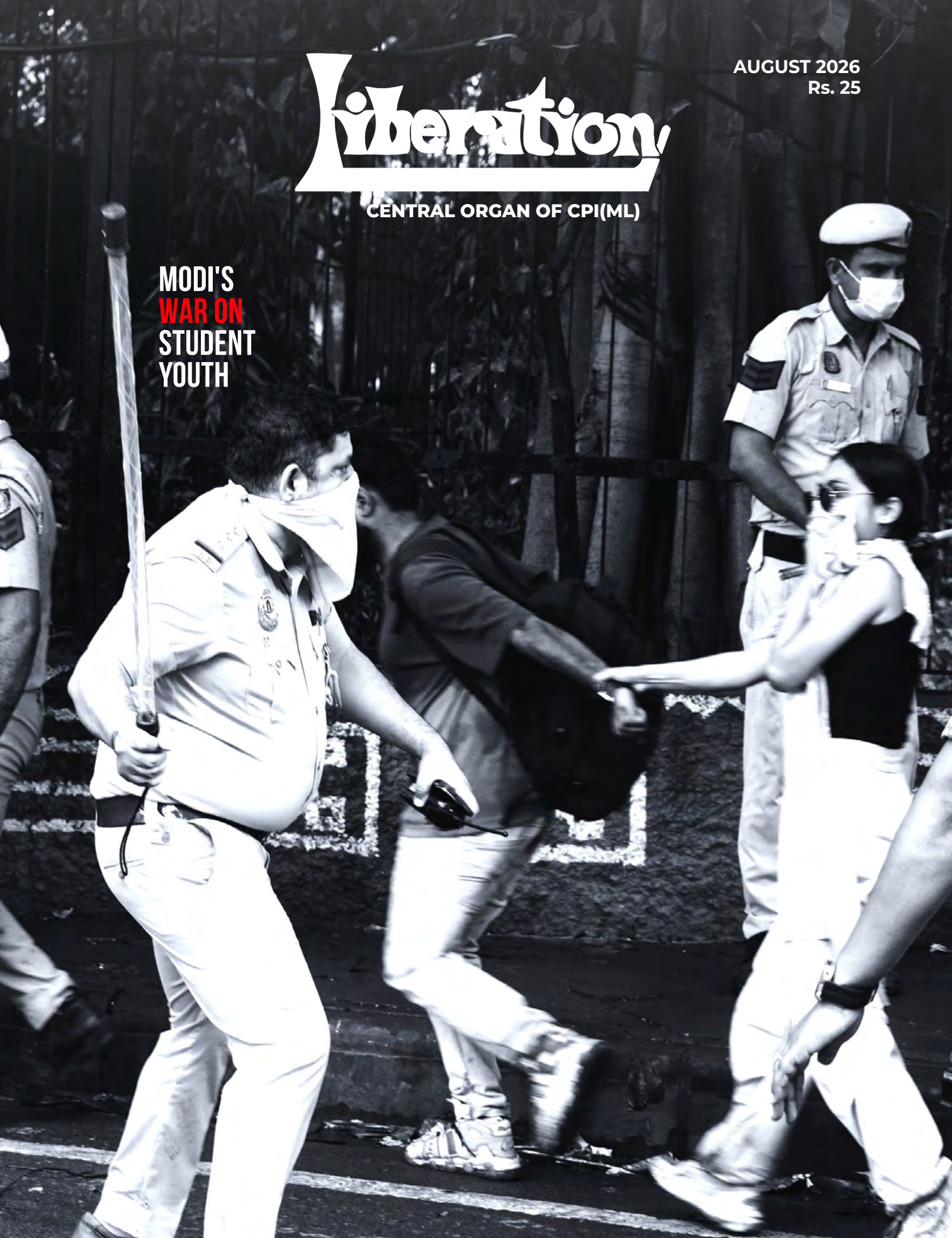


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MODI'S
WAR ON
STUDENT
YOUTH



Parliament March
July 20, 2026, Delhi





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CONTENTS

COVER FEATURE

On the 17th Day of Hunger Strike	05
When Delhi Came Alive on July 20	06

COMMENTARY

Modi Regime's Mandir Scams	10
IN-FOCUS	
Sangh Parivar's Bengal Laboratory	13
Politics Behind WB Foundation Day	15

SPECIAL FEATURE

Encounter Raj in Bihar	18
The Women of Chaiti Pipar	19

INTERNATIONAL

Trump-Rubio's Anti-Communist Design	22
America At 250	23

FILM REVIEW

Quiet Flows the Satluj	27
------------------------	----

TRIBUTE

Father Stan Swamy	29
OBITUARY	30

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Delhi, July 20

When the Streets Came Alive with New Hope and Power of the People

Delhi will remember July 20, 2026 for years and years to come. The fledgling digital outfit Cockroach Janata Party and progressive student organisations, notably AISA, had given a call for a march to Parliament on the inaugural day of the monsoon session to press for the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The government responded by issuing a police advisory which said that there was no permission for such a march and participants would be liable to be punished for participating in any unauthorised event. Just three days ago Amit Shah had changed the Police Commissioner of Delhi. Two days ahead of the march, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk who was on an indefinite fast at Jantar Mantar for the same demand had been bundled away wrapped in a white sheet by plain clothes police personnel. The 'new normal' common sense of Modi's India suggested that no parliament march worth its name was possible in these circumstances.

As the day began amidst heavy showers on July 20, Delhi realised that it had never seen a march like this. Waves of young people were surging through every road in the heart of Delhi. Barricades erected by the Delhi Police were overcome as easily as seasoned athletes cross hurdle races in track and field events. The whole of Delhi had become Jantar Mantar, every road was leading to the Parliament building. The monsoon session began, only to be adjourned amidst loud protests by the opposition. As the day progressed reports of severe baton charges, tear gas shelling and even stone pelting by the police started pouring in from all over Delhi. Many areas looked like battlefields covered in thick smoke and several protesters suffered critical injuries. Yet videos of young people facing baton charges with the tricolour or the Constitution in their hands signalled the courage and determination of India's new generation. And as the evening drew in, protesters could be seen reclaiming the Jantar Mantar protest site that had earlier been 'cleared up' by heavy police violence.

The sit-in protests at Jantar Mantar had begun exactly a month ago on 20 June. A week later, on 28 June started the indefinite fast by Sonam Wangchuk and six leaders of AISA. As days passed and the condition of the hunger strikers began to deteriorate in the heat and sweat of a taxing Delhi summer, three of the six fasting student activists had to be hospitalized, while the other three continued to refuse food. Yet the government did not care to respond. Nor did the Godi media care to report. They must have thought that this conspiracy of silence would tire the protesters out. But at the end of the day the power of word of mouth and the extensive coverage on social media proved more than equal to this devious Modi-Godi strategy. The turnout of July 20 took both the government and the media by utter surprise.

Indeed, the scale of spontaneous response to this new combination of digital satire and real world protest also exceeded the expectations of organisations involved in the campaign as well as opposition parties watching it from a distance. Given the disappointing experience of the 2012 anti-corruption movement under the leadership of Anna Hazare, there was understandably considerable scepticism around the CJP phenomenon and the role of Sonam Wangchuk in the ongoing struggle. The positions adopted by Sonam Wangchuk till recently in support of abrogation of Article 370 and many other policies of the Modi government did not inspire much confidence in his new found role as an opponent of the education-examination system in spite of his widely recognised record as an educator, innovator and climate activist. Yet the mass response to the July 20 call clearly showed that the protests had struck a deep chord with India's youth, not only on the agenda of education, examination and employment but also on the question of holding the government accountable.

The unprecedented scale and spirited nature of participation of the people, especially of the Gen Z contingent of youth below the age of thirty, made July 20 stand out as the unmistakable indication of the assertion of GenZ as a force for social and political change. It had shades of the July 2024 uprising in neighbouring Bangladesh or the September 2025 uprising of Nepal, both of which led to a change of government in their respective countries. Here the demand was only for resignation of the Union Education Minister to make him accountable for the serial paper leaks under his watch. In his notes sent from the hospital, Sonam Wangchuk had even appeared to omit that central demand, expressing his

readiness to end his fast if the opposition could assure him of a serious parliamentary discussion on the agenda of education. The reduction of the demand for fixation of accountability with the government to the opposition raising the education agenda in Parliament, something which the opposition had repeatedly been doing in recent sessions, had confused and disappointed his supporters.

To the credit of the participants of the July 20 March to Parliament, it must be said that despite obvious lack of clarity and coordination, the marchers remained peaceful and determined, withstanding the brutality of the police and provocation of the agents of the Sangh brigade who joined the police to malign and attack the march in many parts of Delhi. It reminded us of the Modi government's conspiracy to discredit and derail the historic farmers' movement after the 26 January 2021 tractor march. But just as the farmers regrouped and bounced back and the movement continued till the repeal of the three anti-farmer farm laws, India wishes the same strength and resilience to its youth to march forward till its core demands are met.

Ten years ago, students had risen in protest in India's universities following the shocking institutional murder of Rohith Vemula. The government had responded by jailing student leaders and maligning the student movement as an anti-national conspiracy. Then in January-February 2020, students and citizens, especially Muslim women, had launched an inspiring protest movement against divisive and discriminatory amendments to the Citizenship Act. The government suppressed that historic Shaheen Bagh protest movement by unleashing communal violence in Delhi and

jailing activists under UAPA. Even after six years young scholars like Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam continue to languish in jail without any trial.

Unlike university-based student movements of the past, the Shaheen Bagh protests or the Delhi border farmers' movement, this time the youth movement made its presence felt right in the heart of Delhi. It created a platform of unity where students from universities merged with the local youth from Delhi's neighbourhoods, parents mingled with their children, young women marched shoulder to shoulder with young men cutting across communities and cultures. Activists of AISA and other Left student organisations devoted their fullest energy and efforts to sustain and strengthen the movement against all odds, and demonstrated how student leaders like the hunger strikers Neha and Danish, Manish and Aameen, Hrishikesh and Deepak could also work alongside Sonam Wangchuk and CJP leaders like Abhijeet Dipke and Sourav Das.

Defying massive disenfranchisement and systematic denial of fundamental rights, serial electoral frauds and the relentless blitzkrieg of hate, lies and the all-pervasive fear and despair that seeks to reduce empowered vocal citizens to fearful loyal subjects, Jantar Mantar of July 2026, and the Parliament March of July 20 symbolise a decisive break with the fear and apathy that had gripped large sections of society. If protesters have to risk their lives to demand justice for the victims of paper leak and accountability of the education minister, then does Prime Minister Modi have any right to continue in office? The people of India have suffered enough, they now demand answers and accountability. ■

It's Not Just About Exam Leaks, but Accountability

▲ NEHA

(The following article was published in The Indian Express on July 14, during the 17th day of the hunger strike by AISA activists in solidarity with Sonam Wangchuk. The hunger strike concluded on July 20, when Neha and the other AISA activists ended their fast to coincide with the Student- Youth Parliament March. – Ed.)



(L-R) AISA activists Deepak, Aameen, Neha, Danish, Hrishikesh and Manish on hunger-strike.

We are on the 17th day of our indefinite hunger strike, demanding accountability for the NEET paper leak and the crisis in India's examination system. Several students have died by suicide in the aftermath of the NEET paper leak.

These young people were exactly like us — with dreams, ambitions and hopes for their future. They had families who loved them, friends who stood by them, and dreams they had nurtured for years. They wanted to become doctors and build a dignified life. Some dreamed of serving society through medicine; some hoped to become researchers; some wanted to bring economic mobility to their families through education. Every one of those

dreams has now been shattered. Their lives cannot be reduced to a cold number in a report.

The question is: Who is responsible? The responsibility is not only for those young lives lost but also for the lakhs of students who have suffered anxiety, uncertainty and injustice because of the failure of the examination system. Can such a crisis be dismissed as merely a "technical glitch" or just another paper leak? Someone in the government must stand up and answer. Since the establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA), hardly any major examination it conducts has escaped controversy. NEET is only the latest and, perhaps the most glaring, example. Even the recent UGC-NET examination, conducted by the same agency, faced serious

questions, including issues related to its sociology paper. How can Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan escape accountability when he heads a ministry under which the credibility of several major examinations has repeatedly been questioned?

It was in June 2015 that Rajnath Singh had declared before the press, "this is not the UPA government, this is the NDA government. Here ministers do not have to resign." Ever since then, this government has maintained this stance. But what does this declaration really imply? It cannot but be seen as an attempt by the government to place itself above any sense of political accountability or moral responsibility, which flies in the face of the most basic definition of democracy. A democratic government must be responsible and legitimate, and Dharmendra Pradhan has indeed lost moral legitimacy. The thousands thronging at Jantar Mantar every day in this heat and rain to join the Cockroach Janta Party's protest to demand his resignation testify to that.

As I, along with acclaimed scientist Sonam Wangchuk and many fellow students, enter yet another day of our indefinite hunger strike demanding the resignation of the Education Minister, we have lost weight, and medical issues are cropping up. We continue our protest despite the scorching heat, relentless rain and suffocating humidity. The support we have received from students, parents, aspirants and intellectuals has been deeply encouraging. Two of

our fellow hunger strikers had to be hospitalised due to deteriorating health, yet the movement continues.

Nothing explains the situation better than a story many of us have heard or read in childhood. It is the story of a king who is one day visited by two weavers who claim to have created magical clothes that are invisible to anyone who is foolish or unfit for their position. The king, afraid of appearing incompetent, wears these imaginary clothes before his court. Fearing the king's anger, his ministers and courtiers praise the beauty of the invisible fabric. But when the king goes out in a public procession wearing nothing, a child finally shouts out the truth: "The king is naked!"

The students of this country have always been at the forefront of struggles for justice and democracy. From the freedom movement to the anti-Emergency movement of 1975 and several other social struggles, students have played a decisive role in shaping the nation's history. How, then, can we remain silent when the future of an entire generation of students is in jeopardy? We will continue to use democratic means, build wider solidarity, and raise our voices until accountability is established. We are here to say what everyone already knows, but many are afraid to say: The king is naked.

(First appeared in Indian Express Online, on 14 July 2026.)

