position India within global debates on AI. Organized under the IndiaAI Mission, the global summit promoted AI as a driver of development, public services, and technological leadership under the themes of “People, Planet, and Progress.”<sup>1</sup>

This push for AI unfolds in a geopolitical reconfiguration marked by US–Israel’s genocide in Palestine and Iran, imperialist attacks across the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa, and intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, all of which creates ripple effects across global trade and energy markets. Within this landscape in a rapidly collapsing planet,

AI is becoming a strategic technology shaping military capacity, economic competition, and technological sovereignty. Here, science develops within the material conditions and relations of production of a given historical period and in turn reproduces those conditions. To understand the emerging AI order—and what it means for India—we must therefore trace the political economy and history of AI and computer science.

At the February 2026 AI Impact Summit in New Delhi, CEOs from companies like OpenAI and Anthropic stood alongside Modi and other state leaders, holding hands, literally. The image was telling: a coordinated alignment between states and tech corporations—a kind of emerging techno-imperial bloc. Today, companies like Anthropic market systems such as Claude as “ethical AI,” presenting AI as a careful, human-aligned technology

emerging from responsible innovation. At the same time, mainstream narratives suggest that the military is now reaching into Silicon Valley to adapt civilian technologies for warfare. The actual history runs exactly in the opposite direction. Many of the foundational technologies behind the digital economy—including networked computing, the internet, and early AI research—developed through military programs and public research funding long before they became the basis of commercial tech platforms. DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), an independent research and development agency within the U.S. Department of War (DoW), itself says its AI work goes back to the 1960s and credits its R&D with early AI successes, while the Pentagon’s contemporary AI contracting has expanded sharply since Project Maven of 2017, an AI drone surveillance program. In other words, AI and computer science were never simply civilian<sup>2</sup> fields later pulled into war; military research was foundational to the field, and today’s dual-use pipelines are merely an extension of that history.

***But, this is not even the beginning.***

To understand why computing and AI took this form, we must go further back—first to the social history of algorithms, and then to nineteenth-century industrial capitalism. People have long used counting, record-keeping, and coordination systems to organize labor and manage resources.

[1] “India AI Impact Summit 2026,” India AI Impact Summit 2026, accessed March 19, 2026, <https://ai-impact-summit.vercel.app>

[2] AI Next Campaign | DARPA,” accessed March 19, 2026, <https://www.darpa.mil/research/programs/ai-next-campaign>.

Thus, algorithms have always been social tools for restructuring work, knowledge, and authority. What changes under industrial capitalism is that these tools are reorganized at scale to serve empire's need for colonial control. Charles Babbage was working in industrial England where steam power was reorganizing production and the British Empire depended on navigation, trade, and colonial expansion. His calculating machine emerged from these conditions: it was designed to produce the mathematical tables required for maritime commerce and built using the same mechanical systems (steam power) and workshop labor that powered the factory. Science here does not stand apart from society. It arises from existing material conditions and, in turn, reproduces and stabilizes them. Computation, thereby, emerges within this process, carrying the logics of industrial production—precision, standardization, control, and scalability—embedded in it historically and materially.<sup>3</sup>

Marx saw this clearly. Along with physical labor, machines replaced memory, judgment, and decision-making. The collective intelligence produced through cooperation—what Marx called the general intellect—was increasingly captured as “machine intelligence.” The question, then, is who controls the knowledge we collectively produce, and whether it will serve profit and domination or social need and emancipation.<sup>4</sup>

That is why the question of AI is as political as it is technical. The

current AI moment sits inside a wider geopolitical reordering driven by war, mineral extraction, energy chokepoints, and infrastructure struggles. The material base of AI begins with mining: cobalt, lithium, rare earth elements, and other critical minerals—much of it extracted from Africa and Latin America—form the backbone of semiconductors, batteries, and data center hardware. Yet, as with earlier extractive regimes, regions that supply these materials capture little of the value, due to ecological destruction, labor exploitation, and conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Since late February, the U.S-Israel imperial attacks have disrupted the Strait of Hormuz, damaged oil and gas infrastructure in the Gulf countries, and plundered Venezuelan oil effectively destabilizing the regions central to global energy supply.<sup>6</sup> Data centers require vast and continuous electricity, and disruptions in oil and gas flows reverberate across global markets, influencing where AI infrastructure can be built and sustained. The construction of AI infrastructure depends on stable energy certainly, but also on predictable returns, and secure political conditions. The Gulf region reflects this contradiction sharply. Oil wealth is being converted into AI infrastructure through investments in data centers and cloud systems, while the region remains ecologically constrained (relying on energy-intensive desalination and experimental cooling systems) and mired in military conflict and dependent security arrangements.<sup>7</sup> Conveniently, US

tech firms are expanding into India, alongside deepening India-Israel defense ties, incorporating India into a broader technological and military architecture<sup>8</sup>.

For India, the alleged tech sovereignty may instead only be a new form of dependency, where infrastructure and labor are local, but strategic control and direction remain external. The ecological and health costs, however, are borne locally in one of the world's most densely populated regions.

What emerges from this look at past and present, is a question of direction for humanity and the planet's future. Two propositions follow. First, from a labor perspective: organizing must begin from reclaiming our collective knowledge, asserting control over how it is produced, used, and distributed. Second, from a political economy perspective: AI infrastructure follows the alignment of energy, finance capital, and geopolitical power. Taken together, these point beyond narrow demands for regulation or “ethical AI”, call for a broader civilizational shift—one that reorients science and technology away from profit, militarization, and endless extraction, and toward collective planning, ecological balance, and sustainable human development. The task ahead is not simply to govern AI, but to transform the conditions under which knowledge is produced and reproduced. ■

*(The author is a PhD candidate in Indiana University-Bloomington, USA)*

[3] Matteo Pasquinelli, *The Eye of the Master: A Social History of Artificial Intelligence* (Verso Books, 2023)

[4] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 383–423; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin/New Left Review, 1976), 492–507.

[5] “Critical Minerals, Critical Moment: Africa's Role in the AI Revolution,” ODI: Think Change, February 10, 2025.

[6] “Strait of Hormuz: As Iran Blocks Key Oil Shipping Route, Can Naval Escorts Help?” - Bloomberg,

[7] “Silicon Valley Giants Invest Billions in Gulf AI Infrastructure,” Jordan Daily.

[8] “Israel and India Expand Defense Ties with \$10 Billion Deal | The Jerusalem Post,” The Jerusalem Post |, “How India Replaced Europe as Israel's Reliable Arms Supplier,” Palestine Chronicle, December 28, 2025.

## Take Down Orders: Digital Censorship Under the Modi Regime

In recent weeks, there has been an alarming surge in social media takedowns across India, with users reporting that posts, accounts, and even entire pages critical or satirical of the Modi government, the BJP, or their policies are being withheld without explanation. Across platforms such as X, Facebook, and Instagram, users are receiving generic notices stating that their content has been “withheld in India” under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, often without any clear reasons or transparency. There is no explanation of what law was violated, no disclosure of the specific order, and no meaningful avenue for appeal.

Several independent media outlets including The Wire, The Caravan, and Deshabhimani have reported that their articles and videos have been withheld in India following takedown orders issued by the Modi regime. In another instance, a Facebook post by former JNUSU President and CPI(ML) leader N. Sai Balaji, highlighting Delhi Police vandalising a portrait of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, was taken down. Several posts by opposition parties and leaders received take down orders.

According to a report by The Hindu, the most recent takedown data from Meta shows that Facebook and Instagram removed nearly three times more content in response to government orders in January–June 2025 compared to the same period in 2023. A recurring pattern has also been noted: content critical of the Prime Minister and the ruling establishment appears to be

disproportionately targeted.

The intensity of takedowns increased during the movement in support of UGC equity regulations in February, coinciding with visible state repression of protests in Delhi University, JNU, and other campuses. The simultaneity of offline repression and online content restriction points to an increasingly coordinated ecosystem of control by Modi regime over both physical and digital spaces of dissent.

These developments stand in direct contradiction to the safeguards laid down by the Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*, which clearly mandated that blocking orders must be reasoned, written, and open to challenge. Yet in practice, secrecy has become the norm, and procedural safeguards have been hollowed out into formalities without substance.

Amid this growing wave of censorship, the Modi government is moving to further tighten its control over digital speech. It is reportedly planning to expand takedown powers beyond the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to multiple ministries and government agencies. This would multiply the centres of censorship, making the system even more opaque and unaccountable.

At the same time, amendments introduced in February 2026 under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 have drastically reduced compliance timelines. Intermediaries are now required

to act on certain government takedown directions within three hours, down from the earlier 36-hour window. While these changes are presented as measures to tackle issues such as deepfakes and harmful content, in practice they are being deployed against voices that are critical of the ruling dispensation. The compressed timelines leave no room for scrutiny, effectively forcing platforms into immediate compliance under threat of legal consequences.

This trigger-happy use of takedown powers stands in stark contrast to the unchecked spread of bigoted and communal content from the Sangh-BJP ecosystem. Hate-filled narratives, including those amplified by ruling party leaders, escape any action. In one instance, an AI-generated video depicting Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma shooting at a skull-cap-wearing individual circulated widely from his official handle, openly threatening Muslims. Despite complaints, no action was taken by authorities, and the post was removed only after public outrage forced a response.