When the Battle for Education Became the Battle for Democracy



In July 20, at around 5.30 pm, Delhi's iconic Connaught Place, usually bustling with shoppers and office-goers, reverberated with the deafening explosions of tear gas shells. Not one, not two, but countless explosions echoed across the heart of the capital as the Delhi Police and paramilitary forces rained tear gas on tens of thousands of Gen Z youth who had come to Delhi to demand justice, accountability and their democratic rights.

What unfolded at Connaught Place was not the beginning of the day's events, but its brutal climax. It marked the peak of more than ten hours of relentless police repression that had begun at dawn. As our correspondent took out his camera to document the state violence unfolding in heart of Delhi, the grainy black-and-white footage it captured evoked haunting parallels with archival images of British colonial repression during the Quit India Movement. This time, it was the Quit Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan movement.

What transpired on July 20 was perhaps best summed up by AISA President Neha in her speech at Jantar Mantar on July 21: "The marks on the bodies of the students present here will bear witness to the meaning of the word 'terrorist'. In the dictionaries, when the words 'terrorist', 'terror', 'fear' and 'violence' are defined, the name of the Delhi Police will be recorded repeatedly. We will remember you."

Hundreds of pairs of footwear, slippers, sandals and shoes abandoned by protesters during the police assault now lie at Jantar Mantar as silent testimony to the terror unleashed on July 20. Each pair stands as a witness to the brutality inflicted upon students and youth who had assembled to exercise their democratic right to protest.

Hunger Strike and Crackdown at Jantar Mantar

The Cockroach Janata Party, along with student organisations including AISA and others, had called for the Parliament March on July 20. The movement had completed one month of its indefinite sit-in at Jantar Mantar, while the solidarity hunger strike undertaken by AISA activists alongside climate activist Sonam Wangchuk had entered its 23rd day. The fast concluded as the march commenced.

Comrades Neha, Manish and Aameen ended their hunger strike following an appeal by a delegation comprising CPI(ML) MP Raja Ram Singh, RJD MP Manoj Jha, CPI(M) leader Amra Ram, Dr Yogendra Yadav, Advocate Prashant Bhushan, Professor Atul Sood, and actors Prakash Raj and Shabana Azmi. The other three hunger strikers, Comrades Danish Ali, Deepak and Hrishikesh, had been compelled to end their fast earlier after developing severe medical complications.

These events unfolded against the backdrop of the shocking kidnapping of Sonam Wangchuk by plainclothes police personnel from the protest site on July 18. Attempts were also made to kidnap AISA activists, but the comrades successfully resisted the police's attempts. Following this hijacking of the movement's leadership, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke, along with several others, also began an indefinite hunger strike.

White bedsheets emerged as a new symbol of the state's attempt to conceal accountability and facilitate repression. Sonam Wangchuk was forcibly taken to Safdarjung Hospital, but he refused to end his fast until the demands of the youth were met, including accountability for the paper leaks and the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

What the police failed to understand was that, over the past month, Jantar Mantar had transformed from merely being a landmark in Delhi into a living space of dissent, defiance and creative resistance. It had become a safe and welcoming space for women, children, students, youth and everyone who dreamed of change. People from every walk of life and every section of society came together to build and sustain this movement. From political posters, revolutionary art and

songs by AISA, SFI, AISF and other comrades, to the creative memes, reels and cultural expressions of Gen Z, Jantar Mantar had evolved into a vibrant carnival of resistance.

July 20: When Delhi Shook

On July 20, as Sonam Wangchuk remained detained at Safdarjung Hospital and preparations for the Parliament March were underway alongside the culmination of AISA's hunger strike, massive double-storey barricades were being welded around Jantar Mantar in an attempt to cage the movement. At the same time, a large contingent of police entered from the rear of the Jantar Mantar protest site and launched a brutal assault on the movement's leaders. CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke was picked up and several AISA leaders were seriously injured. Even before the Parliament March began, police in several BJP-ruled states had launched a pre-emptive crackdown, detaining students and youth leaders, including AISA leaders in Uttarakhand, to prevent them from joining the march in Delhi.

But what the police failed to understand was that their iron cage was far too small to contain the determination of a generation fighting for its future. Beyond the barricades, the crowd kept swelling. Despite roadblocks at every nook and corner of Delhi and the city being turned into a military zone, students, youth, parents and people from every section of society continued pouring in. All roads leading to Jantar Mantar were flooded with people determined to march peacefully. The air reverberated with slogans of Inquilab Zindabad, Jai Bhim and Vande Mataram. Portraits of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi and others rose above the sea of

protesters.

Suddenly, at around 9.30 am, internet services were completely suspended across an area spanning nearly two kilometres, a shutdown that continued until late evening. Police repeatedly blared announcements over loudspeakers declaring the imposition of prohibitory orders, warning people not to assemble and ordering them to remain inside the barricades. The swelling crowd refused to budge. One young woman mocked the police's repeated announcements in the style of a viral SpongeBob meme, turning the state's warnings into a moment of collective defiance.

The police responded with repeated lathi charges, but failed to disperse the crowd.

Soon, the towering double-storey barricades surrounding Jantar Mantar were breached and a virtual tsunami of Gen Z youth, students, parents and civil society activists surged towards Parliament Street.

From that moment onwards unfolded one of the most brutal episodes of police violence witnessed in recent years. Women protesters were molested. Senior police officers were seen slapping and beating women and even children. Lathis were used until they broke. Shock batons were deployed. Nail-studded batons were wielded against protesters. Heads, necks, backs, stomachs, legs and even private parts were targeted. No part of the human body was spared. Senior police officials were heard exhorting their personnel to "beat them to a pulp" and describing it as "an experience". Some of the worst violence was unleashed by plainclothes personnel, whom the police later claimed belonged to a special unit. Most police personnel in uniform had also removed or concealed their name

identification plates.

Despite wave after wave of lathi charges, the peaceful protesters marched on and reached Sansad Marg roundabout. It was impossible to count the number of injured. Many lay bleeding from their heads and faces. Even office-goers and passers-by who happened to be in the area were mercilessly beaten, as though the police were competing in a grotesque contest of brutality.

At one point, a small group of protesters had gathered on the opposite side of the Parliament Street barricade. A senior police officer personally asked them to cross over and join the main protest. The barricades were opened and the students began walking forward. Barely a few seconds later, the police cynically launched another lathi charge on these completely unsuspecting youth.

By then, reports had also emerged that earlier in the day another large group of protesters had successfully reached the new Parliament complex, only to be met with tear gas and a brutal lathi charge. Visuals from the area showed CRPF personnel taking positions with firearms and water cannons inside the Parliament complex.

The harder the batons struck the bones of the youth, the stronger their resolve became. By around 3 pm, every barricade leading up to Sansad Marg had fallen. The entire stretch of Sansad Marg leading towards the old Parliament complex was filled with protesters. Some marched forward raising slogans, some sang songs of resistance, while others met strangers who quickly became comrades in a common struggle.

Soon afterwards, the police launched another massive

assault, firing tear gas shells indiscriminately while carrying out a full-scale lathi charge that pushed protesters from Sansad Marg towards Parliament Street and eventually into Connaught Place. Tens of thousands of young people filled Connaught Place and the surrounding areas. It was here that the repression reached its most savage form. Tear gas shells exploded continuously as police personnel chased protesters through roads and narrow lanes, beating not only demonstrators but even ordinary office-goers returning home.

Every road and every lane of Connaught Place bore testimony to the violence. The entire area was engulfed in the choking smell of tear gas. It also became increasingly evident that the police were using pellet-type ammunition, with several people suffering piercing injuries.

Yet the determined youth refused to retreat. They doused tear gas shells with water, shared drinking water, treated one another's injuries and helped those struggling with burns, breathing difficulties and the effects of tear gas. Amid the unprecedented brutality, we witnessed an extraordinary spirit of solidarity. Men, women, children, the elderly, friends and strangers stood together, helping one another in every possible way.

Having completely failed to disperse the protesters, the Modi government and the Delhi Police watched as thousands regrouped at Jantar Mantar and re-energized the movement. This time, the protest spilled far beyond its original site, engulfing the surrounding areas as ever-growing numbers of people gathered to demand justice, accountability and the right to a dignified future.

Voices of Condemnation Across India and the World

The unprecedented crackdown on students and youth shook the conscience of the entire country. Owing to the complete internet shutdown imposed across central Delhi, the horrific visuals of the police assault began reaching the public only later in the evening, when they flooded social media. By the time reports of the brutality started emerging, hundreds had been admitted to hospitals. One young woman was in the ICU with a fractured skull, while several others had suffered pellet injuries, including suspected eye injuries.

Condemning the violence unleashed on students and youth, CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said that the events of July 20 exposed the Delhi Police as a force acting like goons to crush a democratic movement. He said the repression was part of a larger conspiracy to suppress the movement, just as the Modi government had attempted during the farmers' movement and the Shaheen Bagh movement. But, he asserted, July 20 had also demonstrated the determination of India's youth. Far from intimidating them, the brutality had strengthened their resolve to carry forward the struggle for better education, accountability and justice with even greater determination.

On July 21 and 22, protests in solidarity with the student-youth movement rapidly spread across the country. In Mumbai, despite heavy police repression, massive demonstrations and acts of defiance continued unabated. In Patna, AISA participated in a massive protest march towards Raj Bhavan on July 22. The march was met with police lathi charges and water cannons, but the determined

students broke through the barricades and marched ahead. CPI(ML) MLA Sandeep Saurav and MLC Shashi Yadav joined the protest and strongly condemned the BJP government's assault on students whose only demand was justice and accountability.

In West Bengal, protests were on July 20 against police brutality in several districts including a massive march in Kolkata on July 21 by left students organisations.

Protests condemning the Delhi Police crackdown and demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the disbanding of the NTA, the scrapping of the NEP, and affordable, quality and inclusive education for all were organised in Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Surat, Hyderabad, Kerala, Lucknow, Andhra Pradesh and several other parts of the country.

As this article goes to press, disturbing reports are emerging of massive police firing on youth in Bihar's Jehanabad on July 23, where they were demanding accountability for the paper leaks.

The Indian diaspora also strongly condemned the violence against students and youth. Protest demonstrations were organised in London, Amsterdam and several other cities across the world. On July 20, Indian diaspora members, Indian students and solidarity activists organised a major protest outside the Indian High Commission in London in solidarity with the students and young people resisting repression in Delhi.

In its statement, the South Asia Solidarity Group declared its unconditional solidarity with the students and young people who had taken to the streets of Delhi in their hundreds of thousands, demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan as part of a sustained

struggle against corruption. The statement observed: "It is no surprise to us that the Modi government has responded to the students' movement first with indifference and now with violence. Their attempts to suppress the protests, from barricading Delhi's major thoroughfares and placing supporters under house arrest in towns across the country, to unleashing lathi charges, brutal beatings and tear gas, have made this about far more than education. It has shown the world that the Modi government and the RSS will stop at nothing to crush democratic protest."

On July 23, CPI(ML) MPs Raja Ram Singh and Sudama Prasad joined fellow INDIA Alliance MPs in visiting Gandhi Smriti in Delhi to express solidarity with the student-youth movement. The CPI(ML) MPs unequivocally condemned the brutal police crackdown of July 20 and demanded strict action against the officials responsible for unleashing violence on peaceful students and youth exercising their democratic right to protest.

The Silence and Hollow Promises

On July 22, the issue of police brutality against students and youth was mentioned before the Supreme Court. However, Chief Justice Surya Kant refused to urgently take up the matter, remarking, "Don't waste our time." Just as the Cockroach movement itself was triggered by the Chief Justice's earlier remarks, these words of July 22 too will be remembered by history.

As Jantar Mantar and its surrounding areas transformed into a full-fledged site of resistance and defiance, the Modi-Shah regime, instead of addressing the demands and growing discontent of the youth, intensified its tactics of repression. Around sixteen Metro stations surrounding Jantar Mantar

were shut every day. Internet services in the area continued to be suspended, while police personnel routinely stopped, questioned and intimidated young people attempting to reach the protest site.

After a long silence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi finally issued a statement. Yet, instead of responding to the concerns and demands raised by the students and youth, he attempted to divert public attention with another announcement, a fast-track court, reminiscent of the ₹15 lakh jumla. Even as the Godi media hailed the announcement of a fast-track court as the government's answer to the paper leak crisis, another development laid bare the hollowness of its promises. The CBI had given a clean chit to Sanjeev Mukhiya, earlier described by investigators as the mastermind behind the NEET-UG 2024 paper leak.

But the youth remained clear in their demands and unwavering in their determination. They demanded the resignation of the Education Minister, strict action against the Delhi Police officials responsible for the brutal assault on students and youth, and the withdrawal of all cases against the protesters..

Echoing the demands of the movement and rejecting the Modi government's diversionary tactics, CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya responded to the PM's statement: "If you want the youth to take your post seriously, start with the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan. After serial leaks and serial clean chits, the buck stops with the government. Heads will have to roll. Don't forget that July is always followed by August, the historic month of India's independence, when in 1942 the people of India asked the British rulers to Quit India, and five years later the British rulers indeed had to quit." ■

Defeat the Tyranny of the Venal Modi Regime

While the government is going berserk with its repression of protesting youth with unprecedented brutality on the one hand, and Operation Lotus expedition on the other, the governance in the country is in utter shambles. Consider the three biggest corruption cases that are currently rocking the whole country. The repeated paper leaks that are driving students to suicide and ruining the futures of the youth; the land accumulation spree of the Madhya Pradesh CM and his family in and around Ujjain; and the land and donations scam surrounding the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya which is projected by the Modi government and the Sangh brigade as the epitome of faith for devout Hindus. These are signs of a system that does not care for any kind of accountability and believes that anything can pass. These are scams that illustrate the maxim 'absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

Ram Mandir Donation Scam

Unlike many other scams in the Modi era, this is one scam which the Modi government could not deny and the Modi Media could not suppress. It is a scam which concerns as much the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust as the Modi government which appointed it. It is a scam which directly concerns the RSS and the VHP, and both organisations have had to officially admit the scam and its implications for crores of devout Hindus whose trust stands jolted. It is a scam where the local journalists and lawyers of Ayodhya are determined to fight on for complete disclosure and justice. Ayodhya has been at the heart of

the Sangh brigade's aggressive mobilisation strategy over the last four decades. The first phase of the campaign ended with the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 in brazen violation of India's constitutional vision and framework of rule of law. Over the next twenty-seven years, the Indian state and society, including the executive, the judiciary, the dominant media or the civil society at large, continued to display all the fundamental waverings and weaknesses that had emboldened the Sangh brigade to carry out the demolition in the first place.

The advent of the Modi era and the growing convergence between the executive and the judiciary hastened the arrival of the bizarre 2019 Supreme Court verdict which condemned the egregiously criminal act of demolition of the Babri Masjid but handed over the land for construction of the temple and directed the Union Government to set up a trust to manage and oversee the construction of the Ram Mandir. Since then Narendra Modi has started behaving more like a 'priest King' of ancient India than an elected Prime Minister answerable and accountable to the people of India. To the Modi government, Ayodhya today is more a seat of power and hub of religious tourism and commerce than a traditional temple town of North India.

This is not the first time that allegations of corruption have surfaced around the Ayodhya Ram Mandir project. Before the current eruption of donation embezzlement allegations, there have been serial corruption charges during various phases of the Ram Mandir construction

campaign. And most of these allegations came from within Ayodhya, levelled by the Nirmohi Akhara, one of the original litigants in the Ayodhya title dispute. Way back in the late 1980s and early 1990s Mahant Sitaram had accused the VHP of swindling over 1,400 crore collected from devotees from across the world. There were allegations about misappropriation of Ram Shilas or consecrated bricks in the subsequent phase. More recently there have been several disclosures of inflated land transfer deals - including a case of land purchased for Rs 2 crore transferred soon after for Rs 18.5 crore to the Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

All these allegations were systematically ignored by the Sangh-BJP establishment and successive governments. The unconstitutional act of demolition of a mosque, the electoral exploitation of religious sentiment and allegations of financial irregularities, nothing seemed to matter much as long as the temple was not yet built. But perceptions seem to have begun to change since construction of the temple. The premature inauguration of the temple ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections did not deliver the much expected electoral dividends to the BJP. The NDA lost the majority of Lok Sabha seats in UP including the seat of Ayodhya itself. Narendra Modi himself had a narrow controversial escape in Varanasi. And now the donation embezzlement scam has erupted as the biggest moral crisis for not just the temple trust but for the entire Sangh-BJP establishment.

The Sangh-BJP damage-control exercise appears aimed at having a controlled and limited investigation so as to protect the big shots and lay the blame at the doorstep of lower level employees. General Secretary of the Trust, Champat

Rai, the suspected lynchpin of the scam who is also the topmost RSS appointee in the Trust, has now been replaced by another RSS appointee Krishna Mohan. Meanwhile Hindutva outfits like the Hindu Raksha Dal have asked non-Hindus not to intervene in this Hindu affair where money has only changed hands within the Hindu community! VHP international president wants the police to take action against opposition leaders complaining about the theft of donations. And RSS Sarkaryavah (general secretary) calls for Hindu unity to 'thwart the conspiracies of anti-Hindu and anti-national forces seeking to malign the Hindu dharma and society by exploiting this unfortunate incident'.

Ujjain Scam

The details emerging from Ujjain are far more shocking. Madhya Pradesh BJP CM Mohan Yadav has been at the helm of the land development projects in and around Ujjain for the last two decades and more. From 2004 to 2010 he was chairperson of the Ujjain Development Authority. During the next three years he was head of MP Tourism Development Corporation. Since 2013 he has been MLA from Ujjain South and since December 13, 2023 he has been the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. During this last period his family and real estate companies owned by his extended family members have purchased at least 137 plots measuring a total of 168 acres, mostly around new road projects in and around Ujjain or in areas demarcated for conversion from agricultural to residential land according to the Ujjain Master Plan 2035.

It should be noted that like Ayodhya, Ujjain too is fast emerging as a hub of religious tourism and is set to host a two-month-long Mahakumbh from 27 March to 27 May, 2028. There is a resultant real estate boom around Ujjain and the land value is shooting up like anything. The size of the massive windfall gains accruing to the Mohan Yadav family as a result of its strategically timed and located land acquisition spree is anybody's guess. While the CM has kept quiet about the detailed disclosures made in a five-part investigation published in The Indian Express, his extended family defends it as a 'legitimate business' predating Mohan Yadav's ministerial rise and the BJP calls the scam disclosure an anti-sanatan conspiracy!

Whether it is the case of Adani's corporate fraud, MP CM Mohan Yadav's land acquisition spree in Ujjain, systematic embezzlement of donations in Ayodhya, or glorification of oppressors of women, the Sangh brigade always jumps in support of corruption and patriarchal violence. Whistle-blowers from within the RSS, like Mahipal Singh in the case of the Ayodhya donation theft scam, are sidelined, if not 'mysteriously' eliminated. In the name of religion, the RSS has long been violating every law of the land and every tenet of the Indian Constitution. The Ram Mandir donation theft scam comes as the latest instance of the habitual RSS violation of transparency, legality and accountability.

The venal regime is desperate to hold on to power by breaking opposition parties, buying MPs and MLAs, disenfranchising citizens and silencing dissenters. The anti-corruption protests will have to hold this venal regime to account and defeat this tyranny. The regime that ruins the future of India's youth, loots India's workers and farmers, and plays with the faith of crores of devout Indians must be brought to its knees. ■

Donation loot in Ayodhya Ram Temple

Lal Bahadur Singh

Critics are saying that after Gandhi ji's assassination, this corruption in Ram temple is the second most ignominious moment for the RSS which has disappointed even a section of their own supporters. As per speculation based on information available in public domain, hundreds of crores of rupees and precious ornaments donated by devotees have been stolen from Ayodhya Ram Temple. Actually the theft had been going on since the beginning of the construction or even perhaps since the campaign for temple construction. However RSS and BJP top brass including Prime Minister Modi remain tight-lipped on the issue. RSS General Secretary Hosbole in the first official statement by RSS has said that the anti-Hindu and antinational forces are utilising this incident to defame Hindu dharma. He cautions Hindus against such conspiracies.

It is noteworthy that the temple is governed by a trust formed by the Modi government and the members are either close to the government or RSS. In fact they have made every attempt to conceal the mega loot. This large scale embezzlement has not only thoroughly exposed the high moral ground propagated by RSS, its 'Chal, Charitra and Chehra' and BJP's 'party with a difference' claim.

People know that in this case the buck stops only at PMO doors whose powerful officer Nripendra Mishra was made all in all in Ayodhya by none other than PM Modi himself. Obviously

neither Nripendra Mishra, nor Modi or Bhagwat can escape responsibility and accountability as Modi loyalist officers and RSS leaders were in charge of the whole affair in the temple. It is unique that Ram temple management was entirely in the hands of RSS which is a political organisation in the garb of cultural organisation. The loot of donations is institutionalised corruption by VHP-RSS and BJP at the higher levels. The siphoning of such a large amount of money that went on for such a long period can't be the handiwork of lower level individual employees. Moreover this loot was going on along with alleged land scam and 40% cuts in infrastructural work. So it is impossible that Nripendra Mishra and hence Modi or Champat Rai and hence Bhagwat knew nothing about such huge loot of devotees' donations.

As UP assembly elections are approaching, this development has serious political implications. The issue was broken to the media by Akhilesh Yadav. His local Ayodhya leader ex-MLA Pavan Pandey is also quite vocal on the issue. AAP MP Sanjay Singh exposed back then the land scam but no action was taken then on the issue.

The UP Chief Minister Yogi is making all efforts to maintain a bold face in an election year but being a part of the ruling dispensation he is simply not taking any decisive step to unearth the scam and punish the real culprits. However this dacoity is fully exposed and the civil society too is much agitated. Faizabad bar association members took out a procession and submitted a memorandum demanding arrest of Champat Rai and Anil Mishra. Bar has also decided not to defend any of the accused in the court.

However what is needed is an impartial inquiry into the matter which may investigate all aspects in a holistic manner and punish all culprits, however powerful they may be. Maybe the Modi government tries to distract people by tactics like a bill on delimitation in the coming Monsoon session, but it won't be easy for the RSS to wipe out the black scar of this mega-corruption and open loot. ■

Donation Theft Allegations Reach Badrinath Temple

▲ **INDRESH MAIKHURI**

Amid reports coming from the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, allegations of theft of offerings have also begun to surface at the Badrinath Temple in Uttarakhand.

As per reports, Pramod Nautiyal, the personal assistant (PA) to the Chairman of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC), is accused of embezzling money while counting the temple offerings. It has also been alleged that CCTV footage shows Nautiyal carrying bundles of currency notes out of the counting room, and that Nautiyal allegedly stole money on multiple occasions, not just once.

Following these reports, on 8 July, a case was registered against Nautiyal at the Badrinath police station, and he was suspended the same day. By the time of writing, he had been arrested.

As mentioned earlier, Pramod Nautiyal was serving as the personal assistant to the Chairman of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee. He had worked in this capacity under three successive chairmen. This raises an obvious question: if he was the chairman's personal assistant, he should ordinarily have been accompanying the chairman at all times. While the chairman was based in Dehradun, Nautiyal was stationed in Badrinath performing the duties of a counting officer for temple offerings. How was this possible? Was it the chairman who decided to post his personal assistant in Badrinath? If so, what was the rationale behind such a decision? The decision itself raises serious questions about the chairman.

After being suspended, Nautiyal was attached to the Temple Committee's office in Joshimath. However, instead of reporting there, he disappeared without informing anyone or obtaining valid permission. Reports later emerged that he had approached the Nainital High Court, but the court granted him no relief. He was subsequently arrested by the police on 13 July and sent to jail, only after the court declined to intervene.

Reports also emerged that over the past few years the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee had received 20 to 25 laptops from various banks under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, but their whereabouts are now unknown. Similarly, two ambulances and a Tempo Traveller vehicle received as donations have also reportedly gone missing.

The Badrinath and Kedarnath temples in Uttarakhand are administered under the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee Act, 1939, under which the committee's chairman, vice-chairman, and members are appointed by the state government. Since the BJP has been in power in Uttarakhand for nearly a decade, the committee has also been under the control of BJP appointees. During this period, the committee's functioning has repeatedly been mired in controversy.

In 2023, allegations surfaced that a donor had contributed 228 kilograms of gold for gold-plating the Kedarnath Temple, but a substantial quantity of the gold was allegedly embezzled and brass and copper plates were installed instead. Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati of Jyotirmath has also made similar allegations.

On 4 May 2025, BJP leader Hemant Dwivedi, considered to be a close associate of Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, was appointed Chairman of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee by the BJP government in Uttarakhand. Between 2009 and 2012, Hemant Dwivedi served as Chairman of the Terai Seed Development Corporation. His tenure there was highly controversial, with allegations of corruption against him. He has also faced allegations of land fraud, and a related case is still pending. Despite this controversial record, he was appointed chairman of the Temple Committee, reportedly because of his proximity to the Chief Minister.

In April 2026, newspaper reports alleged that Vijay Kapruwan, the Vice-Chairman of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee and a BJP leader, had shown his wife as a peon employed by the committee and had been drawing her salary.

More recently, allegations have also emerged that the expenses of VIP pilgrims visiting Kedarnath - including their travel, accommodation, and food - were paid from the Temple Committee's funds. Among those named were many BJP leaders. It has also been alleged that bills were raised in the names of pilgrims who had actually paid their own expenses.

There have also been allegations that donation funds have been misused for unnecessary office relocations and extravagant spending instead of being used to improve facilities for pilgrims. According to one report, the Temple Committee operated an elaborate office in the upscale Canal Road area of Dehradun, where ₹15 lakh was spent on maintenance in 2025. The office was then abruptly vacated and shifted to a rented building in Rishikesh. The Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee already owns two guest houses and office premises at prime locations in Rishikesh that require repairs and maintenance. Instead of repairing and utilizing those properties, thousands of rupees are reportedly being spent every month on renting a new building.

The cases of theft of offerings, embezzlement, loot, and wasteful expenditure that have surfaced during the tenure of the BJP-led Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee, in addition to the controversies in Ayodhya, make it clear that religion serves merely as a cover for its pursuit of political power. ■

The Sangh Parivar is Wasting No Time in Developing its Bengal Laboratory: The Opposition Cannot Afford to Wait and Watch

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



The Bharatiya Janata Party has had to wait for decades to grab power in West Bengal. The wait finally ended in May and work has now begun on war-footing to fit Bengal into the Sangh's ideological and political mould.

After just two months in power, the Sangh brigade has already unleashed a blitzkrieg, offering Bengal a crash course to familiarise the people with the full fury of its communal agenda. The public-private partnership model of fascist terror with the state empowering and collaborating with vandal brigades on the ground is working overtime across the state. Meanwhile, the government is losing no time in unleashing its policy regime and setting the tone of its bulldozer-powered model of encounter raj.

Over the last decade, fascist rule in India has demonstrated three prominent features - mob lynching, bulldozer raj ('bulldozer justice', in official parlance) and targeted elimination dressed as 'encounter deaths'. All three features are already being proudly flaunted by the new regime. The first incident of pelting of eggs at Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee set a new trend early on

and the dominant media of West Bengal, now completely aligned with the new regime, promptly normalised it as an expression of public anger against the TMC-era corruption. The media even coined a new term – ‘egg therapy’ – for this unmistakable symptom of a mob taking the law into its own hands.

Encounter Raj

Encounter killings were adopted as a strategy by Amit Shah in Gujarat. One of these cases had even landed him in jail in a judicial era where the powerful still did not enjoy complete impunity. Subsequently Uttar Pradesh chief minister Adityanath incorporated encounter killings as a declared policy of governance along with bulldozing of houses, mosques, shops or other institutions belonging to members of the Muslim community. The BJP chief minister of West Bengal has turned this policy into a film dialogue of sorts “sakale jama, rate kharoch” – deliver to the police in the morning and kill by the nighttime. The first application of this policy has already been witnessed in case of the horrific rape and murder of an 11-year-old girl in the Baruipur area near Kolkata. The encounter victim, one Prabhas Mandal, was an eye witness of the original crime who had already named a few people, including a local BJP leader.