The exponential rise in takedowns reflects a broader pattern, part of an attempt by the fascist and US-compromised Modi regime to silence and suppress democratic voices, including journalists, students, activists, and political opponents. What is unfolding is the steady construction of a censorship infrastructure designed to shape public discourse by controlling what can be seen, said, and shared. This creates a chilling effect on the fundamental right to free speech and expression, with an expanding regime of surveillance and digital policing that throttles independent press and dissenting voices, which is essential for the survival of any democracy. ■

# Right to Menstrual Leave: Observations of the Supreme Court is Anti-Gender Justice

▲ SHILPA PRASAD

**T**he Supreme Court of India, being a constitutional court, is strictly bound by the Constitution of India. However, recent oral statements by the Chief Justice of India in relation to menstrual leave raise the question whether the Constitution has been kept at the forefront.

On 13th March 2026, the Supreme Court disposed-off a writ petition seeking paid menstrual leave for women in all establishments. During the hearing, the bench comprising of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi made certain deeply concerning oral observations. The Chief Justice of India Surya Kant orally observed that, "These petitions are deeply rooted, designed PILs. You are not a bona fide petitioner. This is basically only to create a type of impression in young women that you still have some natural issues and you are not at par with male persons and you cannot work like them during a particular time." The Chief Justice also stated, "This can be harmful to their growth... You do not know the kind of mindset created at the workplace" Justice Joymalya Bagchi stated, "Affirmative action in respect of females is constitutionally recognised. But look at the practical reality in the job market. The more unattractive the human resource, the less is the possibility of assumption in the market. Look at from the business model. Will any employer be happy with the competing claims

of other genders?"

In addition, the Court also stated that these observations will be taken into consideration by other Courts hearing similar petitions across the country, for the purpose of formulating a "model policy" that maybe considered by all stakeholders. In essence, the Court has orally remarked that those courts which are considering giving menstrual leave rights to women in their states will have to consider the opinion of this higher court, essentially asking High Courts to toe the line. The observations had been made in an earlier order in another case filed by the same Petitioner, Shailendra Mani Tripathi v. Union of India (W.P.(C) Nos. 172/2023. In that case the Supreme Court left it to the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development to take an appropriate decision.

It is noteworthy that in either case, the Supreme Court failed to issue any specific directions to the Union Government. Instead, the Court deferred the decision entirely to the executive, and stated that the Union "may" take a decision. The Court also failed to fix any timeline for the decision to be taken. Detailed reasons have not been given for the refusal to consider the request for a menstrual leave policy for women.

This is a marked departure from Courts actively enforcing rights. In the seminal case of

Vishaka and Ors. V. State of Rajasthan (AIR 1997 SC 3011), the Court had stepped in bridge the absence of an enacted law against sexual harassment. The Court issued what will come to be known as the Vishaka Guidelines on sexual harassment, leading to the subsequent enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Now, this active approach of enforcing rights has been abandoned.

These statements are deeply disturbing made by the judges. The Supreme Court is meant to be the guardian of fundamental rights. Justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done as well. The statements made by the Supreme Court betray a certain position of the Judges on the issue of paid menstrual leave, and affects not only the decision that may be made by the Union Government on the issue, but also on other States that may be making decisions on the issue.

The statements are also deeply patriarchal in nature, placing the burden on women to endure pain while working instead of companies enforcing paid menstrual leaves. The statements place a premium on the reality of gender discriminatory practices by the companies, instead of issuing directions to stop these practices. Similar arguments had also been made prior to the enactment of laws granting maternity leave, deferring to the needs of companies instead of the needs of women.

The Supreme Court fails to consider that menstrual health is a core aspect of reproductive health, as has been held by the Supreme Court in other cases. Menstrual health is an aspect of the right to live with dignity as well, and is tied into the right to bodily

autonomy. The Court must not look at women as a mere “human resource”, but persons with inherent rights such as dignity that cannot be sacrificed at the whims and fancies of companies or the market.

This approach of the Supreme Court lacks in understanding of the actual experiences of women. A huge population of women suffer from menstrual pain, ranging from severe to chronic, depending on stress, physical health, nutrition, and access to medical help. These factors are exacerbated in marginalized communities especially for Dalit and Adivasi women.

The Supreme Court must also ensure that there is a progressive realization of rights for women, and we do not regress. Oral statements made by judges must also be bound by the Constitution, on which they have taken their oath. ■

## Panipat, Surat, Guwahati and Beyond: Workers’ Revolt Against Modern-Day Slavery

▲ ABHISHEK

**B**y the afternoon of 23 February, images and videos of thousands of workers wearing yellow helmets and protesting outside the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) refinery at Panipat began circulating widely. The sheer scale and determination of the gathering stirred the conscience of all who saw it.

Meanwhile, sections of the mainstream media rushed to portray the workers’ protest as mere vandalism and stone-pelting. Yet the massive participation of workers spoke a truth far deeper than such distortions could conceal: the labouring bodies whose sweat sustains the refinery had reached the limit of what they could endure. Faced with relentless exploitation, they chose to rebel. And rebel they did.

Ground reports indicate that the immediate spark for the protest was an accident on 21 February, in which three workers were injured while working inside the refinery. Neither the IOCL management nor the concerned contractor cared to ensure proper medical care for the injured workers. This callous indifference ignited anger among workers who have long been subjected to intense exploitation and systematic violations of their legal rights.

The uprising at Panipat did not arise in isolation. It was preceded by protests by contractual workers at IOCL refineries in Guwahati and Barauni, and was followed by a powerful assertion of workers’ resistance by contractual workers at Larsen & Toubro’s Arcelor Mittal Nippon Steel India plant in Surat.

At the IOCL refinery in Guwahati, contractual workers have been organising themselves in large numbers, holding demonstrations and raising demands for basic workers’ rights: the enforcement of an eight-hour workday, wage increases, safe working conditions, occupational safety, and access to social security.

On 12 February, when workers across the

country observed the All-India General Strike, the Guwahati workers organised a successful strike, demonstrating their growing unity and determination.

Since 2 February, workers at the IOCL refinery in Barauni, Bihar, have been engaged in sustained protest around the same set of demands. The Barauni workers have been demanding enforcement of the eight-hour workday, social security provisions such as PF and ESI, and basic working conditions including industrial safety, resting sheds, clean drinking water, hygienic toilets, and proper sanitation facilities. They are also confronting the devastating consequences of contractualization and sub-contractualization, which have become structural mechanisms for bypassing and violating workers’ rights.

The management initially assured the workers, on 2 February, that their demands would be addressed. But the situation took a repressive turn when union leader Lal Bau Rai was arrested by the police and suspended by the management on 8 February. This act only strengthened the workers’ resolve. They continued their boycott of work until their leader was released.

If the workers of Panipat drew inspiration from their fellow workers in Guwahati and Barauni, their own uprising has now become a spark for a wider rebellion in Surat. In the weeks that followed, industrial units across the country erupted in mass resistance against modern-day slavery and the exploitative nexus of management and state power. The IOCL Bottling Plant in Salem, Tamil Nadu stood in solidarity with the Panipat workers.

By the first half of March, powerful waves of protest spread across the Adani Thermal Power Plant in Korba, Chhattisgarh, Vedanta Power Plant in Singhitari, Chhattisgarh, Buxar Thermal Power Plant in Bihar, Hindustan Zinc Limited in Chittorgarh,

Rajasthan, IOCL Vadodara in Gujarat, and Obra Thermal Power Plant in Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh.

The struggle continues to expand, engulfing sites of exploitation across the country. In recent days, fresh waves of resistance have emerged at Adani Power Plant in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh, NTPC Plant Shakti Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, UltraTech Cement Patratu, Jharkhand, UltraTech Cement Petnikota, Andhra Pradesh, Adani Power Plant Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, Tata Steel Plant Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, Tata Power Plant Mundra, Gujarat, and Jindal Steel and Power Plant Raigarh, Chhattisgarh.

The wave of workers' resistance unfolding today must also be understood alongside the accelerating crisis of industrial safety in India, enabled by the systematic dilution of labour laws and the weakening of industrial compliance and inspection regimes under the Modi government. Across factories, chemical zones, fireworks units, and industrial corridors, explosions, fires, and

toxic gas leaks have become disturbingly routine.

In recent months alone, a series of catastrophic incidents has exposed this structural collapse of safety enforcement. In Nagpur, a blast in an explosives unit claimed more than 20 lives. In Kakinada, a fireworks factory explosion killed nearly two dozen workers. In Rajasthan's Bhiwadi industrial belt, a chemical factory fire killed seven workers. Earlier, in January 2026, a massive explosion in an industrial unit in Badlapur, Maharashtra, shook the entire industrial belt, exposing once again the fragility of safety systems under intensified deregulation.

A stark illustration of this systemic collapse was witnessed in the Palghar industrial belt of Maharashtra on 2 March, where a major gas leak at a chemical unit in the Tarapur MIDC region exposed thousands of residents and workers to toxic fumes. The leakage of hazardous gases, including sulfur-based compounds, spread panic across nearby industrial and residential

zones, with people reporting severe eye irritation, breathing difficulties, and respiratory distress. The scale and intensity of the incident evoked grim memories of the Bhopal gas tragedy for many, yet both mainstream media attention and official response reflected a deeply negligent and muted attitude.

The intensifying tide of workers' resistance unfolding today reflects the mounting anger of the toiling masses against the brutal exploitative policies of corporate power and a modern regime of wage slavery. In the name of "Ease of Doing Business," the Modi government has advanced a system that openly privileges corporate profit and protection of corporate cronies, while systematically undermining and eroding the rights, safety, and very lives of workers. It is an order where labour is sacrificed to corporate accumulation, and where democratic and labour protections are steadily dismantled to serve the interests of capital. ■

## CPIML-AICCTU Teams Visit Panipat

A team from AICCTU, consisting of Comrades Abhishek and Vinod visited the protesting workers. Subsequently, on On March 08, 2026, another team consisting of Sudama Prasad (CPIML MP, Arrah), and comrades Prem Singh Gehlawat (CPIML, Haryana), Uma Raag (DTI), Akash Bhattacharya (AICCTU), Brijesh Gupta (AISA), and Aditya Krishna (AILAJ) met the workers and expressed their solidarity with their demands.

What the team found was not just a labour dispute in a narrow sense. It was a systematic, state-backed exploitation of migrant workers, conducted in one of South Asia's

largest integrated refineries. The Indian Oil Corporation Limited, a major public sector undertaking, operates 11 refineries across the country, including the one at Panipat. Yet even within such a public sector enterprise, the systematic violation of labour rights under the garb of contractualization has become the norm.

The upsurge at the Panipat refinery has starkly exposed how deeply the state apparatus is implicated in enabling the conditions of slavery for the workers. Within a PSU itself, thousands of contractual workers are forced to work without even the most basic protections guaranteed

under existing labour laws.

The overwhelming majority of workers in the refinery is contractual workers. Estimates suggest that around 30,000 contractual workers are engaged in the refinery and its expansion projects, compared to only about 1,000 permanent workers.

The refinery is currently undergoing expansion, and a large number of construction workers have been deployed. Several private contractors have been awarded tenders for this work. Larsen & Toubro alone employs a substantial section of these workers, while many other service providers



are also involved. Through this elaborate web of contractualization and sub-contractualization, the principal employer, IOCL, effectively insulates itself from accountability while workers' rights are systematically violated.

The team found that workers are routinely made to work 12-hour shifts instead of the legally mandated 8 hours, while being paid only standard 8-hour wages. This amounts to a direct theft of wages, with overtime legally due at double rates being systematically denied. Workers are made to work 28 days a month, with no weekly offs or holidays, including on gazetted holidays.

Basic facilities inside the plant are absent. There is no clean drinking water, no toilets, and no canteen. Outside the plant, conditions are equally harsh. Most workers, migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and other labour-supplying states, are housed in cramped 10×10 foot rooms, with four to five workers per room. Rent ranges between ₹3,000 and ₹5,000 per month, forcing workers to spend a significant share of their already low wages merely to secure basic shelter.

CISF personnel have turned the gate pass system into an additional mechanism of control and extraction. Police verification, renewals, and gate passes each involve informal costs borne by workers, extracted through

a nexus between contractors, subcontractors, and administrative machinery. No bonus is paid to workers, and in most cases there is no ESIC coverage, leaving them completely unprotected in case of accidents or emergencies.

The immediate flashpoint of the struggle was a major industrial accident around 21 February, which led to the death of two workers and severe injury to a third worker, whose leg had to be amputated. The response of the management was widely reported by workers as callous and indifferent.

Soon after, on 23 February, thousands of workers gathered in protest, displaying remarkable unity and resilience despite heavy repression. When workers boycotted work and assembled in large numbers, the management refused dialogue and instead deployed the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to suppress the protest.

Lathi charges, tear gas shelling, and even firing in the air were used in an attempt to intimidate and disperse the workers. Reports also indicate the use of mobile network jammers inside the refinery to prevent information about the protest from spreading. In a further display of state-corporate bias, FIRs were filed against approximately 2,500 unnamed workers, while no action has been taken against management

or contractors responsible for years of labour law violations and the fatal negligence that caused worker deaths and grievous injury.

Yet the workers refused to be cowed down. In the face of repression, they have remained steadfast, continuing their struggle with determination until their demands are met. The workers have placed forward a set of fundamental demands.

Key Demands of the Workers:

(1) Enforcement of the eight-hour workday: Workers are currently compelled to work 12 hours a day, and at times even 16 hours. Weekly holidays are routinely denied, and no overtime is paid for the extra hours of work.

(2) Timely payment of wages: Workers frequently go two to three months without receiving wages. They are demanding that wages be paid regularly, no later than the 7th of each month.

(3) Safe and dignified working conditions: The immediate trigger for the protest was the accident that injured three workers inside the refinery and the employer's refusal to ensure medical care. Workers are demanding proper industrial safety measures, along with resting facilities, canteens, clean drinking water, and hygienic toilets.

(4) Access to social security: Workers report that there is no transparency regarding employer contributions to their PF accounts, and do not have access to ESI benefits. They are demanding full enforcement of these statutory rights.

(5) End to repression: The workers are demanding the immediate release of arrested workers and the withdrawal of all FIRs filed against them. ■

*(With inputs from Abhishek and Aditya Krishna)*

# Prisoners of Conscience & State Persecution: Bihar's TADA Victims



TADA victims Comrades Churaman Bhagat and Ajit Sau outside Gaya Central Jail on March 19, along with former Arwal MLA Comrade Mahanand and Comrade Shah Shad, son of martyr Comrade Shah Chand, the first among the seven TADA victim comrades to die in custody.

**M**ore than three decades ago, in 1988, a small village in Arwal, Bihar- Bhadasi - became the site of a tragedy that would scar generations. What began as a peaceful assertion of rights by poor and marginalized villagers turned into a long and brutal saga of state repression.

Fourteen innocent people, peasants, workers, youth, and activists associated with CPI(ML), were trapped under the draconian TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act). In 2003, they were sentenced to life imprisonment in a case that bore all the marks of fabrication.

TADA itself had lapsed in 1995 after widespread protests against its misuse. Yet, in Bhadasi, its shadow lingered, destroying lives, silencing families, and turning decades into a slow, grinding punishment.

## People's Resistance in Arwal-Jehanabad and Police Repression

The soil of Arwal and Jehanabad has long been marked by both people's resistance and brutal repression. In 1986, police bullets rained down on a peaceful gathering in Arwal, killing 23 people in an incident widely remembered as independent India's own Jallianwala Bagh. It was only after massive statewide protests, culminating in a gherao of the Bihar Assembly, the government ordered an inquiry and transfer of CR Kaswan.

Many of those later accused in the Bhadasi case had been active in these protest movements and were known in the area for their involvement in local struggles around land, wages, and dignity. This made them particularly

vulnerable to being singled out by the police.

The immediate incident in Bhadasi in 1988 revolved around a dispute over a singhara (water chestnut) pond. For the villagers, this pond was not just a water body but a crucial source of livelihood. It was being cultivated collectively with the support of a cooperative, and there was a growing fear among the villagers that local landlords would forcibly take over the produce. On the day of the incident, villagers had gathered to resolve this dispute.

Despite this, a large police contingent led by the Officer-in-Charge of Arwal arrived in the village, on the pretext that 'extremists' had assembled. What followed was an unprovoked firing by the police. Three villagers were killed on the spot. The violence, however, did not end there. It extended into a systematic process of arrests, fabrication of evidence, and the construction of a case under TADA.

One of the most striking aspects of the Bhadasi case is that most of those eventually accused were not even present at the site of the incident. Only a few individuals, including four minors, were arrested during or immediately after the firing. Even these arrests were arbitrary, with people being picked up from the pond or from their homes. The remaining accused were named later in the FIR filed by a Sub-Inspector who had been part of the police contingent. Those who found their names in the FIR subsequently surrendered in court. No arms or incriminating materials were recovered from any of them, which further raises serious questions about the basis of the charges.

Despite these glaring inconsistencies, the case proceeded under TADA, a law that effectively reversed basic

principles of justice by making bail difficult and placing extraordinary powers in the hands of the police. By the time the Jehanabad TADA court delivered its judgment in 2003, sentencing all 14 to life imprisonment, the accused had already lost years of their lives in jail. The Supreme Court later upheld the conviction, closing off legal avenues and extending their incarceration indefinitely.

The human cost of this prolonged incarceration has been immense. Seven of the fourteen died in prison. Among those who survived, several had been minors at the time of the incident. In March 2026, the remaining comrades received release order after decades of incarceration. This marks the end of a long legal battle, but it also highlights the deep injustice inflicted through the misuse of TADA. Their struggle stands as a stark reminder of how draconian laws like TADA and today, UAPA have been used to criminalize the poor, suppress people's movements, and target political activists.

### **Profile of the Bhadasi Prisoners of Conscience are as follows:**

**Martyr Comrade Shah Chand:** He was 60 years old at the time of conviction and was made the main accused. Coming from an educated Muslim family in Bhadasi village, he entered public life inspired by communist ideas. He was elected Mukhiya of Bhadasi in 1978 and held several public positions thereafter. In 1982, he was a member of the Jehanabad–Arwal Peace Committee. In 1994, he became the first secretary of the Inquilabi Muslim Conference. In 2002, he was appointed to the Jehanabad–Arwal Wakf Board. Known locally as “Mukhiyaji,” he was widely respected for developmental work, including canal construction, literacy campaigns, and health

initiatives. He died in jail in 2014 after 12 years of incarceration.

**Martyr Comrade Laxman Sao:** About 65 years old at the time of conviction, he was a landless peasant who ran a small village shop. He was randomly picked up and jailed in the case. He passed away on 27 November 2025 after prolonged incarceration.

**Martyr Comrade Madho Chaudhary:** Around 40 years old, he worked as an agricultural labourer and was also engaged in traditional occupations such as growing singhara and tapping toddy. He died in jail in 2023 due to lack of proper medical attention.