A policy of encounter killings can only mean a brazen negation of any notion of rule of law. It only helps the police become a rogue power and by no means has any deterrent effect on the rate of crimes. UP under Adityanath is witnessing on an average five encounters every day and yet the state continues to top the list of reported crimes against women. The Allahabad high court pointed out how the encounter raj was short-circuiting the criminal

justice system and ordered mandatory FIR and investigation into each encounter, while exposing the partisan loyalties of the UP police.

Plethora of Moves

Combine this arbitrary repressive mode of governance with the new policies and laws being set in motion. The government now has the power to detain anyone without trial for as long as one full year and such detainees will not even have the right to have any legal counsel to represent them. A uniform civil code bill aimed at obstructing, if not incriminating, interfaith marriages and live-in relationships, has been referred to a nine-member committee for further examination. Other Backward Classes reservation has been slashed drastically from 17% to 7%. All Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and OBC certificates issued since 2011 have been subjected to mandatory re-verification. Fifty-one state-run Industrial Training Institutes have been identified for privatisation. Eleven holding centres have been set up to corral suspected Bangladeshi citizens before pushing them back into Bangladesh. This ‘pushback’ is not what is called deportation in diplomatic terms, it is an illegal forcible act whereby people are pushed into Bangladesh territory across the border. The return of Sweetie Bibi and five other Indian citizens including two minors who had been illegally banished to Bangladesh, after a yearlong legal battle, should serve as an eye-opener to the cruelty and injustice being meted out in the name of this ‘operation push back’.

True to the RSS agenda of ideological aggression, history and culture have already emerged as key battlegrounds for the new BJP government. A prominent road in one of Kolkata’s predominantly

Muslim neighborhoods, known for nearly a century as Suhrawardy Avenue, after eminent physician and former Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, Hassan Suhrawardy, has been renamed as Gopal Mukherjee Road after a person who has already been glorified as the saviour of Bengali Hindus in Vivek Agnihotri’s propaganda film The Bengal Files. Indeed the CM has announced a panel chaired by the controversial Kartik Maharaj to evaluate the names of Kolkata roads and replace ‘Mughal’ and ‘Pathan’ names. Kartik Maharaj, or Swami Pradiptananda of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, was awarded Padmashri in 2025 even though he faces a rape allegation and is accused of instigating anti-Muslim violence.

Choice of Tradition

Meanwhile, Syama Prasad Mookerjee has already been ordained as the father of West Bengal. June 20 has been designated as West Bengal day to mark the day when undivided Bengal was bifurcated as part of the overall partition of pre-independence India. Amidst these loaded attempts at redefining the history of West Bengal, came another ideological statement when the school midday meal project in Kolkata was handed over to Iskcon which promptly announced that eggs would be taken off the menu to uphold vegetarianism. Beyond the mid-day meal menu and the brazen undermining of children’s nutrition, the growing presence of Iskcon in West Bengal should also be seen in the wider cultural context of the state.

As the land of the great Bhakti movement icon Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, West Bengal has always had a strong Vaishnava tradition known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This 16th century

tradition was carried forward in the 19th and early 20th centuries by Harichand Thakur (1812-1878) and his son Guruchand Thakur (1847-1937) in a strong anti-caste direction and consolidated as Matua religion. This was the period when Jotiba and Savitribai Phule were promoting mass education, especially education for women and the oppressed castes, as a weapon of empowerment and radical social awakening. From Chaitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavism to the Harichand-Guruchand school of Matua religion, the entire legacy is now being sought to be appropriated by Iskcon which operates as a powerful global ideological ally of RSS in its project of aggressive Hindutva.

The BJP wants to unleash its whole agenda without losing a moment. It believes the iron is still hot and must strike as hard as possible. Like Narendra Modi still keeping the public busy with Nehru and the Congress, the BJP in West Bengal would like to use Mamata Banerjee and the TMC as the distractionary veil behind which it can execute its gameplan undisturbed. The TMC has already been subjected to a threeway division. The rebel MLAs are being propped up as the 'real TMC' to rob Mamata Banerjee of her party, the majority Lok Sabha MPs of TMC are being held in the holding centre called the Nationalist Citizens Party of India, while three Rajya Sabha MPs have been converted and baptised straight into the BJP. Meanwhile, opposition on the ground from all quarters is being sought to be silenced by orchestrated mob violence and state intervention. It will be a mistake for the secular progressive opinion of West Bengal to treat the BJP as a passing phenomenon and its unfolding agenda as just some gimmick in the name of governance. The Sangh brigade is serious about turning West Bengal into another safe laboratory for its project of fascist remodelling of India. If the BJP is not wasting a moment, can the Left or any opposition worth its name be caught waiting?

(The article was first published in The Wire on July 14, 2026.) ■

New Rulers, New Myths: The Politics Behind the West Bengal Foundation Day

▲ DR. AKASH BHATTACHARYA

On 20 June 2026, nearly 80 years after its birth as a state of independent India, West Bengal celebrated its first foundation day. On this date, in 1947, the Bengal legislature voted to partition Bengal, as part of the impending Mountbatten Plan to partition India along religious lines. Thereby the state of West Bengal was born. With all parties on the verge of accepting the vivisection of the subcontinent, the partition of Bengal was fait accompli by this point.

Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka celebrate the days of their official creation as foundation days. The West Bengal Foundation Day marks an addition to this list, with a twist. A brain-child of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it not only celebrates the state's creation but also adorns the state with a dangerous myth of power: that West Bengal is predominantly Bengali Hindu, and that this Bengali Hindu identity defines the state.

The 'Two State' Theory

In his column in The Telegraph, West Bengal's finance minister Swapan Dasgupta has argued that the designation of the Foundation Day by his government is an act of historical recognition of the distinctiveness of West Bengal vis-à-vis Bangladesh. This recognition marks the start of a long-delayed confrontation with the trauma of partition by the people of West Bengal. Far from being an act of myth-making, this recognition in fact debunks the myth of a unified Bengali identity, mischievously perpetuated by the secularists, he suggests.

Dasgupta's argument is strongly animated by the idea of a bipolar Bengali identity – the Bengali Hindu and the Bengali Muslim being the two poles. Within this framework, these two identities are understood to be seamless and distinctive, and often antagonistic. In the process, each becomes uniform and overwhelming in their own right, shaping the political, social and cultural lives on either side of the Indo-Bangladesh border.

The bipolar framework, as we all know, has a troubling past. Hindu / Muslim bipolarity was the key idea behind the 'Two Nation Theory'. It laid the political and intellectual foundation for the Indian partition. However, as the enduring cultural diversity of Indian, Pakistan and Bangladesh show, the partition did not confirm the general acceptance or legitimacy

of the 'Two Nation Theory'.

Effected under extremely complicated circumstances involving multiple stakeholders, and legitimized through an election that was based on an extremely narrow franchise, the partition was decisive and irreversible. However, it was anything but an inevitable culmination of the purported Hindu/Muslim bipolarity. Millions of Muslims remained in India, and in West Bengal, by choice.

Though few Hindus remain in Pakistan and Bangladesh as compared to Muslims in India, heterogeneity and diversity are essential elements of all South Asian nations. Majoritarian governments of each of the post-partition states have had to go to great lengths to tear apart the composite culture of these societies. They have still not fully succeeded despite the violence that they have unleashed time and again.

The Left-Out Bengals

Proponents of uniformity tend to underestimate the essentially fluid and layered nature of identities. Any identity – be it Bengali, Bengali Hindu, Bengali Muslim, or Indian – is based on commonalities amidst differences and diversity. Dasgupta passionately argues about the existence of not one but two Bengals. In the process he ignores the fact that there aren't two but many Bengals.

Besides a Hindu Bengal and a Muslim Bengal, there is a Dalit Bengal, an Adivasi Bengal, a Christian Bengal, a Buddhist Bengal, a rich man's Bengal, a working-class Bengal, a resident Bengal, a migrant Bengal, and so on. Each of these Bengals cut across the Indo-Bangladesh border. Macro-identities such as Bengali Hindu, Bengali Muslim, Bengali and Indian are real too,

but they are immersed within the many Bengals and do not stand apart from them.

The official 70 (Hindu)/27 (Muslim) statistic based on the 2011 census overshadows the many sects and denominations, castes, classes, and genders, that comprise these two blocs. The identities and interests of these smaller blocs converge on some issues and diverge on others. For instance, Dalits (23.51 percent) and Adivasis (5.8 percent) can hardly be straightjacketed as Hindus or Muslims without taking into account internal hierarchies within these religions. Besides a significant portion of West Bengal's population are officially neither Hindu nor Muslim (nearly 12 lakhs, as per the 2011 census). Christians, Buddhists and other denominations may constitute a miniscule percentage of the state's population, but that does not mean their enduring influence on Bengali culture should be either subsumed or swept aside by the Hindu/Muslim bipolar framework.

Bangladesh mirrors much of this diversity despite adopting Islam as state religion. According to the 2022 census, Bangladesh has nearly 1.5 crore Hindus, nearly 10 lakh Buddhists and 5 lakh Christians. Adopting a state religion hasn't necessarily allowed Bangladesh to govern efficiently. The percentage of non-Muslims has steadily decreased in the country.

Whether Bangladesh laments this decrease or not, is beside the point here. For the better part of its history, Islam has been a key marker of East Pakistan / Bangladesh's identity. India, in contrast, has always taken pride in its diversity and tolerance. There is no reason for that to change now, certainly not in Bengal.

Dasgupta's punchline – 'Indian Bengal and Bangladesh have commonalities but they are distinct' – is a truism that no serious person has ever denied. Whether these two regions, or whether Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, Buddhists and Christians in West Bengal, are distinct or not, has never been the question. The question is how Indian governments should manage diversity and ensure that different communities pull together in one direction – towards the constitutional goals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

A Fictive History

Dasgupta identifies three stages in West Bengal's journey towards celebrating Hindu-ness: first came the long denial of Hindu-Muslim distinctiveness by the secularists, then the secularists lost legitimacy due to demographic transformations in Bengal, and finally West Bengal awakened to its distinctly Hindu identity by choosing the BJP over the secularists in the 2026 Assembly elections.

Hindu and Muslim distinctiveness are both organic and rooted in history. Contrary to Dasgupta's accusation, no one has denied this through 'intellectual acrobatics.' Scholars and thinking people have only questioned whether bipolar frameworks can or should serve as general models for governing South Asia.

Bipolarity champions love to claim that they represent all members of their respective communities, like the BJP claims to represent all Hindus. They tend to deny the internal fractures within these blocks of identity, often to the detriment of those on the wrong sides of caste, class, and gender divides within those communities. Scholars and

thinking people have questioned these claims and denials too, and rightly so.

The finance minister criticizes the so-called secular disavowal of 'Muslim separatism' in causing partition. People sensitive to the role of multiple stakeholders in the 1947 partition have never denied the role of 'Muslim separatism', they have just refused to singularize and exceptionalize its role. They have criticized one-sided and simplistic narratives that fan the fires of communal strife.

Contrary to his claims, the non-existent denial did not get exposed by the demographic transformation in Bengal's border districts. That transformation exists more at the level of political discourse than at the level of ground realities. Between 2001 and 2011, when the census data were available, the share of the Muslim population in West Bengal's border districts rose between 0.6 and 2.6 percentage points (pp) over the decade – nowhere near the whopping 40-pp figure mentioned in political speeches.

Secular political parties did not lose ground when their denial of Dasgupta's fictive history was subsequently exposed by the turn of events. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) lost ground when its ill-executed industrial policies backfired, and different strands of anti-incumbency converged to end its 34-year rule. Fifteen years after the CPIM lost West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress lost ground due to corruption, dynastic politics and the party's deep-seated organizational weaknesses. Many people voted for the BJP expecting industrialization, employment generation, and better overall governance.

It must be stated here that the unified secular identity which Dasgupta projects onto a range of non-BJP parties is questionable too. Indian secularism has existed as a principle rather than as a prescribed set of laws or norms; its interpretations have swung between state intervention and deliberate non-intervention in religious matters. Different parties have interpreted secularism differently. The finance minister forgets that the Trinamool Congress, unlike the Congress and most Left parties, was quite charitable to the Sangh Parivar in its early years in power, in order to provide a counter-weight to the Left.

Reading the Mandate Right

A large number of people voted for the BJP in the 2026 Assembly elections because it appeared to be the only winnable alternative to the increasingly unpopular Trinamool Congress. Trinamool Congress's symbolic gestures towards Muslims such as honorariums for Imams no doubt raised eyebrows. Consolidation of Hindu votes did play a role, but that would never have won BJP the election on its own, if not for the massive anti-incumbency against the ruling party. The mass exclusion of voters (90.82 lakhs) through the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) played a big role too.

Importantly, the SIR not only excluded lakhs of legitimate voters, but also worked as a device of polarization, creating internal enemies for people to vote against. The reality of illegal immigration from Bangladesh falls far short of the scale claimed by the BJP, and Dasgupta knows it. In his column he cleverly avoided discussing it while alluding to demographic transformation in the border

districts. The discursive demons created by the BJP externalizes West Bengal's Muslims rather than illegal Bangladeshis.

The bottom line is quite simple. BJP has won Bengal, but it has not won it because West Bengalis now see themselves as exclusively Hindu. Therefore, the victory has not given the BJP the right to make West Bengal Hindu.

The argument for democratic and efficient governance of diversity is a simple one too. It is ideological and humanitarian, but it also based on practicality. I wish to build this argument not through political polemics, but by invoking an iconic scene from a prominent Bengali film.

In Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire* (The Home and the World), based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel by the same name, the benevolent zamindar Nikhilesh gathers the eminent Hindu citizens of his estate in the wake of a communal conflagration. He pleads with them to calm the situation down because, 'whether anyone wants it or not, Muslims are a part of this country. You cannot imagine India without Muslims.' Nikhilesh's plea fell by the wayside that evening, and he gave up his life trying to fight communal fires the next day.