**Martyr Comrade Madan Singh:** He was about 48 years old at the time of conviction. After studying up to Class 9, he joined the army in 1971 and rose to the rank of Subedar by 2001. He had come home on a short leave and was going to buy cement when he was arrested and implicated in the Bhadasi case. He died in jail.

**Martyr Comrade Mahgu Chaudhary:** 70 years old at the time of conviction, he was engaged in traditional occupations such as growing singhara and tapping toddy. He died after suffering from paralysis caused by a stroke during long incarceration.

**Martyr Comrade Sohrai Chaudhary:** 70 years old at the time of conviction, he worked as an agricultural labourer along with traditional occupations. He died in jail.

**Martyr Comrade Baleshwar Chaudhary:** 65 years old at the time of conviction, he was an agricultural labourer and engaged in traditional occupations. He died during incarceration.

**Comrade Tribhuvan Sharma:** 40 years old at the time of conviction, he became associated with IPF and CPI(ML) after completing his

schooling and was active from 1986. He was imprisoned for 17 months after the Bhadasi incident and later became a full-time activist. There are no other cases against him. He was released in 2019 after spending about 17 years in jail.

**Comrade Arvind Chaudhary:** about 30 years old at the time of conviction, he worked as an agricultural labourer and in traditional occupations. He was only 14 years old at the time of the incident. He is now set to be released after decades in jail.

**Comrade Churaman Bhagat:** 65 years old at the time of conviction, he is a small peasant engaged in agriculture and has been active in IPF and CPI(ML) since 1984 at the panchayat level. He was released on 19 March 2026 after decades in jail.

**Comrade Shyam Chaudhary:** 35 years old at the time of conviction, he is a landless peasant engaged in toddy tapping and also made clay idols for festivals. He was among those captured during the police action—dragged out while harvesting singhara. He is set to be released after decades of incarceration.

**Comrade Ajit Kumar (Ajit Sau):** About 29 years old at the time of conviction, he was an agricultural labourer. He was only 13 years old and a Class IX student at the time of the incident. He was picked up from his house and kept in Gaya jail with juvenile undertrials, yet tried as an adult under TADA. He was released on 19 March 2026.

**Dr. Jagdish Yadav:** 45 years old at the time of conviction, he became associated with IPF in 1981 as a medical student in Patna. He was a full-time activist from 1985 to 1995 and later a part-time CPI(ML) activist. He had also worked extensively in literacy campaigns. He has now been released after years in jail. ■

## Draconian Laws, Enforced Disappearances, and the Modi Regime's Escalating War on Dissent

**A**fter nearly six months of unconstitutional and vindictive incarceration, climate activist and Ladakh statehood campaigner Sonam Wangchuk was finally released on March 14. He had been arbitrarily arrested on September 26, 2025 under the draconian National Security Act following widespread protests in Ladakh demanding statehood, protests that were met with brutal state repression and loss of lives. In a rare climbdown, the Modi government revoked the NSA against him after facing mounting public outrage and legal scrutiny. Even during the Supreme Court hearing challenging his detention, serious questions were raised about the blatant misuse of the NSA to crush democratic movements.

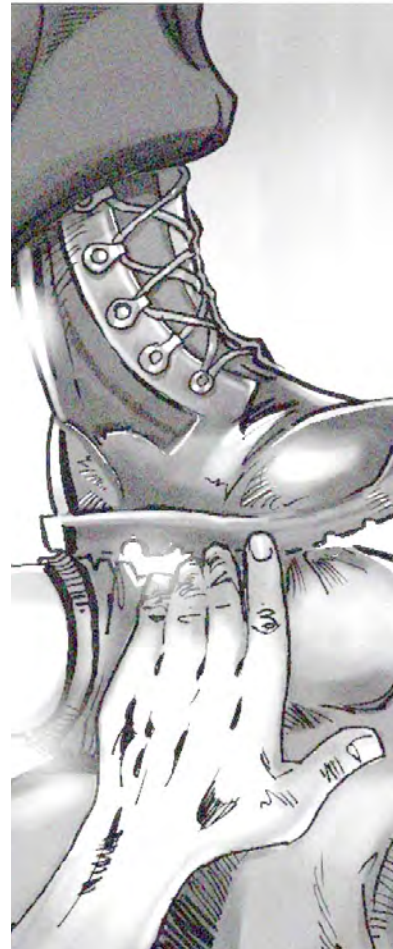
Around the same time, in Haryana, the state government was forced to retreat in another case. It refused to grant sanction for prosecution of Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, who had been arbitrarily arrested last year by Haryana Police for his academic and social media commentary on Operation Sindoor. He was charged with endangering the sovereignty and integrity of the country, a familiar and dangerous pattern where dissent is criminalised through sweeping and vague laws. His arrest marked yet another instance in 2025 where draconian legal provisions were deployed to silence critical voices.

But any sense of relief was short

lived. Even as these cases exposed the regime's authoritarianism, a far more chilling episode came to light in Delhi, revealing the depths of repression. Only after a habeas corpus petition was filed in the Delhi High Court did details emerge of enforced disappearances carried out between March 12 and 14. Around ten left wing students and activists, including those associated with the BSCEM group, were picked up by plainclothes personnel believed to be from the Special Cell and taken to undisclosed locations. No arrests were recorded. No legal procedures were followed. It was a brazen abduction operation carried out in the capital.

As per reports, for several days these students and activists were subjected to inhuman torture, including sexualised violence. "They forced me to strip naked, forced me to open my legs and hit me with a belt on my private part," said Dalit activist Shiv Kumar, who was recently released by the Delhi Special Cell, speaking to Maktoob Media. Another activist, Rudra, told the same outlet that an officer came into the interrogation room and forced him to go under the table naked. "He was eating his food and kept kicking me on my private parts. I was forced to kiss his slippers as well."

In the habeas corpus case, the Delhi High Court directed the Delhi Police to preserve CCTV footage of the Special Cell premises in connection with



the detention of several student activists in the national capital. The abductions were carried out in the open without any documentation or identification, by individuals claiming to be police personnel. Neither has the Delhi Police provided a copy of the FIR in the case, claiming its "sensitive" nature, an excuse repeatedly used in cases of repression against students and activists.

In a statement issued on March 17, AISA condemned the fascist abduction and torture of students and Left activists by the Delhi Police, stating that the police are functioning as "thugs in uniform" to suppress democratic voices through violent intimidation. ■

**What threatens fascism the most is the idea of a free-thinking human being and an educational space that nurtures a critical outlook.** From JNU to Punjab University to Lucknow and across campuses, we are witnessing a renewed wave of repression orchestrated by the Sangh-BJP ecosystem in collusion with the state apparatus.

Across campuses, students are rising for equity, dignity, campus democracy, and affordable education. In response, the BJP-ABVP machinery is working to turn universities into battlegrounds of hate, pushing communal, Manuvadi, and patriarchal politics while crushing every voice of dissent.

In JNU, students were thrown into jail for demanding action against casteist discrimination and a casteist Vice Chancellor. In Punjab, students resisting the poison of RSS hatred were detained. In Bangalore, those who spoke out against militarised violence and sexual assault faced organised right-wing attacks. In Lucknow, even the basic right of Muslim students to offer namaz became a target, with solidarity actions met by state repression.

**In the first part of a series on campuses as spaces of critical education and struggle, Comrade Smriti examines JNU, the New Education Policy, and the broader ideological assault that seeks to hollow out education, strip it of its critical edge, and reduce it to an instrument of control under fascism. Comrade Nitish, former JNUSU President who was arrested and jailed in Tihar, reflects on prisons as extensions of this system, where casteist and communal hierarchies structure everyday violence.**

## How Universities Are Being Remade: Lessons from JNU

▲ SMRITI CHOUDHARY

**F**ourteen JNU students were taken to Tihar jail on the morning of 27th February. The series of incidents that has led us to this juncture is the visible consolidation of a transformation that is steadily reshaping the very idea of the university in India.

The developments in JNU, ranging from curricular changes and privatisation, to the criminalisation of protest are all elements of the political project of RSS that seeks to dismantle the very possibility of an egalitarian education.

At the centre of this transformation lies the vision articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP). The NEP in practice enables an unprecedented centralisation of authority over academic structures, curricula, and institutional priorities. It also opens the door to a model of the university that is less concerned with fostering critical thought and more invested in producing compliant, depoliticised subjects.

The introduction of "Indian Knowledge Systems" (IKS) courses and the outsourcing of Value Added Courses (VACs) to the Siddhanta Foundation, a private entity, must be understood within this broader policy shift. Far from being supplementary, these courses reshape what counts as legitimate knowledge. It elevates a narrow, Brahmanical framework while marginalising scientific temperament and anti-caste traditions in academia.

The implementation also raises serious concerns: students are forced into poorly designed, pre-recorded online courses by an unaccountable private entity. These courses are riddled with technical glitches, yet these courses are enforced with minimal choice for students.

By outsourcing teaching to for-profit entities, the university has turned knowledge into a commodity. Public funds are channelled into private hands, while the JNU admin evades any responsibility for academic standards.

If the restructuring of the curriculum represents one axis of this transformation, the expansion of surveillance represents another. JNU Admin recently attempted to introduce facial recognition and smart-card entry systems in the university library.

The contrast between the administration's willingness to invest in surveillance and its persistent claims of financial constraints in other areas is particularly striking. Students have long faced inadequate hostel facilities, crumbling infrastructure, and a severe shortage of academic resources like books and journal subscriptions.