A benevolent zamindar – be it Nikhilesh or Tagore – need not be our hero, but we would do well to heed his warning. And lest we should forget, Nikhilesh's creators Tagore and Ray – were both Brahmos: a religious denomination that was highly critical of mainstream Hinduism. Perhaps their locations as partial outsiders to Hindu society helped them to see what others could not. A society overwhelmed by (engineered) uniformities loses not only its building blocks but also its critical faculties that are essential to its growth. ■

Encounters, Bulldozers and Mob Lynching

The Changing Face of Bihar's Politics

▲ KUMAR PARVEZ

Bihar has long been regarded as the land of people's movements and struggles for social justice and equality. However, over the past few months, a significant shift has taken place in the state's law-and-order situation and the government's approach, triggering a new and deeply concerning public debate. Bihar has witnessed 28 police encounters in the past seven months, resulting in the deaths of seven individuals.

The growing number of encounters has raised serious questions about the rule of law and constitutional governance. There is a considerable public anger over these encounters which many allege were 'fake' and extrajudicial killings carried out in violation of the constitutional guarantees of the right to life and due process of law. In any democratic nation, only the courts have the authority to determine guilt and impose punishment but in Bihar, it appears that the police themselves are acting as investigator, judge and executioner.

The encounter killing of Sonu Yadav in Siwan has emerged as one of the most disturbing examples. Allegations have been made, both by local residents and political leaders, that the police ignored established legal procedures. Instead of arresting the accused, producing him before a court within twenty-four hours, and allowing him an opportunity to defend himself, the police allegedly shot him dead.

Another troubling example of arbitrary state action is the case of Bharat Tiwari, who was murdered in

Belauti village in the Shahpur area of Bhojpur district. The incident has generated widespread public outrage. Members of Bharat Tiwari's family, particularly his sister, have directly accused the government and the administration of shielding influential individuals involved in the crime and attempting to suppress the case. They allege that political pressure has prevented an impartial investigation, making justice increasingly unlikely. This incident indicates that the law is enforced rigorously against the poor and the powerless, while the influential receive protection from the very institutions that are meant to uphold justice.

Such actions that undermine the due judicial process fundamentally undermine the rule of law. The purpose of such encounters and biased investigations is not to combat crime or deter criminals. Rather, the real objective is to create an atmosphere of fear in society, thereby legitimizing arbitrary exercise of state power. Such developments pose a serious threat to democratic institutions. Under the banner of Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary's policy of 'zero tolerance' towards crime, there are allegations that a particular social group is being systematically portrayed as criminal, despite having historically played a major role in the politics of social justice.

Many are asking why such incidents have increased so sharply after Samrat Choudhary assumed office as Chief Minister. Is this genuinely an effort to control crime, or is it part of a deliberate attempt to replicate Uttar Pradesh's "Yogi model" of

policing in Bihar? This question is now being widely discussed among Bihar's educated citizens as well as the general public.

Another deeply disturbing incident occurred in Rajgir, where two Dalit youths - Shravan Paswan and Pintu Paswan were allegedly beaten to death by a mob. Reports have also emerged from several parts of the state of people being attacked after being asked about their caste and Dalits being assaulted for entering temples. Such incidents are a source of profound shame for any civilized society. As in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar too appears to be moving toward a system in which legal procedures are bypassed and the police and administration are effectively empowered to deliver justice on their own. As has often been the case, the greatest victims of such arbitrary practices are the poor, the landless and other socially vulnerable communities.

On 18 June, police used excessive force against a peaceful protest in Nagarnausa block of Nalanda district. Villagers had been demonstrating for the establishment of a government college after the administration halted the project. According to allegations, the police raided the villages at around five o'clock in the morning, forcibly broke open locked houses, entered homes through rooftops, and assaulted women, children, and elderly residents. Reports claim that a five-year-old child was threatened with being thrown from a rooftop, an eighty-year-old paralysed woman was beaten until she lost consciousness, and a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl had a pistol pointed at her head to intimidate her. It is further alleged that the police damaged more than twenty-five auto-rickshaws and motorcycles, looted shops, and even forcibly took away women's jewellery.

These developments prove that

Bihar is gradually drifting away from the slogan of Sushasan (good governance) towards a 'police state' and 'bulldozer rule'. Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, has argued that the foremost challenge today is to protect the rule of law. According to him, the government seeks to govern through fear while sidelining both the judiciary and the Constitution.

It is important to recognize that this is not merely a question of law and order. The real objective is to weaken the unity of backward classes, Dalits, and minorities—a coalition that, after decades of struggle, had displaced feudal forces from positions of power. Under the pretext of fighting crime, an attempt is being made to restore the old social order under a new political guise. Unless those who believe in social justice and democracy unite, it will become increasingly difficult to prevent Bihar from turning into an 'encounter state'. The unfinished struggle for equality must once again be carried forward collectively—from the streets to Parliament. ■

GROUND REPORT

The Women of Chaiti Pipar Who Foiled a Massacre

▲ KUMAR PARVEZ

When our team reached Chaiti Pipar, a small village situated on the banks of the Falgu River in the Hulasganj block of Jehanabad district, on 8 July 2026, the midday sun was already overhead. At the entrance to the village stood a temporary police outpost, where a few policemen were resting in the shade of a makeshift hut. They had been deployed to provide 'security' to the village—just four days after a horrifying incident that had shaken this otherwise peaceful settlement to its core.

Mainstream newspapers and television channels had portrayed the incident as 'a violent clash between two rival groups involved in the illegal sand-mining business'. However, that version bore little resemblance to reality. The truth was the exact opposite of what had been presented through television cameras and newspaper headlines.

As we entered the village, we first encountered a group of men. They immediately recognized our delegation leader, Comrade Mahanand Singh, former MLA from Arwal. Rather than fear, their faces reflected shared grief, resilience, and determination. After exchanging greetings of 'Lal Salaam', we began discussing the events of the morning of 4 July, and gradually the layers of the story unfolded. Walking further into the village, we reached the very spot where the firing had taken place four days earlier. A group of women stood there, accompanied by several school-going girls. Sitting with them on the ground, we began reconstructing the events of that terrible morning.

Chaiti Pipar is a small settlement consisting of approximately 100 Ravidas households, 10 Ramani households,

and three Yadav households, inhabited primarily by economically disadvantaged families. Although the government has officially prohibited sand mining in the Falgu River, the villagers alleged that Vishnu Sharma, also known as 'Vishnu Don', a resident of the neighbouring village of Ghinji, had continued illegal sand extraction round the clock under the open protection of the local police stations of Ghosi and Hulasganj. According to the villagers, his influence was so overwhelming that merely approaching the river could invite deadly consequences.

Among those living there under conditions of poverty and feudal oppression was Runi Devi. On the morning of 4 July, she made a simple but important request to her husband, Vijay Ram (also known as Vijay Choudhary). "Our daughters are growing up" she told him. "We need to protect them from the indecent gaze of society. We must build a toilet at home. Please go and bring back one or two sacks of sand from the river". Contrast the government's expensive campaign promoting India as 'Open Defecation Free (ODF)' with the harsh reality where Dalit women in many villages are still forced to relieve themselves in the open, exposing them to harassment and intimidation by the criminals of the sand mafia gang.

When Vijay Ram approached the river to collect sand for constructing the toilet, he was confronted by armed men working for Vishnu Don. They threatened him, saying that "if he dared to touch the sand, there would be corpses on the ground". Instead of retreating, the villagers protested what they regarded as an unjust assertion of control over a public resource. A heated argument followed, which eventually subsided. At that moment, the confrontation

appeared to have ended but that was a temporary calm before the upcoming storm. Approximately an hour later, criminals led by Vishnu Don returned, a large group of armed men carrying both firearms and traditional weapons. The attackers entered the Dalit settlement displaying rifles openly. The villagers said that this was not an ordinary assault but a carefully planned operation to execute a 'planned massacre' intended to silence and annihilate the entire settlement. Gunfire reverberated throughout the village. One bullet grazed Reshmi Devi's head, leaving her seriously injured. Ajay Ram was shot directly in the abdomen. Sudhir Ram suffered a gunshot wound in his leg. Within moments, five people lay bleeding on the ground.

The attackers then rounded up several men from the village and began dragging them away by force. Speaking with trembling lips but determined eyes, Kanchan, Sudhir Ram's sister, a student in Class XI described what she had witnessed from the rooftop of her house. She said that she and her sisters watched in horror as their brothers were shot and as bullets rained through the village. For a few moments, she admitted, fear overwhelmed her. But then, she said, an extraordinary courage emerged from within. Instead of hiding inside their homes or breaking down in tears, the women of Chaiti Pipar armed themselves with sticks and rushed directly to confront the attackers, unafraid of the bullets.

When the attackers attempted to carry away Dinesh Ram, whom they had already shot and intended to kill and mutilate, the women resisted. The unarmed women prevailed over the rifles and confronted the heavily armed goons, physically restraining them and freeing their captured husbands and relatives

from the clutches of the attackers. The leader of the group, Vishnu Sharma (Vishnu Don) was held captive by them for nearly half an hour. Having little faith in the local police, they chose not to hand him over to the officers stationed nearby. Instead, they telephoned the senior administrative officials directly and surrendered him into their custody. During the counter offensive of the women, one of the goons, Dheeraj Sharma, was accidentally killed by gunfire from his own associates.

The exemplary courage displayed by the women remind us of the celebrated poem by the revolutionary Hindi poet Gorakh Pandey, originally written against feudal oppression in Kaitharkala, Bihar.

Oh! What happened? What happened?

They were as gentle as cows,

They appeared so helpless!

How did they snatch away the guns?

They confronted the sand-mafia gunmen,

Captured their leader and handed him over to the police,

Freed their men-

These are the women of Chaiti Pipar!

When our team later sat down with Kanchan, they found neither tears nor despair in her eyes. Instead, there was deep anger and a plethora of burning questions directed toward the state of affairs. Challenging the biased official narrative and the media, she said-"the administration and the media claim that this was a clash between two rival mafia groups. I ask them to come and look at our homes. Look at these broken huts. We cannot even afford enough sand to build a wall for our toilets. Do people like us possess guns and

rifles? Why is the administration treating us like this? If we had firearms, would we have kept Vishnu Sharma alive for thirty minutes? Would we have handed him over alive to the police? We would have killed him ourselves. All we had were our sticks and the determination that, if we had to die, we would die fighting".

This incident has sharply divided the political opinion in Jehanabad district. Since the formation of the BJP-led government, feudal elements and the sand mafia have become increasingly emboldened. Some members of the Bhumihar community have attempted to portray this brazen criminal act of violence as a 'caste conflict'. The conduct of Arun Singh, the father of the local MLA Rituraj Singh deserves special mention for its insensitivity. He visited the family of the deceased sand-mafia, Dheeraj Sharma, to offer condolences but did not visit the nearby Dalit settlement of Chaiti Pipar, where several people had been injured.

This incident has strengthened unity among the Chandravanshi community. Many of them now regret having voted for political representatives whom they believe have sided with the perpetrators of the violence. This attack has given rise to an unprecedented and rock-solid unity among the rural poor. Members of the Ravidas, Ramani and Yadav communities are now standing together in opposition to what they describe as terror and intimidation. The progressive elements of society refuse to accept the argument that the incident was a struggle between two caste groups. Rather, they believe that the fight is between the terror unleashed by the sand mafia and the resolve of the rural poor to fight back for their rights and self-respect. Even the state administration is fractured in their

assessment of the incident.

Kanchan highlighted a particularly painful consequence of the atmosphere of terror—the education of village girls. She explains that the education of girls has effectively come to a halt because the only nearby secondary school is Ginji High School, and the route to the school now passes through an area they no longer consider safe. Her fear is a slap on the face of the system and raises the question whether the administration intends to provide any secure alternative for the girls' education or whether their future, too, will become another casualty of the mafia's reign of terror.

CPI(ML) responded quickly to the incident. Following a visit to the village on 5 July by the party's

district secretary Vijay Kumar, Ravindra Yadav, Prabhat Kumar, Indresh Paswan, Arun Bind and Sanjay Chandravanshi, a large protest march was organized in Ghosi on 6 July. The party activists declared that they would not allow feudal forces or organized mafia networks to regain influence in southern Bihar. A district-level protest march was held on 11 July 2026 in Jehanabad, in which the affected families and the brave women of Chaiti Pipar themselves participated and challenged the deaf administration. Later, on 20 July, a massive Chaiti Pipar Chalo march was organised at the village followed by a massive rally at Ghosi which was attended by thousands of people.

The struggle of Chaiti Pipar is

not merely about access to sand. Rather, it is a manifestation of a broader struggle against the plunder of natural resources, feudal domination, and the nexus between criminal networks and sections of the state machinery. At its heart, lies the fight of society's poorest citizens for dignity, identity and fundamental rights. The oppressors seem to have forgotten that whenever Bihar was subjected to oppression, it turned the tide of history. This time, the onus for writing that history has been assumed not by men, but by the courageous women of Chaiti Pipar.

Salute to the historic resistance of the women of Chaiti Pipar!

Red Salute to their courage and revolutionary spirit! ■

BJP Govt Openly Protecting the Sand Mafia

A massive "Pratirodh Rally (Resistance Rally)" was held in Ghosi against the brutal, murderous, and feudal attack carried out on 4 July by a sand mafia gang against poor Dalits and Extremely Backward communities in Chaiti Pipar village under Ghosi police station in Jehanabad district. Thousands of local villagers, women, and members of the affected families from Chaiti Pipar attended the meeting. The gathering echoed with slogans against the sand mafia and the police-administrative nexus that protects it.

The meeting was led by CPI(ML) Polit Bureau member Dharendra Jha, and addressed by former Arwal MLA Mahanand Singh, former Ghosi MLA Rambali Singh Yadav, Central Committee member Kumar Parvez, Gaya District Secretary Niranjana Kumar, Jehanabad District Secretary Vijay Kumar, former JNUSU President Dhananjay, Dr. Ramadhar Singh, Leela Verma, and many others along with the victims of the feudal violence,

Renu Devi and Reshmi Devi.

Addressing the meeting Dharendra Jha sharply criticised the state government and the local administration. He said that sand mining in the Falgu River is completely prohibited by law. Despite this, the "Vishnu Don Gang" continues to carry out illegal sand mining day and night under the open protection and connivance of officials from the Ghosi and Hulasganj police stations. Poor people have the right to use local resources for their basic needs, but under the double-engine government, the mafia enjoys complete freedom.

Mahanand Singh saluted the courage of the women of Chaiti Pipar. He said that under the BJP-led government, the confidence of feudal forces and the sand mafia has grown to such an extent that they are now conspiring to falsely implicate innocent Ajay Ram and Vijay Ram in Dhiraj Sharma's murder case. Comrade Rambali Singh Yadav added that this is a fight for the Poor's Rights Over Natural Resources but Chaiti Pipar is not merely about a few sacks of sand. It is a struggle for the dignity of the poor, their identity, and their basic rights.

Victims Renu Devi and Reshmi Devi

also narrated their ordeal in tears, saying that fear still prevails in the village. The mafia's men continue to threaten them to withdraw the case or face serious consequences, but they will not bow down.

The CPI(ML) placed major demands before the government through this rally. They include immediate withdrawal of fabricated cases filed against innocent Ajay Ram and Vijay Ram in the name of the Dhiraj Sharma murder case, and an end to attempts to harass the victims; suspension of the police officials of Ghosi and Hulasganj police stations; filing of a chargesheet against the main accused, Vishnu Don. The free treatment for the injured, adequate compensation for the affected families, and a government guarantee of security for the entire settlement, along with special arrangements to ensure the safe education of the village's daughters, and immediate construction of toilets at government expense in every poor household of the Mahadalit and Extremely Backward settlement in Chaiti Pipar, and installation of adequate numbers of new hand pumps for drinking water was also demanded. ■

Trump-Rubio Design to Return to the McCarthy Era of Anti-Communist Hate and Persecution

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

Shortly after the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the foundation of the USA on 4 July, the Trump Administration hosted an international ministerial meeting against what it calls far-left terrorism. Sixty-seven countries including India took part in this ministerial exercise. India was however represented not by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, or Home Minister Amit Shah or National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, but by India's current Ambassador to the US Vinay Mohan Kwatra. As far as the Modi government is concerned, with its penchant for demonisation of anything leftwing, 'leftwing extremism' has always been a pet theme. In fact dissenters of all ideological hues are these days dubbed and persecuted as Urban Naxals in India. And in recent months the government ran a sustained military campaign of extra-judicial violence called Operation Kagar and triumphantly declared India 'Maoist-free' by 31 March 2026.

Why is the US resurrecting the McCarthy era anti-communist prejudice and hate now in 2026? The Soviet Union has long disappeared and bourgeois ideologues had since been busy celebrating the end of the 'communist threat'. In the wake of the Cold War or the era of US-USSR superpower rivalry, US foreign policy has revolved around the twin targets of terrorism and the growing economic power of China. However, even while

focusing on encirclement or containment of China, the US has articulated it more in economic and military terms, not ideologically or politically. But Marco Rubio now calls 'far-left terrorism' the 'blind spot' of the West's anti-terrorism discourse. The US now underlines far-left terrorism as a distinct strand alongside the two other variants known in the Pentagon's parlance as Islamic terrorism and narcoterrorism.

Targeting the Left is a characteristic feature of every rightwing political regime. Dubbing the Left as far-left, linking it up with terrorism and persecuting dissent as leftwing extremism is a defining feature of far-right aggression. This basic pattern of a far-right fascist regime can be seen everywhere from Modi's India to Trump's America. There is also something about the current juncture that makes the Trump Administration see red. Perhaps more than ever before since the Vietnam War protests and Civil Rights movement period, the US is today witnessing the rise of a distinct socialist stream within its regimented political mainstream that has started questioning the bipartisan consensus around neo-liberal policies of sacrificing the people at the altar of profit and waging wars of occupation and aggression across the world in the name of peace, democracy and human rights.

As the US-led Western world or Global North bids goodbye to the politics of liberal democracy

and the economics of the welfare state, as Israel goes on perpetrating a continuing genocide on the Palestinian people and the US-Israel axis wages war on the sovereignty of Iran, there is also a renewed surge of anti-fascist resistance against far-right aggression as well as growing and active support for an end to Israeli occupation and genocide in Palestine. The Trump Administration and far right forces across the world are afraid of this potential Left resurgence, especially working class action and civil society solidarity against the US-Israel axis of war and aggression. The regime change plot against Iran has not just been foiled in the face of the remarkable resistance and resilience displayed by the government and people of Iran, the war on Iran has badly dented the myth of American military invincibility and global political hegemony. The development has also created serious strains on the NATO bloc and on US equations with several European countries.

Earlier this year Marco Rubio sought to repair the cracks emerging in NATO by invoking the shared legacy of colonialism and Christian values. And now comes the Cold War era glue of anti-communism. Using classic fascist rhetoric, Rubio calls Leftism an evil against civilization itself, 'a revolt of the worst against the best, a revolt of the weak and the cowardly against the strong and the good', and describes the

growing worldwide resistance against fascism, imperialism and racism as 'a new wave of the old evil'. Apart from spewing venom against the anti-fascist anti-imperialist resistance, the Trump Administration has a long standing target in America's own backyard - it wants to topple the socialist government of Cuba. All through his life as Prime Minister and President of socialist Cuba, Fidel Castro had to face one CIA plot after another. Now after the abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, the Trump Administration feels emboldened enough to attempt to occupy Cuba. The rhetorical war on far-left terrorism is an integral part of this actual war against the Latin American Left.

For us in India, this is going to emerge as yet another ideological plank to camouflage the Modi government's capitulation to US imperialism. India's subservience to the US began in the 1990s in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. From the American side it was presented as a civilizational alliance against the Islamic world and Confucian China while the Indian ruling classes called it a strategic imperative and opportunity in the era of globalisation. During the last two decades Israel too has become a strategic ally of India, and now India is seen as the strongest supporter of the US-Israel axis, surrendering completely to the US-Israel narrative and violence against Palestine and Iran. The growing affinity between Hindutva and Zionism has been a major ideological plank for India's surrender to Israel, and now this shared thread of anti-communism binds the Modi regime in an even closer embrace with the US-Israel axis. ■

The Other America: 250 Years of Resistance

▲ AZAD

The 250th anniversary of the United States was marked by official celebrations of the country supposedly being the oldest democracy and the country's national achievements. However, any honest reckoning with American history must begin elsewhere: with conquest, slavery, exploitation, empire, and the long resistance of those who refused to accept them. The story of the United States is not only the story of presidents and its founders. It is also the story of indigenous nations, enslaved people, women, people of color, workers, immigrants, socialists, communists, and anti-imperialists who fought to make the country "a more perfect union".

The founding of the United States was inseparable from settler colonialism. In its initial years, the westward expansion of the country was not an inevitable march of the so-called "manifest destiny," but a process of conquest, removal, and dispossession. The Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears remain among the clearest examples of how the new republic expanded through violence against the native indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, these communities were not mere spectators to this oppression but actively resisted it. The Cherokee Legal Resistance in the 1820s, the Red Cloud's War in the 1860s, the occupation of Alcatraz in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Standing Rock resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, to name a few, all reveal a continuous struggle for sovereignty, land and dignity by people of the First Nations.

Moreover, neither did American independence mean freedom for all non-native people. The country that supposedly speaks about liberty, in practice tolerated and protected slavery. In particular, close to three-fourths of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention were slave owners. Under the rubric of "states' rights," slavery and later Jim Crow laws were defended for generations. Women were denied the right to vote for a substantial period of time. Chinese immigrants were targeted through exclusionary laws in the 19th century. Even till this day, the prison system in the United States perpetuates many of older patterns of racialized control and exploitation. Against this, though, there has always been resistance: abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, and Harriet Tubman raised their voice against slavery; the Civil War and Reconstruction sought to formally integrate enslaved people with equal rights into the country; the suffragette movement was waged to grant women the right to vote; and later the struggles led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X sought to challenge the renewed forms of discrimination and racial oppression faced by people of color.

The American government was also no friend of the working class who had to fight for every gain they have won. The Haymarket Massacre, the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, the Taft-Hartley Act, the Red Scares, the firing of PATCO workers under Reagan, and the rollback of New Deal protections show that all through these last 250 years, repeated

violence and repression was used against labor. Yet workers responded by organizing and sometimes with militancy: the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Haymarket struggle for the eight-hour day, the unionization drives of the 1930s, the rise of the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the Flint sit-down strike of the 30s, more recently the Occupy movement, and renewed labor organizing at Amazon warehouses, Starbucks stores, and the 2023 strike by the nearly 150,000 members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union are some prominent examples.

Since the 20th century, the powers that be in the United States have also been shaped by strong anti-communist sentiments and imperial ambitions. The Palmer Raids, the House Un-American Activities (HUAC), McCarthyism, and the persecution of radicals sought to crush socialist and communist movements in the country. These actions also resulted in overreach, encroaching into the civil liberties of the people of the country. Internationally too, the U.S. imperial power was projected through violent coups and sometimes through outright wars in Nicaragua, Iran (both in the 50s and also more recently), Vietnam, Guatemala, Cuba, Chile, Iraq, Libya, Venezuela, and elsewhere. Furthermore, through its military, diplomatic, financial support for the Zionists, the United States has been directly complicit in perpetrating a genocide against the Palestinian people. Nonetheless these reactionary measures also germinated resistance: Eugene Debs and the Socialist Party of America, the Communist Party USA, the Seattle General Strike of 1919, the Black Panther Party, the Socialist Workers Party, Workers World Party, strong anti-war movements (such as during the Vietnam and Iraq wars), the May 2006 immigrant rights strike, the recent mass protests and student encampments in support of Palestinian rights, and today's renewed socialist resurgence such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and newly elected New York City mayor Zohran Mamdani, the Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL) to name a few.

250 years since its birth, the United States cannot be looked at as a simple celebration of a democratic republic. Its history is marred by slavery, settler colonialism, labor exploitation, racism, patriarchy, anti-communism, and imperial ambitions. Yet in parallel to that runs another history: that of resistance and struggle. Often led by women, people of color, progressives, socialists, communists, workers, and peasants, this tradition has followed American power like its shadow - exposing its hypocrisies and fighting for a more just future. ■

USA, China, and Changing Economic Power Dynamics

▲ SURYA AND PRAKASH

The United States of America (USA) is celebrating the 250th anniversary of its independence. In the lead up to the celebrations, starting in 2025 with the second Trump administration, the world witnessed some major events and announcements. On April 2nd, 2025, a broad package of tariffs were imposed on most countries of the world. For a certain period, both India and China had one of the highest tariff rates. The Trump administration announced that it wanted to "take back" the Panama Canal, the world's second busiest waterway. The administration also announced that they would annex Greenland, which is an autonomous territory of Denmark. Several European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries announced that they will stand with Denmark, in effect, breaking the NATO alliance.

In 2026, the genocide in Gaza continues and the war on Lebanon has escalated. US/NATO's proxy war has led to the hundreds of thousands of deaths in Ukraine and Russia. The war on Iran, led by the US and Israel, is heading towards a major setback for the US. Are these merely the actions of a narcissistic and authoritarian person or a manifestation of a more systemic and deeper crisis impacting US imperialism. This article briefly examines the economic dimensions of this crisis and the desperate attempts to resolve it.

Historical Background: From 1776 to World War Two

The US was established as a settler colonial state when the thirteen original colonies declared independence from the British empire. Even after independence the genocide of Native Americans and slavery continued. The westward expansion of the newly independent colonies was done through annexations and wars, for example, to name a few, the Louisiana purchase of 1803, the 1821 ceding of Oregon Country, and the annexation of Texas that led to the Mexican American war of 1845, and the control of Panama Canal zone from 1903 to 1979. The Monroe doctrine (1823) was part of the US power projection starting in the 1800s when many Spanish colonies were gaining independence. The current imperial policy, often called the Trump corollary to the Monroe doctrine or the "Donroe doctrine," builds on this long history. The

kidnapping of President Maduro of Venezuela, the plan for Greenland annexation, and the Panama Canal acquisition were justified as part of this doctrine.

World War II was fought between the European colonial powers with the Soviet Union and China playing a key role in defeating fascism. Millions of soldiers from the colonized countries were forced to join the colonial armies. The war resulted in the massive destruction of the European colonial powers and their industrial base. The US emerged from the war with minimal damage to its infrastructure and industrial base. As the US emerged as an uncontested imperial power, which did not permanently occupy the countries except for a few exceptions, a set of institutions were established to ensure global hegemony. Some key institutions for economic hegemony were the International Monetary Fund (1944), World Bank (1944), and World Trade Organization (1995; GATT - 1948) that worked in concert with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949) and United Nations Security Council (1945).

The Dollar System

After the Bretton Woods system was set up in 1944, the US dollar became the global reserve currency and is the most widely used currency for international trade. The high global demand for dollars is considered an "exorbitant privilege" for the US. It allows the country to borrow money at a lower cost and use the currency as a tool of hegemony. The petrodollar system was established in the 1970s after the end of the gold standard. Oil-exporting countries agreed to sell oil only in US dollars, boosting the dollar's global reserve status. For example, Saudi Arabian oil revenue was reinvested in US government debt, enabling ongoing US deficit spending. Even

though most fossil fuel exporting countries export their products in dollars, the monopoly has been shaken. Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of petroleum, now accepts other currencies. The US financial sanctions, used extensively against countries, have encouraged transactions in other currencies, raising fears of "de-dollarization." BRICS nations are also experimenting with a new financial infrastructure to challenge the dollar's global dominance.

Neo-Liberal Capitalism, Imperialism and the US

The US share of global production was 50% in 1950 after World War II but had dropped to 25% by the 1980s. After several decades of neo-liberal economic policies, the US share of global production has fallen to 12%. As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), US manufacturing has fallen from 21-25% (1950s) to about 10% (2024). While the US is still the world's largest economy in terms of nominal GDP, it has slipped to the second-largest in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) behind China.

After World War II, the US routinely engaged in balanced trade or ran surpluses. It had a large current account surplus immediately after the war but by the 1970s it had a chronic deficit and is today the world's most indebted country. The US has had a trade deficit with the rest of the world for nearly 50 years. While the US GDP is over \$30 trillion (2025), the US debt-to-GDP ratio has gone up to 121%. A World Bank (WB) study predicted that countries with a debt-to-GDP ratio above 77% for a prolonged period were likely to experience significant slowdowns in economic growth. The total government debt will increase by another \$3.8 trillion after the Trump administration

passed a major tax cut for the rich.