Every time the students place basic demands in front of the administration, we are told that they have no funds. Yet, when it comes to installing high-tech monitoring systems, these constraints seem to vanish. This selective allocation of resources exposes their priorities: the disciplining of bodies takes precedence over the nurturing of minds.

Moreover, the imposition of these measures without consultation reflects an erosion of democratic practices within the university. Decisions that fundamentally alter the nature of campus life are taken unilaterally, without meaningful engagement with students, faculty, or staff. The language of “security” and “efficiency” is deployed to justify these moves, masking the gradual consolidation of authoritarian governance.

Parallel to these developments is the systematic weakening of institutional safeguards for marginalised communities. The rollback of UGC Equity rules marks a significant retreat from the commitment to social justice that has historically underpinned public higher education in India. The stay on UGC Equity rules has left students from marginalised communities increasingly exposed to discrimination.

Within JNU itself, there are numerous practices that disproportionately impact Dalit, Adivasi, and other marginalised students. There is evidence of systemic discrimination in PhD admissions, including manipulated cut-offs, biased viva evaluations, a decline in SC/ST student enrolment, and discriminatory practices in hostel allotment. There is also a targeted academic victimisation of Dalit and women students, and a lack of institutional support.

The role of the current Vice-Chancellor must be understood in this context. Her publicly reported anti-Dalit and anti-Black remarks are proof that she has fostered an institutional climate in which such attitudes are normalised and, at times, legitimised. The promotion of Brahmanical ideals within the curriculum, the tolerance of exclusionary practices, and the absence of meaningful accountability mechanisms all

point to a leadership that is aligned with, rather than resistant to, the broader ideological shift underway.

Unsurprisingly, these developments have provoked sustained resistance from the student community. JNU has a long history of democratic engagement, where students actively participate in shaping the intellectual and political life of the campus. In response to the current crisis, students went on strike and conducted a referendum in which an overwhelming majority called for the removal of the Vice-Chancellor.

Yet, the administration’s response has been marked by an escalating pattern of repression. Students have been subjected to punitive fines and legal action for their involvement in protests. Five students, including JNUSU President Aditi and ex-president Nitish were rusticated and declared out of bounds. Fourteen JNU students were arrested in Tihar jail for raising their voices for a future with equitable higher education in India. Protest is, therefore, no longer treated as a legitimate form of political expression, but as a threat to be neutralised.

The trajectory that JNU is on, from ideological imposition as under the guise of NEP, erosion of equity, to the criminalisation of dissent, all represent one coherent political project. Each element reinforces the others, creating a self-sustaining system of control. The curriculum shapes the ideological framework, surveillance enforces compliance, weakened safeguards enable exclusion, and repression silences opposition. What emerges is a university that is no longer a site of intellectual freedom, but an apparatus of governance.

A university, at its core, is not merely a collection of buildings, courses, and administrative



structures. It is a space where ideas are contested, where knowledge is produced through dialogue and disagreement, and where individuals are empowered to question existing hierarchies. However, when these functions are compromised, the institution loses its essence.

The struggle unfolding in JNU, therefore, is not just about a particular set of policies or the tenure of a single administrator. It is about defending the very idea of the university as a democratic and egalitarian space. It is about resisting the reduction of education to a tool of ideological reproduction and administrative discipline. And it is about asserting that knowledge, in its truest sense, cannot flourish under conditions of fear, surveillance, and exclusion.

If universities are to remain spaces of freedom and possibility, this transformation must be confronted—not only within JNU, but across the country. The stakes are nothing less than the future of higher education itself. ■

# Tihar Diaries: Caste, Custody and the Crushing of Dissent

▲ NITISH

**I**t was 20th August 2025 when I started receiving phone calls and messages about the installation of some machine at the gate of B.R. Ambedkar Central Library, JNU. I was the President of the JNU Students' Union at that time. I reached the gate and asked the workers to stop the work until we could speak to the Acting Librarian. She did not meet us that day. After a protest, the work was stopped for the day.

Immediately, we sent some queries to the Acting Librarian regarding the Facial Recognition Technology System; at that time we did not even know that it was FRT. We asked about the decision-making procedure, the minutes of the AC/EC meetings, the cost of the machine, and the rationale behind it. Instead of having a dialogue, she chose to deploy Delhi Police on the campus and forcefully install the system.

After a protest and the announcement of an indefinite sit-in, the JNU administration issued a notice under the signature of the Registrar stating that they would form a committee which would talk and deliberate with all stakeholders, and that the status quo regarding the installation would be maintained. However, the JNU administration betrayed this assurance and, without even forming a committee, again tried to install it during the JNUSU elections, when the Model Code of Conduct was applicable.

When the new union came with Aditi as its President, they again protested. The FRT was uninstalled by the union and the administration rusticated all four office bearers,

including me. But this rustication came a day before the union had announced a march for the Rohith Act on 3rd February.

The campus rises from 3rd February against the rustication, the CPO Manual, and for the Rohith Act. Multiple strikes, dharna, marches, juloos happened but the Admin did not say anything. However, Madam VC Shantishree D. Pandit said shamelessly in a podcast that Dalits are drugged with permanent victimhood just like Blacks. This was intolerable. She disrespected hundreds of years of struggle and movements for our dignity.

When she failed to apologise and resign even after multiple protests and marches on campus, JNUSU announced the Long March to the Ministry of Education for her resignation and the enactment of UGC Regulations along with the Rohith Act. However, a peaceful march that started from Sabarmati T-Point was met with violence. The Delhi Police locked the university's North Gate and carried out heavy barricading. A large police force, including the RAF, tear gas units, rifles, and a riot control vehicle, was deployed. We came to know through one police officer that forces from 12 police stations had been deployed that day.

Why such heavy force? The simple answer is that we were demanding accountability from the Vice-Chancellor of a university known worldwide for its public education model. Delhi Police has beaten many of our friends. The Police dragged President Aditi, Joint Secretary Danish, Vice President Gopika and dozens of students

from the University gate and sent to Kapasera. One Police man, seen everywhere in video, came closely to a person who was holding the portrait of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, and snatched the portrait and break it. The Government of India later asked all social media handles to struck down this video from everywhere.

I came out of the gate to ensure medical assistance for one of the detainees, who was a PwD student, but the Delhi Police also detained me and took me to Jafarpur Kalan Police Station. They shifted us at midnight to Kapasera Police Station, and after bureaucratic torture throughout the night, they told us in the morning that they would arrest 14 students and produce us before the magistrate.

It was a major crackdown on the nationwide movement that erupted after the stay on the UGC Equity Regulations by the Honourable Supreme Court.

When we first entered Prison No. 4 of Tihar, a police officer asked us to sit down and said, "niche baith ja." He was sitting on a very high chair and we were told to sit on the floor on our legs. This was shocking and humiliating. I was reminded of the movie Maamannan by Mari Selvaraj, where a Dalit man was asked to sit on the floor when he went to meet an upper-caste feudal landlord in his area. The prison is not a democratic set up but a replica of feudal orders in modern city. One of our friends tried to sit on a stool that was there, but one of the police officers shouted "Aeeeeeee" in a very high pitch.

Later, when we were waiting in the lobby for verification, I was sitting with one leg over the other, the way I usually sit. Again, someone shouted in a high pitch, "pair ko niche rakh, jail aaya hai tu." We were not even allowed to put our

hands in our pockets or on our waist, or to stand upright with both our hands folded.

The first thing we heard inside the jail was the sheer normalisation of abuses and slurs by both police officials and inmates. These slurs were always directed at our mothers and sisters and their body parts. It was shameful and disturbing that even police officials spoke like this.

I am not referring to slurs directed specifically at me or any individual. But if we stood anywhere in the prison for even two minutes, we would hear dozens of abuses and slurs in that time frame. Violence does not always come in physical form. Listening to abuses and slurs directed at anyone is an insult to our mothers and sisters.

The ecosystem of the prison has institutionalised this. One might say it is not institutionalised if it is only said by inmates, but when the very people responsible for reform use such language as if it were their official language, it becomes institutionalised.

I was allotted Barrack No. 1 of Ward No. 1. Except for one, all eight male persons from JNU-14 were sent to different wards. Only Comrade Varki was in Ward 1, but in Barrack No. 5.

When I first entered the ward, the inmates who were on duty asked us, after learning that we were from JNU, "kyon karte ho ye sab protest?" They had just beaten and abused one inmate who had been released for breaking the queue.

The prison had mixed reactions when people heard about JNU. Some praised what we do and cursed the government for suppressing dissent and protest, while others sympathised with our cause but advised us not to indulge in all this. During a scanning process when they came to know that we are from JNU, we were

treated like criminals, as if there was no need for enquiry, trial, or a chargesheet. The officers did not say anything personally to me about JNU, but our friends were questioned with remarks such as: "desh ke khilaf narebaazi kiye ho?" "anti-national ho kya tum log?"

When I was leaving the prison, someone asked me again why I had come. I said we had protested against the casteist remarks of the VC and demanded her resignation. He asked, "Did you find the jail good? Do you want to come again?"

I replied that we only protest for our rights; who would want to come to jail? We protest, and the government puts us in jail. He said in affirmation, "Yes, you are right."

I asked him if he needed any help or if he wanted to send any message outside to his family. He replied, "No, no."

Along with other inmates who were on their first day, I was called at 3 pm for cleaning duty. I picked up a broom and started cleaning the ground. I also cleaned the dustbin by picking it up and placing it in a wheel cart.