Current Economic Crisis

The great financial crisis (GFC) of 2007-09, started in the US with mortgage-backed securities. From January 2007 to September 2009, the large US and European banks lost more than \$1 trillion from bad loans and other assets. The financialization of the economy and the inflation of asset price bubbles are key aspects of neo-liberal economic policies. These economic policies have been in place for decades and have benefited the capitalist class. One hundred and fifty billionaire families spent nearly \$2 billion to influence the 2024 US elections. No wonder, in the second Trump administration, the top officials encompass thirteen billionaires with a total net worth of \$460 billion. While three multimillionaires, in 2022, owned more wealth than the bottom half of the US population (160 million). The top 1% get around 45% of all new income.

While, in 2011, the average real wage of a male American worker was marginally lower than in 1968. It is estimated that about 36 million people lived below the poverty line in 2024. The neo-liberal economic policies have led to the de-industrialization of large parts of the US economy. Globally, 266 million people experienced high levels of acute food insecurity in 47 countries. To defend this brutally unequal system, the US maintains more than 750 military bases around the world. To pay for the major tax cuts for the rich and finance the \$1.5 trillion defense budget, US social services such as Medicare and Social Security are likely to see major cuts.

Some countries such as China were not as badly impacted by GFC. China has emerged as a peer competitor of the US. The United

Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) estimates that Chinese industrial production (as a % of global production) will rise from 6% (2000) to 45% (2030). During the same period, the US's industrial production (as a % of global production) will decrease from 25% to 11%. No wonder the Obama administration started the "Pivot to Asia" after the global financial crisis. It was a significant shift in the US foreign policy as it shifted the country's focus away from West Asia and Europe.

Changing Global Economic Power Dynamics

The contemporary global order has undergone a significant transformation over the last couple of decades, driven by shifting economic power in the global capitalist world order, intensifying geopolitical competition, and the growing aspirations of emerging economies to reshape international institutions. While the United States continues to dominate the global financial system, China's rapid economic rise and the expanding influence of BRICS have contributed to an increasingly multipolar world. Yet, despite these changes, the transition away from a U.S.-led international order remains incomplete, as economic interdependence coexists with strategic rivalry and significant institutional constraints. A recent example of these dynamics was Donald Trump's 2026 visit to China. Although the visit resulted in China agreeing to purchase 200 Boeing aircraft, the United States had reportedly expected an agreement closer to 500 aircraft. More importantly, the visit failed to resolve long-standing structural trade disputes or reduce tariffs between the world's two largest economies. China also maintained restrictions on exports of rare-earth minerals as it produces

approximately 90% of the global supply. These minerals are indispensable for manufacturing semiconductors, electric vehicles, aerospace components, wind turbines, and advanced defense technologies, giving Beijing substantial leverage over critical global supply chains. Geopolitical disagreements also remained unresolved. China declined to support U.S.-led pressure on Iran, instead advocating negotiations and ceasefire efforts, while simultaneously reaffirming Taiwan as a core national interest and criticizing continued American military support for the island.

These developments reflect broader changes in the global economy. Between 1995 and 2025, the United States' share of global nominal GDP fluctuated between 23–31%, while China's share increased dramatically from approximately 2–3% to around 18%, making it the world's second-largest economy. Similarly, the combined share of BRICS economies in global GDP expanded from 10% in 1995 to approximately 41% by 2025, overtaking the United States, whose share stood at roughly 26% during the same period. Despite this remarkable redistribution of productive capacity, the architecture of international finance has changed much more slowly. The U.S. dollar still accounts for approximately 55–60% of global foreign exchange reserves and is involved in nearly 90% of all foreign exchange transactions worldwide, underscoring the continuing centrality of the American financial system despite declining relative economic dominance.

While nearly all conventional measures of economic progress within the capitalist framework highlight China's extraordinary economic achievements, these gains have also been accompanied

by significant domestic contradictions, highlighting the foundational problems of the capitalist economy. On the one hand, over the past four decades, the country has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty, built globally competitive manufacturing and technology sectors, and emerged as a leader in renewable energy, electric vehicles, and digital infrastructure. On the other hand, this growth model now faces mounting pressures, including slowing GDP growth, industrial overcapacity, a prolonged real-estate crisis, rising youth unemployment, and increasing wealth inequality. Interestingly enough, these challenges have not translated into declining public support for the state and Chinese Communist Party. Many young Chinese remain strongly patriotic despite being acutely aware of domestic problems. This apparent paradox reflects a combination of nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiment, reinforced by perceptions that China's developmental achievements compare favorably with growing political polarization and economic instability in many Western countries.

The rise of BRICS represents another important dimension of the changing international order. Originally proposed by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill in 2001, BRICS evolved from an investment concept into a political coalition following its first summit in 2009, held in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Since then, the grouping has expanded its agenda beyond calls for reforming global financial institutions to establishing the New Development Bank, promoting greater use of local currencies in international trade, and reducing dependence on the U.S. dollar. The 2023 Johannesburg Summit

marked a major expansion of BRICS by inviting countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, while the 2024 Kazan Summit emphasized sanctions-resilient financial infrastructure and reforms to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. Despite these ambitions, BRICS continues to face important structural limitations. The grouping lacks a common currency, coordinated foreign exchange mechanisms, integrated financial markets, or unified security objectives. Its members possess diverse political systems, economic priorities, and often conflicting geopolitical interests. Furthermore, simply replacing the U.S. dollar with another reserve currency would not necessarily eliminate the deeper structural inequalities embedded within the global financial system. More fundamental reforms may require alternative trading arrangements based on bilateral settlement systems, long-term clearing mechanisms, or regional financial institutions that reduce dependence on global capital markets. These contradictions became particularly evident during preparations for the 2026 BRICS ministerial meeting in New Delhi, where disagreements over the conflict involving Iran and tensions in the Strait of Hormuz prevented member states from issuing a joint communiqué. India instead released only a Chair's Statement to preserve diplomatic continuity. Such divisions demonstrate that although economic multipolarity is becoming an increasingly prominent feature of the global economy, geopolitical fragmentation and divergent national interests, and the internal laws of Capitalist world order continue to constrain the emergence of BRICS as a coherent strategic bloc. Consequently, the international system appears to be evolving not toward the replacement of one hegemon by another, but toward a more complex world characterized by multiple centres of economic power operating within an international financial and security architecture that remains substantially shaped by the interests of US imperialism and global capitalism. ■

Quiet Flows the Satluj

▲ KANWALJEET SINGH

The film *Satluj* was released for 48 hours in India, following a long legal battle. It was abruptly taken down citing threats to national security. The release on OTT and subsequent removal has attracted mass attention, and has led to a wave of public screenings across Punjab. Gurudwaras have become the centres of screenings organised spontaneously by enthusiastic youth, sometimes with the intervention of workers of some farmer organisations, network of SAD Badal or of newly developed Waris Punjab De etc. The film itself, and the talking points around it, have bearings upon the political narrative in Punjab, which is heading towards assembly elections scheduled early next year.

Some are genuinely fearing a conspiracy, an RSS-typed script, in the whole process of the making of film, the delay in release, the timing of the release on OTT and the taking down of the film. They suspect a deliberate move to achieve a polarising effect in an election bound state. Whatever is behind the scenes may be a subject of conjectures, but on the face of it the approach to the film is consistent with what the Modi government has been doing as a norm. When it comes to films, the Modi government has two clearly distinct interventions - films they promote and films they obstruct. The usual gestures for promotion are endorsements by famous faces, public calls to go watch, and tax rebates, as in case of 'Kashmir Files'. The latter films suffer delays, cuts, boycotts and takedowns. What actually happens with the banned films seems almost immaterial to the highly regimented state machinery. Compare the current ban with that on the BBC documentary titled 'India: the Modi Question'. The reasoning that wants to see an indirect promotion in the current ban on *Satluj* does not play out consistently for either of these two cases.

A senior journalist, who identifies himself as a relative of KPS Gill, anchors his critique of *Satluj* upon the allegedly overhyped human rights defending and fair investigating credentials of Bhai Khalra. He rates *Satluj* as a propaganda film, which is defending or projecting a half truth. The film, though, does not claim that Jaswant Khalra started his crusade within a formal human rights framework. He rather starts with a modest conviction - dignity in death, for all. Another of his triggers is a constant discrepancy in the records of the dead, mentioning them as 'unclaimed' despite recording detailed information including names, father's names and addresses of the deceased. He asserts a minimal conclusion - it signals a procedural lapse, a haste and a conspiracy behind dumping these bodies, and therefore, warrants investigation. The path he chose has four components - one, flag the concern in the public domain, two, organise the victim families, three, seek a legal intervention through the courts, by building a case that may stand judicial scrutiny and four, not to bow down to any pressure or threat. All this suffices for someone to be considered a human rights protagonist. Concluding anything over whether or not he was successful, whether or not he proved to be right, whether or not he remained consistent throughout - would have required him to live. Else, it warrants a rigorous investigation, with or without him.

For the BJP, the Satluj takedown episode does not seem to merit an official well-formed party stance. Diametrically opposite stances have been taken by their party leaders including the state party chief, a minister of state and a senior leader. BJP leader Ravneet Bittu has challenged the veracity of facts. He has pointed to "selective portrayal of Punjab's darkest chapter" in the movie. Bittu questions "Why are the massacres of innocent Hindus, bus passengers, shopkeepers, government employees, labourers and ordinary citizens brutally killed by terrorists not depicted with the same intensity?" This line of argument is a well-known template powered by whataboutery. Senior BJP leader and former chairman of the National Minorities Commission Iqbal Singh Lalpura, on the other hand, has asked Bittu to avoid questioning the numbers of dead mentioned in the film. "When Jaswant Khalra spoke about the disappearances of 25,000 people, he gave a message. The claim was verified by the National Human Rights Commission. If Bittu Sahib wants the data, he can seek it from NHRC (National Human Rights Commission)," he said.

Bittu's harsh criticism of Daljit Dosanjh, the lead actor, as well as of the film is countered by citing the legacy he inherits, referring to his grandfather, the then CM of Punjab, assassinated at the hands of militants. The BJP may want people to be distracted by this jugglery of statements issued by its leaders and overlook the fact that it is the Modi Government's Information and Broadcasting Ministry which has ordered the take down of Satluj from the OTT platform citing a threat to national security.

Congress is the only political party who, being at helm of the government during the period covered by the film, can expect a backlash from the Sikh electorate. Congress leaders and government have a direct visible presence in Satluj. Under scrutiny is the role of

the Congress government and police in the crisis of the 1980s and 90s. While the high-handedness with innocent Sikh youth is a common concern, still there does exist a large section in Punjab which considers the state monopoly over violence, and the way it was exercised, as a necessity. Congress championed the support of this segment. Their view is echoed in the film at a point where, after an episode of cold blooded murder of a family by SSP Sugga, DGP Bitta (changed name of KPS Gill) claims in front of a journalist "I agree that asking questions is a right of every citizen, but you must also remember, that if there is any democracy left, it is only because of us". The argument clearly rests upon a false binary - either bear the militancy or accept a limited democracy within the confines of a police state. The people of Punjab suffered from both, simultaneously. The indispensability of democracy, dialogue, justice and progress is the lesson which even Congress must have learnt from the horrors of a decade of Modi rule. Does the Congress still endorse KPS Gill's logic?

Ask a random viewer after watching Satluj - what are the top keywords associated with the film? What is the one topic that the film discusses through Bhai Khalra? The most expected answer is - 'Human Rights'. A broader inference will lead to a second theme - 'state violence' or 'the abuse of power'. Courage, fear, brutality, corruption, political interests etc. may form the third circle in this word cloud. One may contest any facts about Bhai Jaswant Singh Khalra's life, about numbers of disappearances and extrajudicial killings, but one cannot miss the overwhelming impact of the film as a story of a disrupted but imaginative investigation into the scale of extrajudicial killings through municipal records of wood used to burn them. To read from it a mere quantitative statement about the numbers of extrajudicial killings

that took place in Punjab, amounts to missing the point. The film rather problematises the abuse of power and the curbing of democracy by muzzling the press, political activity and judicial procedures in dealing with a political issue, and makes a qualitative statement, instead.

Satluj has takeaways beyond what happened then in Punjab. Enthusiastic debates over the veracity of factoids, over partial representations or misrepresentations only serve to downplay or bypass these qualitative as well as operative takeaways. The film asks 'what if?' questions. What if a government is replaced with a police state? What if the discourse of politics is polarised along communal lines? What if the political opposition is reduced to zero? What if the judiciary surrenders the principles of justice and starts looking at the acts of persons through the eyes of policemen? What if the public health infrastructure and the doctors are dominated by the police? What if the courts fail to protect the life and liberty of witnesses? And looking at today's India, what if all this happens once and for all?

Satluj is being screened among people who are, almost daily, witnessing fake encounters of youngsters accused of involvement in crime or mafia gangs, or of carrying out crimes at the behest of their alleged cross-border handlers, in Punjab, and JCB-led and police-guarded demolition campaigns almost all over India. The institutions essential to democracy are suffering credibility losses to the extent that the Modi government can no longer be seen as a passing phase but has engineered a fascist transformation of the state apparatus which has built pressure to conform even on the non-BJP governments. The very section of people which was earlier an advocate of giving exceptional powers to the police to counter the insurgents, now may want the same against the gangsters, drug mafia and those involved

in increasing incidents invoking memories of Sikh militancy. The BJP wants to catch the imagination of this section when Amit Shah promises a strong and decisive government at the BJP's recent Moga rally. On the other hand there does exist a vast mass of people who want peace and order through democratic strengthening and progress. They are the ones who need a powerful voice and articulation. Both these segments draw opposite lessons from the film.