Personally, I do not have any objection to doing such work, but the question is about health and safety. Prison inmates are treated as if they can be pushed into these jobs without any safety mechanisms such as gloves and masks. None of us was provided with gloves or masks while doing this work.

I do not know who was responsible for cleaning the toilets, but I am quite sure they were not provided gloves either.

The barrack where I was staying, had around 150 people. This ward is also known as Mulaiza, which means first-timers. Most of the people in our barrack and ward were those who had come to

prison for the first time.

Even inside the prison, older inmates had better space, while newer ones got the "highway" - the middle area where there was space to sleep only on one side. You could not lie on your back.

On the second night, which was Saturday, there were 165 prisoners in our cell. Even though the state claims that Tihar is the world's largest prison complex, the Central Jail website of the Government of Delhi itself acknowledges that around 9,000 people are staying beyond the sanctioned capacity. If you try to find a place to sit and study, you will definitely not get one.

Our jails are filled with Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, and Bahujans. In every announcement they make, it is almost guaranteed that one out of five names is a Muslim man. The true representation of the majority communities of Indian society - Dalit-Adivasi-Bahujan Muslims - does not get adequate representation anywhere except in prisons. One person I met had been picked up by the police and directly sent to Tihar from the court. His phone was confiscated and he did not even get the opportunity to call anyone. He got bail, but there was no one to fill his surety bonds. He had to wait five days in Tihar for his one-time call service through the PID number.

When we appeared before the court, the honourable judge said that we had been granted bail but the police would first verify our addresses. After that, we were sent to Tihar.

Each of us was assigned one police officer to hold our hand so that we could not run away. When we entered Tihar, we thought we would come out in a day or the next. However, we stayed there for two nights and were preparing for a third. While in jail, whenever the

pain became unbearable, I would remind myself of the struggles of Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Khalid Saifi, Gulfisha, Hem, and Saibaba. Some of them have spent years and years in prison. Inside the jail, I would recall the diary written by Umar. Their struggles were certainly a source of inspiration, but when I think about the extremely long time they have spent in prison, my body shudders. No words and no form of solidarity can truly compensate for their courage and resolve.

On the night of third day, I was shifted from inside the barrack to the verandah. Before sleeping, I took mustard oil from one of the inmates. We were sure we would not be released on Sunday. I started talking to a person who had come in a drug case. He asked, "kya modi sarkar achha kar rahi hai?" I realised he does not like Modi but he was fearful while asking this question of anticipating a backlash if I would have Modi supporter. I said, "Main yahan hun kyonki maine Modi ke dwara chuni hui Vice Chancellor ka virodh kiya tha" He got relaxed. We had just started talking when I heard the announcement: "Ek ki ek se Nitish Kumar." I quickly got up and stood near the gate. The older inmates called me, asked about my experience in prison, and some asked me to send messages outside.

While leaving the prison, I took some soil from Tihar with me. When I returned to JNU after my release, I placed that soil there and said to the corrupt and casteist VC in a solidarity gathering - "Madam Vice-Chancellor, we will remember that you sent us to jail because we were demanding your resignation over your casteist statement. You sent us to jail because we were demanding that the UGC regulations be implemented along the lines of the Rohith Act. You sent us to jail because we were fighting against the rustication of our union. You sent us to jail because we were fighting against the surveillance system on the library. But remember one thing, now JNU has the soil of Tihar, you may break our heads, break our legs, or send us to jail; we were not afraid, and we will not be afraid. We will seize our rights and claim them. ■

## Five Arguments for Why the India-EU Trade Deal is a Loss for the Indian People

▲ SURYO

**O**n 27th January 2026, India and the European Union (EU) signed the India-EU Free Trade Agreement. The trade agreement proposes to drastically reduce or completely eliminate a wide range of tariffs on European commodities in India, and Indian commodities in the EU. Both the European Parliament and the Government of India are heralding the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and asserting that it will benefit both economies. I present here five arguments that the India-EU Free Trade Agreement is bad for India's consumers, workers, farmers, and overall economic health.

### 1. Unequal exchange will transfer value from India to Europe.

Currently, commodities produced in the European Union are more expensive than commodities produced in India. For instance, a 750ml bottle of Coca-Cola in India costs 40 rupees, while a similar bottle in countries like Germany would cost 1-1.5 Euros or about 135 rupees. This price difference reflects differences in wages and the cost of production in general, and across industries, European commodities sell at a relative premium, while Indian commodities sell at a relative discount. This results in a loss of value or a loss of income from India to the EU, because if both these countries were to trade Coca Colas, for every one bottle that the EU exported to India, India would have to export three or more.

Since countries typically trade different goods, this price difference is not directly visible but continues to shape the terms of trade. As a result, even when India and the EU trade "equal amounts" in monetary terms, there is a transfer of value from India to the EU, a phenomenon described as unequal exchange. In effect, India has to export a much larger quantity of goods to pay for fewer European goods. Even if trade appears "equal" in money terms, more real value flows from India to Europe.

### 2. Tariff cuts will benefit European goods far more than Indian goods

Before the FTA, tariff rates on EU commodities in India were relatively high (often higher than 70 or even 100%), while existing tariff rates on Indian commodities traded in the EU were considerably lower (6-24%). At the same time, the EU commodities are also more expensive than Indian goods exported to the EU. For instance, while India exports generic drugs and textiles (currently priced at 5-50 Euros), the EU exports luxury automobiles and high-value pharmaceuticals (priced at tens of thousands of rupees or hundreds of Euros). As tariffs are reduced, the price of European goods in India will fall sharply, making them much more competitive in Indian markets. In contrast, the price reduction for Indian goods in Europe will be relatively small and may not significantly increase demand. This asymmetry means

that imports from Europe are likely to grow much faster than Indian exports to Europe. For illustration, consider, for instance, that a 1% reduction in prices leads to a 1% increase in demand, then the demand for European commodities would increase by 70%, but the demand for Indian commodities would only increase by about 15%.

This imbalance will have two major consequences. First, there will be a larger increase in EU ex-ports to India than in Indian exports to the EU, leading to a worsening of India's trade balance. Note that the EU is one of the few entities with whom India holds a large export surplus (2.4 lakh crore rupees in 2024). This imbalance will likely reduce India's existing trade surplus with the EU. As imports from Europe grow faster than exports, India may face pressure on its foreign exchange reserves, which can weaken the rupee. A weaker rupee makes imports more expensive and increases economic vulnerability. A trade deficit would also increase the incentive to export (for foreign currency) and result in settling for lower prices for the exports, which would worsen the terms of trade (the ratio of the price of exports to imports). This will then further worsen unequal exchange.

Second, there will be a greater penetration of European goods into Indian markets than Indian goods into European markets (recall the 70% and 15% example). At the same time, Indian producers losing domestic market share to cheaper European imports will not find equivalent opportunities in export markets, leading to job losses.

### **3. Farmers will be indirectly affected through changes in food consumption and agro-industry**

Although the government claims that agricultural products will be

protected, the reduction of tariffs on processed food products can still have serious consequences for farmers. Cheaper imports of processed food from Europe will encourage a shift in consumption patterns away from fresh agricultural produce and towards imported processed goods. This shift reduces demand for agricultural inputs used in domestic food processing industries. Over time, this weakens the link between farmers and the manufacturing sector, leading to a decline in demand for farm produce. There has been a general upward trend in India in the consumption of processed food since the IMF-enforced economic liberalization policies of 1991. A report from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that the consumption of processed food increased by over 50%, and the consumption of ultra-processed food nearly doubled. With the import of processed food from the EU, farmers may face a reduction in agricultural demand in the manufacturing sector that is currently supplied by Indian farmers, as EU manufacturing may use EU supply chains.

### **4. Pharmaceuticals may become prohibitively expensive for most Indians**

India's pharmaceutical sector has historically relied on a flexible system of compulsory licensing, which allows the government to authorise the production of cheaper versions of patented drugs when necessary. This has been crucial in ensuring access to affordable medicines. The FTA, however, encourages voluntary licensing, which means companies retain the right to decide whether to license another company to produce the drug. While compulsory licensing is not formally abolished, the Indian government's commitment to voluntary licensing under the TRIPS agreement may increase

the effective ability of European companies to monopolize pharmaceutical markets and drive up costs for consumers, making life-saving drugs expensive and reducing sovereign production and pricing autonomy. Given that India has not issued any compulsory licences since 2014, this shift may further restrict access to affordable medicines while offering limited export gains for Indian generic manufacturers. Overall, the existing tariffs are low (11% each), and the tariff reductions need not generate a large boost in demand, especially for Indian generic manufacturers whose commodities will be priced at 10 euros instead of 11 euros, say. As a result, the agreement risks raising costs for consumers while offering limited benefits to domestic manufacturers, further weakening India's ability to regulate its pharmaceutical sector in the public interest.

### **5. Key export sectors may not see real gains**

Sectors such as textiles, leather, and marine products are often cited as beneficiaries of the agreement. In these sectors where the production capacity is currently higher than global demand in these sectors, after US tariffs on Indian commodities, and therefore, the benefit of tariff reductions in the EU would at best control the damage from tariffs imposed by the US, rather than substantially increase gross revenue of the Indian textile sector over previous years.

The fundamental problem with the India-EU FTA is that it proceeds as if trade takes place between equal partners, despite deep structural inequalities, and it lacks a clear strategic vision. As a result, the final negotiated text fails to safeguard India's national interests. ■

# Nepal's Quest for Change with Stability

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The results of the latest parliamentary elections in Nepal signal a tectonic shift in the Himalayan republic. In an electoral landslide, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party led by thirty-five-year-old Balendra Shah, engineer and rapper turned politician who was formerly Mayor of Kathmandu, has swept aside established communist parties and the Nepali Congress to win a massive majority. The communists of Nepal had emerged as the leading force in securing and shaping Nepal's transition from constitutional monarchy to a multiparty parliamentary republic. In the previous two elections held in 2017 and 2022, the Nepali Congress had started regaining some lost ground, but taken together the communists still had the biggest share of votes and seats. In this election the Nepali Congress has finished a distant second, and the divided communist factions have taken the third and fourth positions. The ouster of the KP Oli government through the violent Gen Z uprising in September 2025 has thus been electorally vindicated and confirmed in Nepal.

The similarities of Nepal with recent political developments and electoral outcomes in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are quite unmistakable. In all the three countries we have seen powerful popular upheavals led primarily by Gen Z youth and driven by great anger against the incumbent regimes and a profound yearning for change. All these three countries now have a drastically altered political landscape. But the dissimilarities are also worth noting. In Sri Lanka,

the change has catapulted an old but minor party like the JVP from the margins to the centre of power. In Bangladesh, the former ruling party Awami League was banned from contesting in the elections, and the new party born out of the July Uprising joined hands with the Jamaat and emerged as the main opposition bloc. It was BNP which came back to power after a gap of nearly two decades. In Nepal, parties that have been in power in the past, competed with the new challenger Rashtriya Swatantra Party (National Independent Party) in elections and lost.

As a party, the RSP had made its presence felt in 2022 itself, emerging as the fourth largest party with a tally of 20 seats out of 275 (165 seats through first past the post system, and 110 seats through proportional representation). The party had joined the coalition government led by Prachanda with its leader Rabi Lamichhane becoming Deputy Prime Minister as well as Home Minister before the Supreme Court forced him to resign on the charge of invalid citizenship. Lamichhane subsequently came back after winning a by-election, and the party reinforced its identity as a rising political alternative. Meanwhile, Nepal had already witnessed another indication of the growing quest for a political alternative with the victory of Balendra Shah as an independent candidate in the Kathmandu mayoral election in May 2022 in the wake of the Covid pandemic. What propelled the remarkable rise of the RSP in the March 5 parliamentary elections was Balendra Shah joining the RSP and being projected as the prime ministerial candidate.

What does this political shift signify? Nepal has seen fourteen governments since the republican transition in 2008. No government has lasted its full term and the coalition pattern has become increasingly messy and chaotic. The scale of the mandate clearly reflects Nepal's desire for political stability. Growing perception of widespread corruption and a deepening rot in the system and a visible generational rift between gerontocratic rulers and a predominantly youthful electorate has further fuelled mass disillusionment. The unprovoked police firing on peaceful protests against the ill-advised social media ban added to the popular outrage. The consequence has been an unprecedented readiness of the Nepali electorate to experiment with new faces and the promise of clean governance yielding a massive mandate for Balendra Shah and RSP candidates. Balen made it a point to contest against the ousted PM KP Oli and the result was a humiliating defeat for the latter.

The RSP describes itself as a centrist party with a reform agenda for Nepal's republican democracy. There is no support for any restoration of monarchy. In fact, the party that openly advocates restoration of monarchy got only one seat. There is also little traction for making Nepal a Hindu state. But there does seem to be a greater push for a presidential system and technocratic governance. It remains to be seen how the new regime will deal with the ideological-political pressure exerted by the Modi government and the RSS on one hand and Nepal's growing economic dependence on China on the other. Remittance by expatriate Nepali workers is a major source of income for Nepal, and the instability, uncertainty

and anti-immigrant environment in the Gulf region in the wake of the US-Israeli war on Iran will be an added challenge for Nepal.

For Nepal's communists who historically led Nepal's republican transition and enjoyed enormous goodwill repeatedly coming to power since the 1990s, the electoral rout must be treated as a massive wake-up call. As a landlocked country situated between two big and powerful neighbours without any major resource or industrial base, Nepal clearly has major economic and foreign policy challenges to navigate. At the same time, politically Nepal has been one of the few Asian countries with a strong mass communist influence. Nepal's communist parties must draw lessons from the current electoral debacle, draw fresh energy from the Gen Z struggles and aspirations for a prosperous and progressive Nepal, and rebuild a communist movement which can steer Nepal towards a stable and robust democratic future. ■

## Cuba Defies US War Threats and Illegal Blockade

**A**mid the US-Israeli war on Iran, Trump has escalated his war rhetoric against Cuba. On March 16, he openly declared that he would have the "honour of taking Cuba" and claimed that he could "do anything" with it.

Following the US intervention in Venezuela and the removal of President Nicolás Maduro, aimed at asserting hegemony and subjugating Latin America and the Caribbean, Trump has turned his focus sharply towards Cuba. Soon after the Venezuela operation, the US intensified its blockade by imposing a total oil embargo and threatening punitive tariffs on any country supplying fuel to Cuba. Under US pressure, several Latin American countries such as Guatemala and Honduras have moved to expel Cuban doctors and medical brigades, which had long been providing critical healthcare services to marginalised populations neglected by their own systems. Their removal has directly impacted access to healthcare for thousands, particularly among the poorest sections.

For the past three months, Cuba has received almost no fuel supply, pushing the country into a severe energy crisis. Yet, the island nation continues to resist, defending its sovereignty while rapidly expanding alternative energy sources such as solar power to keep critical sectors, including hospitals, functioning. In recent weeks, Cuba has experienced multiple nationwide blackouts, reflecting the severity of the crisis, although authorities have managed to restore supply and maintain essential services. But the escalating blockade has been severely impacting the Cuban economy, have affected their ability to cook and preserve food, transport goods, or access public healthcare services in hospitals.

Amid this pressure, attempts are also being made to destabilise the country internally. On February 25, 2026, Cuban forces thwarted an infiltration attempt

involving a Florida-registered speedboat, linked to elements within the Cuban diaspora in the United States, carrying advanced weapons and ammunition. This incident points towards a US-backed covert effort using sections of the Cuban diaspora to incite violence and chaos. This is a familiar playbook, one that dates back to the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, where CIA-backed counter-revolutionary forces attempted to dismantle the Cuban Revolution and restore a pro-imperialist oligarchic rule.

Despite these sustained attacks, Cuba and its people continue to resist. In a powerful act of international solidarity, the Nuestra América Convoy has been launched to deliver essential medicines and humanitarian aid, drawing parallels with efforts like the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. On March 17, the first batch of the convoy arrived in Havana carrying five tonnes of medicines and medical supplies to support the country during this crisis.

As the Trump regime continues its imperialist war threats against Cuba and its socialist system, which once overthrew the imperialist plunder machine, Cubans are bravely standing in defence of their sovereignty and country. Despite immense suffering, they carry forward the enduring spirit of resistance with the words of Fidel Castro: *Patria o Muerte, Venceremos* (Homeland or death, we will prevail). ■



# Makkal Mamanram - The People's Tribune

▲ S. KUMARASAMI



**A**t Ponthur, in Sriperumpudur, Tamil Nadu, a hub of automobile industry and a centre of global capital, the Solidarity Forum of the Chennai Capital Region inaugurated a two storeyed office on March 8, in a vibrant atmosphere filled with enthusiasm, blending the spirit of International Working Women's Day with that of May Day.

The Makkal Mamanram (People's Tribune), now stands majestically as a two-storied edifice, because of the joint initiative of the Left Trade Union Centre (LTUC, affiliated to AICCTU) and the Solidarity Forum, with the cooperation of the United Labour Federation (ULF), the Working People's Trade Union Centre (WPTUC) and Comrade Paramasivam.

The People's Tribune is built not just by construction materials but by

the contribution and involvement of thousands of workers and a dream that has come true. On the stairs of every floor of the building are inscribed with the slogans, "Labor is noble; let the laborers rule the world", "One for all, and all for one", "Without us, there is no nation", "Down with Capitalism! Long live Socialism!", etc.

The Solidarity Forum states that any trade union or Works Committee may conduct meetings, and organizations that are pro-people and dedicated to the welfare of the masses can hold their gatherings here without any fee. Furthermore, the doors of this building will be wide open to welcome and conduct marriages of couples in love, transcending the barriers of caste and religion. The doors of the Makkal Mamanram stand open to those who possess immense love for the people, profound indignation toward injustice,

and a steadfast commitment to upholding the ethics and values of the Constitution. This People's Tribune - a sanctuary of love, virtues, and camaraderie - will play a pivotal role in elevating the working class to positions of leadership of the society.

On the call of the Solidarity Forum, workers from Hyundai, Leyland, MRF, and Diamond Chain visited rural areas on multiple occasions to join hands and work alongside agricultural laborers. The Solidarity Forum had also guided workers in extending a helping hand to the people devastated by the Tsunami.

In the course of the movement of Pricol workers for their trade union rights, the agricultural laborers embraced and supported them when workers were arrested on charges of murder and subsequently were on a conditional bail at Gandarvakottai in Pudukkottai district.

With the most exploitative apprenticeship system and the denial of permanent status in Tamil Nadu, worker vanguards conducted a massive signature campaign and several awareness rallies in order to secure protection for apprentices and temporary workers through an amendment Act 47/2008, and to advocate amendments in the act for trade Union Recognition.

## What does the Makkal Maamanram intend to do?

Working people, both within and outside industrial establishments, contribute significantly to social production. Yet, the fruits of this social production are snatched away by the capital, the private

ownership. Contemporary parliamentary and electoral politics, effectively facilitate the rule of capitalists, the wealthy elite, and the dominant forces by merely garnering the people's votes.

The working-class politics is meant to transform the workers' consciousness of 'class in itself' to become a 'class for itself' through their awakening and through a collective consciousness and unity, and to inspire them to rise up as a united force for their own cause. The solidarity of workers must transcend the boundaries of individual union flags and extend beyond the walls of their respective factory workplaces. The permanent employees must raise voices for non-permanent, trainee and contract workers. The factory workers, whose collective organizing is feasible, should work towards mobilising sanitation guards and sanitation workers in both urban and rural areas, scheme workers, gig workers, migrant laborers, and agricultural workers.

Our dreams must become the dreams of the working people. To turn these dreams into a reality, concrete actions and organized functioning are essential. For those dedicated to serving the people, the doors of the Makkal Mamanram shall always remain open. Let us dream, and let us strive to make those dreams a reality.

On this occasion, 3,008 comrades joined the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the CPI(ML) Liberation, the Chief Guest, hoisted the red flag.

Comrade T. Parvendhan, Principal Secretary of the Samathuva Vazhakkariñar Sangam (Equality Lawyers' Association) of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), participated in the event. The President of the Ponthur Panchayat also attended, while both including the President of the Sengadu Panchayat contributed financially for the program.

AICCTU all India President V. Shankar, Advisor S. Kumarasami, State President K. Bharathi, LTUC-AICCTU comrades A.S. Kumar, Jyothi, Rajaguru, and Rajesh; CPI(ML) State Secretary Pazha Asaithambi, CCM Balasundaram; President of the Working People's Trade Union Forum, R. Kuchelar, Comrade Mariappan of the United Labour Federation; and Comrade Chandrasekar of the Hosur Trade Union Federation and Advocate Paramasivam delivered speeches at the inaugural function of the People's Tribune, along with others. Comrades from the CPI (ML), AICCTU, LTUC, and the Solidarity Forum gathered in large numbers at the function venue.

Hundreds of workers from 32 corporate and multinational companies including Hyundai, Daimler, Nissan, Royal Enfield, Asian Paints, Motherson, Sanmina, TI Diamond Chain, Hinduja, etc., joined the inaugural function along with sanitation guards and sanitation workers from various districts, including the Chennai Corporation. ■

### **The inauguration of the Makkal Mamanram was carried out by the workers themselves.**

The ground floor was inaugurated by women sanitation worker comrades Lakshmi, Annalakshmi, Selvi, Meghala, and Sathya. The first floor was inaugurated by Gopi, a trainee, along with Damodharan and Rudran, both contract workers. The second floor was inaugurated by rural worker comrades Anusuya and Kannaiyan. ■

## **A Charter of Struggle**

### **By the Solidarity Forum**

[Presented to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and to political parties to be included in their election manifestos, on Behalf of Workers of the Chennai, the State Capital Region]

- Ensure 8-hour workday and a 5-day work-week; Guarantee permanent employment lakhs of workers.
- Ensure "Equal Pay for Equal Work" for non-permanent and contract workers.
- Refuse to enact state-rules that would facilitate the implementation of the four anti-worker Labour Codes.
- Ensure a daily wage of ₹1,250 and guarantee the regularization of, at least, 10 percent of non-permanent and contract workers every year in the state capital region of Chennai.
- Release the two Pricol workers who are in jail for more than ten years.
- Abolish the system of contract labour and consolidated pay.
- Take concrete measures to protect the right to protest, right to unionisation and to safeguard the interests of women workers.
- Declare gig workers engaged by companies such as Amazon, Swiggy, Ola, and Uber as "workers" and enact protective legislation for them.
- Establish a "Workers' Park", designed to serve as a space for workers gatherings, recreation and growth.
- Immediately formulate necessary rules for the implementation the Standing Orders (Amendment) Act! ■

## Land to the Tiller: Chintaluru Farmers Vow to Resist Land Grab, Demand Pattas



**A** village meeting was held on March 12 in Chintaluru, Andhra Pradesh, under the leadership of the Chintaluru Inam Lands Struggle Committee, attended by Bugata Bangarraju,

CPI(ML) Liberation leader, and other comrades, along with local farmers and villagers. Chintaluru village in East Godavari District was declared Inam land—grant land from the colonial period. After

the abolition of the Inam system, cultivators who have tilled these lands for decades have the right to obtain pattas (legal ownership titles).

Farmers had earlier submitted declarations of their rights to the Inam authorities following a public announcement. Yet, despite decades of struggle by the cultivators, the government has failed to resolve the issue or recognise the rights of the people actually working the land.

Now, in the name of a "comprehensive survey", attempts are being made to clear the way for handing over these lands to landlords, threatening the livelihood and rights of poor cultivators. The meeting strongly warned that any attempt to dispossess the poor and transfer their lands to landlords will be firmly resisted. The struggle for land rights and pattas for the actual cultivators will continue with greater determination. ■

## AIPWA Condemns Acquittal of Dera Chief Ram Rahim in Ramchandra Chhatrapati Murder Case

**A**IPWA has expressed strong disappointment over the decision of the Punjab and Haryana High Court to acquit Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in the murder case of journalist Ramchandra Chhatrapati. The High Court set aside the life imprisonment awarded to Ram Rahim by the trial court in the case.

AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari in a statement issued on March 7 said that Ramchandra Chhatrapati was the courageous journalist whose reporting

exposed the truth about Ram Rahim. It was Chhatrapati who published the letter that revealed the rape and sexual exploitation of sadhvis (Hindi female ascetics) inside the Ram Rahim's dera. The publication of this letter led to a CBI investigation which found Ram Rahim guilty in the rape case, for which he remains in jail. Ramchandra Chhatrapati was later shot and killed outside his home.

She pointed out that while the court upheld the convictions of other accused in the murder case, it is shocking that the main accused,

Ram Rahim, has been declared innocent.

She said that the government and the courts have already shown repeated leniency towards Ram Rahim, a convict in rape and murder cases, by granting him parole on multiple occasions and allowing him to remain out of jail. Acquitting him of all charges in the murder case amounts to a complete mockery of justice.

AIPWA has demanded that the government immediately intervene in the matter and move a higher court to ensure that Ram Rahim's punishment in the case is upheld.

Meena Tiwari said that justice for Ramchandra Chhatrapati is essential for the defence of press freedom and for the fight against sexual violence and the abuse of power. ■

# OBITUARY

## Comrade Ditumoni Gogoi

Comrade Ditumoni Gogoi, member of the CPI(ML) Liberation Assam State Committee and a resident of Koliabor in Nagaon, passed away on 7 March 2026 at the State Cancer Hospital in Guwahati at the age of 47.

A committed and courageous activist, Ditumoni Gogoi was widely respected in the Koliabor area as a strong voice of protest and a dedicated organiser of people's struggles. He played a leading role in raising issues affecting the working people of the region, from the problems of tea garden workers to the struggle around the closure of the Shilghat jute mill.

Comrade Ditumoni Gogoi joined the communist movement in 1998 through All India Students Association and from 1999 worked as a full time party activist. In 2011 he contested the Assam Assembly election from the Koliabor constituency as the CPI(ML) candidate. The party dips its red banner in his memory and pledges to carry forward his legacy of struggle for the rights of workers, peasants and the oppressed. Red Salute to Comrade Ditumoni Gogoi. ■



## Comrade Anita Devi

Comrade Anita Devi, CPI(ML) Liberation Jharkhand State Committee Member passed away tragically on 7 March 2026 in a road accident at Meral in Garhwa.

Comrade Anita played a vital role in strengthening struggles for the rights of workers, peasants, landless people and the poor. Her tireless efforts helped take these struggles to new heights and strengthened the organisation of working people across the region. Her life of commitment and struggle remains an enduring inspiration for party activists and for the many mass movements she helped build. Since 2016 she remained at the forefront of the movement of scheme workers and became a powerful voice for their rights. Rising from Palamu, she became State Secretary and later State President of the Jharkhand Rajya Vidyalaya Rasooya Sangh.

The life of Comrade Anita Devi stands as an example of struggle, courage and unwavering dedication to the people. Her untimely death is a profound loss for the party and for the broader people's movements across Palamu and other parts of Jharkhand. Red Salute to Comrade Anita Devi. ■



## Comrade R. Nallakannu

CPI(ML) Liberation pays its revolutionary salute to Comrade R. Nallakannu, a veteran of the Indian communist movement who was born at its very inception and passed away at a time when the movement marks the completion of its centenary. A senior leader of the Communist Party of India, Comrade Nallakannu died on February 25, at the age of 101.

Comrade R. Nallakannu was a freedom fighter who struggled for India's independence, standing steadfastly against British colonial rule and facing repression and imprisonment without fear. He joined the CPI and devoted his entire life to the communist movement as a committed fighter for socialism. Beginning his political life in the underground, and later facing conspiracy cases and repeated imprisonments, he played a historic role in building and strengthening the Communist Party of India in Tamil Nadu. From leading struggles of agricultural labourers to championing environmental protection and fighting against sand and mineral plunder, he acted with courage and determination.

Affectionately known as RNK within CPI circles, Comrade R. Nallakannu was a respected leader not only within the Left movement but also in the wider public sphere. Red Salute to Comrade RNK. ■



## March 23 | Martyrdom Day

### Uphold Bhagat Singh's anti-imperialist legacy and oppose the Modi regime's surrender to the US-Israel axis.



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