The River Satluj, in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense, marks the continuity between the late night hurried cremation of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on its banks, and the unknown dead bodies dumped by the Punjab police in the 80s and 90s. Its robust flow in silence wonders - will it have to carry yet more bodies? This depends only upon what happens on its banks. If the people of Punjab focus on Bhai Khalra's story as only a piece of historic injustice, then surely, the film and the episode surrounding it, may turn out to be a red herring, in the sense that worse is already happening all around. On the other hand, if we let the deep sense of injustice and a sturdy resolve to fight it in all its forms sink in, then look around in the present world and act, we will find the film's message of defending human rights and a dire need for institutional checks and balances to be a well-placed anchor for the perfect narrative to bank upon while fighting for historic justice as well as for a just future. Let the Satluj flow quiet and free. ■

On the Fifth Martyrdom Anniversary of Father Stan Swamy

An Uncompromising Voice for Human Rights, Adivasi Identity and Resistance

▲ MANOJ BHAKT

With Father Stan Swamy's death in judicial custody, the country witnessed the cruel nexus between the Modi government and the judiciary being laid bare. Eighty-four-year-old Father Stanislaus Lourduwamy was suffering from advanced Parkinson's disease, yet he was not even provided with a straw and sipper to drink water. The truth behind this act of cruelty is even more horrifying which is not confined to Stan alone. Today, after five years of his death, that horrifying truth can be seen spreading all around us.

Father Stan stood firmly with the activists and movement leaders in their struggles for Adivasi communities in Jharkhand. He raised his voice against the false implication of Adivasis in criminal cases, their incarceration without trial or due process, and the continued violation of constitutional provisions in the Fifth Schedule areas.

It is due to Stan's leadership commitment that the Bagaicha, in Namkum (Ranchi), emerged as a platform and shelter for various rights movements. He built solidarity with numerous people's movements and remained a strong advocate of that unity. Stan also played a significant role in the formation of the Jharkhand Janadhikar Mahasabha, a leading platform for the struggle for constitutional and human rights. He succeeded in articulating the voice of resistance against the suppression of rights in the natural language of Adivasi identity. Bagaicha remains a living testimony to this even today.

With the Modi government coming to power in 2014, India began to

take a disturbing turn where Mob lynchings and open communal polarisation during festivals became increasingly common. While the communal offenders began enjoying the impunity and protection of those in power, in Jharkhand, the 2017 Global Investors Summit, attempted to weaken the CNT and SPT Acts. The repression of the Pathalgadi movement, attacks on minorities in the name of cow protection, and restrictions on religious freedom through anti-conversion laws together created an atmosphere of fascist terror in the state. At the same time, the central government was taking major steps towards fascism through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the three farm laws, and the crackdown on JNU. The entire state apparatus had been reshaped to crush dissent and popular movements. In this context, Stan Swamy's activities had become an unpardonable crime.

In the Vishrambag (Pune) FIR No. 4/2018 (the Bhima Koregaon case) 16 people were made accused with false allegation of having links with Maoists. This was the second FIR; the first, Pimpri FIR No. 2/2018, had named those who attacked Dalits who had gathered to observe Shaurya Diwas. The second FIR marked the first major experiment of the Sangh-corporate establishment where some of the country's best-known activists, writers, and movement leaders were falsely implicated, and the term "Urban Naxal" was widely propagated. All accused were charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and all of them were accused of conspiring to assassinate Narendra Modi.

The case was transferred from the Pune Police to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), and during the investigation, malware was used to install fabricated files on the accused persons' laptops, and forged evidence was created. It is well known that, with the help of sophisticated surveillance software, the Modi government has subjected bureaucrats, judges, journalists, and even Members of Parliament to surveillance. In this case, one of the accused, Surendra Gadling, remains in prison after nearly ten years, while some are under house arrest, and the others are out on bail under very stringent conditions.

Meanwhile, the government declared its plans to "eliminate" the Maoists, setting final deadlines for their eradication, and a continuing series of killings was carried out through staged encounters. Behind this state-backed violence, the destruction of forests, the repression of Adivasis, and the relentless expansion of corporate control continued unabated. Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, many other student activists, political activists, and journalists, remain imprisoned.

Major changes are being made to the laws, and the Constitution is under continued attack. The institutions like the Election Commission and the judiciary are being manipulated. And now even Members of Parliament are facing physical assaults by saffron goons. The Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls is pushing democracy to the margins.

The RSS may believe that it is closer than ever to realising the fascist state it envisioned a century ago. To that end, it is systematically weakening democratic institutions to bring them under its control and using fear and inducements to break political opposition. The Modi government has gone so far as to attack the very foundation of the Indian Republic, citizenship itself. Yet it has failed to grasp the depth of the roots of a free India, forged through the struggle against British colonial rule. The real strength of India, of "We, the People of India", lies in the power of mass movements on the streets.

Father Stan would have found solace in the fact that the people of this country are not silent spectators. As soon as the Labour Codes began to be implemented, a new generation of workers launched struggles in the industrial centres. In Barkagaon, the farmers' struggle against Adani's takeover continues. In Jharkhand and across the country, Adivasis are uniting against attempts to divide them into Sarna and Christian communities. Students and youth have also opened a new front against the central government. Standing firmly with these expanding and deepening movements against the fascists, and forging unity among them, would be the truest tribute to the memory of the martyred Father Stan Swamy. ■

Adieu Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat

▲ PURUSHOTTAM SHARMA



Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat, Central Committee Member of the Party and Vice President of the All India Kisan Mahasabha (AIKM) passed away on July 3, 2026 from a cardiac failure while he was in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, attending the National Executive meeting of the All India Kisan Mahasabha. The news of his untimely demise came as a shock to the Party, AIKM, and the wider democratic and people's movements.

Having turned 80 earlier this year, Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat remained as active and committed as ever. He continued to participate enthusiastically in Party programmes, organisational work, and people's struggles, inspiring comrades with his unwavering dedication, simplicity, and revolutionary spirit. His sudden passing is an irreparable loss to the movement.

Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat attended the national executive meeting of the All India Kisan Mahasabha on 2–3 July 2026. On 1 July, while changing trains at Loharu railway station on his way to Jhunjhunu, he fell down. He was taken to a hospital, where doctors detected minor fractures in two ribs and advised him to rest at home. However, he refused to go home and decided to rest at the meeting venue itself. By the morning of 2 July, his health had improved

considerably, and he attended the first session of the meeting for two hours.

On 3 July, after the meeting concluded, while preparing to return to Delhi, he reported some difficulty in breathing. He was immediately seated in a jeep and was being taken to hospital accompanied by the Comrades Raja Ram Singh, Phoolchand Dhewa, Purushottam Sharma, D. Harinath, and Anand Negi. The hospital was only five minutes away from the meeting venue. However, within barely two minutes, he suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away while seated in the front seat of the jeep. He was taken to the hospital, where doctors declared him dead. He was then taken to another nearby hospital, where doctors again declared him dead.

Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat's son, Parminder Singh Gehlawat, stated that in 2015 Comrade Gehlawat had suffered two severe heart attacks and had been on a ventilator for a week. After those attacks, his speech remained impaired for the next few years, including during the historic farmers' movement, but had recovered by 2023.

From the hospital, Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat's mortal remains were brought back to the meeting venue in Jhunjhunu. There, members of the Kisan Mahasabha's national executive paid tribute to him by draping him in the red flag. His body was then brought from Jhunjhunu to the CPI(ML)'s parliamentary office at 21 Meena Bagh, Delhi.

A condolence programme was held there from 9 to 11 a.m. the next morning. The party's National General Secretary, Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, members of the Kisan Mahasabha national executive, leaders and activists of the Delhi party organisation

and AISA, several leaders of the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, leaders of Left parties in Delhi and his family members paid floral tributes to him. Thereafter, his funeral procession was taken to his ancestral home in Dhirpur, Delhi. His last rites were performed at 12:30 p.m. at the cremation ground in Dhirpur. The SKM and several affiliated farmers' organisations sent condolence messages on the passing of Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat.

Among those who paid tribute were CPI(ML) General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, leader of the parliamentary party Comrade Raja Ram Singh, Member of Parliament Comrade Sudama Prasad, Comrade Arun Singh, the leader of the CPI(ML) legislative party in the Bihar Assembly, CPI(M) leader and former MP Hannan Mollah, P. Krishna Prasad of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Rajan Kshirsagar, the President of the AIKS (Ajoy Bhavan), Arjun Prasad Singh of the Krantikari Kisan Union, R. K. Sharma of the All India Kisan Khet Mazdoor Sangathan (AIKKMS), Vimal Trivedi, National President of AIUKS, the Delhi State Secretary of the CPM, Comrade Rajesh representing IFTU and AIKMS, Neha, AISA's National President, who was

then on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, Prof. Gopal Pradhan and Pranay Krishna from Jan Sanskriti Manch, Sanjay Joshi of Navarun publications, teachers' leader Uma Rag, journalists Bhasha Singh and Mahendra Mishra, and CPI(ML) leaders and cadres from Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. Also present were Kisan Mahasabha office-bearers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Odisha, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh with many others from across the country.

Political Journey of Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat

His contact with the then underground CPI(ML) was established during his youth days, by then he was running a small pharmaceutical factory in Loni, a town in Uttar Pradesh adjoining Delhi. One of his friends, Dr. Prem Singh, practised medicine in Meerut and was connected to Comrade Ishwarchand Tyagi, then CPI(ML)'s Uttar Pradesh State Secretary. It was through Dr. Prem Singh that Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat came into contact with Comrade Ishwarchand Tyagi. Dr. Yashpal Rana, from Dhaka village in Delhi, was also part of their circle

Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat's ancestors were among Delhi's first victims of land acquisition.

When the British decided to make Delhi their capital, they acquired the lands of several villages for what is now the seat of power in India - the 'Lutyens Zone'. One such village was Malcha, the village of Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat's ancestors, situated within the 1,800 acres of land acquired by the British.

Chanakyapuri, now home to numerous foreign embassies, stands on the land of Malcha village. After displacement around 1906, most families from the village moved to Haryana and established a new village named Malcha. However, Comrade Prem Singh's great-grandfather chose to settle in Dhirpur, Delhi, the village of his relatives. Today, this village lies close to Delhi University.

The British shifted to their new capital, Delhi, in 1911. They did not provide adequate compensation to the farmers of Malcha after acquiring their land. Even today, some members of the fourth and fifth generations of those displaced from Malcha continue to fight for compensation for their ancestors' land. ■

of friends. Comrade Ishwarchand Tyagi often came to Dhirpur to meet Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat and Dr Yashpal Rana. At times, Comrade Gehlawat also travelled to Meerut to meet them.

He came into direct contact with the party organisation in Delhi in 1986. From then onward, he joined the Delhi unit of the Indian People's Front (IPF) and entered active politics. During the second Delhi State Conference of the IPF, held in Malkaganj in 1986, he became the Vice-President of the Delhi IPF. At this conference, he bore the responsibility of organising the arrangements.

Later, at the IPF national conference held at Shah Auditorium in Delhi in 1988, he undertook major responsibilities for managing the event. Later, he also assisted Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, who had been elected from the Arrah Lok Sabha constituency on the IPF banner, in his parliamentary work. He subsequently closed his pharmaceutical factory and became a full-time party worker.

From the historic 'Daam Bandho-Kaam Do' rally at Boat Club in 1990 to every phase of the historic farmers' movement, and through all major events held in Delhi, his work continued. As long as Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat was present, party leaders and farmers' leaders across the country associated with the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha reposed complete trust in him to manage major events in Delhi. He took responsibility for every difficult task and completed it successfully. In 2002, the party entrusted him with responsibilities on the farmers' front, when it formed a national coordination committee by bringing together its state-level farmers' organisations from across the country. At a national conference held in Patna on 10 May 2010, this coordination committee emerged as the All India Kisan Mahasabha. Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat was elected its Vice-President, a position he held until his last breath.

He was also the party's in-charge for Haryana. Comrade Gehlawat was among the founding leaders of the AIKSCC and the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha. He was a member of the National Coordination Committee of the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha, a member of the National Coordination Committee of the Land Rights Movement, a member of the National Coordination Committee and Secretariat of the All India People's Forum and a member of the headquarters team responsible for the functioning of the CPI(ML) Central Office.

Despite health problems from 2015 onwards, he participated actively in every party and farmers' movement programme. From 2017 to 2019, despite poor health, he remained fully involved in the 10,000-kilometre 'Kisan Mukti Yatra' conducted across the country under the leadership of the AIKSCC.

Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat's spirit, courage and contribution to the Indian revolution will always be cherished.

CPI(ML) Liberation extends its deepest condolences to his family, comrades, friends, and all those who had the privilege of working with him.

Red Salute to Comrade Prem Singh Gehlawat. ■

Condolence Messages

"... No meeting was ever as engaging without him. From the days of the AIKSCC and its journeys to the evolution of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), he not only represented the views of AIKM with unwavering conviction but also offered insightful analyses of the positions taken by various organizations. Even when his observations digressed from the immediate subject, they invariably remained relevant and gave everyone much to reflect upon.

"His contribution was not confined to discussions alone. During massive public gatherings, he would remain on his feet for hours, personally overseeing countless organizational arrangements, a demanding responsibility that he carried out with remarkable efficiency despite his advancing age."

— AIKMS (All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha)

"There could be no more fitting farewell for a revolutionary who dedicated every moment of his life to the struggles of India's peasants, workers, Adivasis, Dalits, and all oppressed people. He remained active in the movement until his very last breath. ...

"Throughout his life, he stood uncompromisingly against corporate land grab, forced displacement, the destruction of forests, and the dispossession of farmers, Adivasis, forest dwellers, and rural communities. He believed that the struggle for land was inseparable from the struggle for democracy, constitutional rights, and people's sovereignty over natural resources. ... Even after turning eighty this year, Comrade Prem Singh never slowed down. He travelled tirelessly, attended meetings across the country, guided younger comrades, and continued to organise people with the same passion and humility that defined his political life."

- Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA) ■

Red Salute to Comrade R.N. Thakur

Leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Movement!

Comrade Ram Narayan Thakur (R.N. Thakur), one of the foremost leaders of the first generation of CPI(ML) and a key organiser of the revolutionary workers' movement in Bihar, passed away on 5 July 2026 at PMCH, Patna. He had suffered a brain stroke a few days earlier. Despite the efforts of the doctors, his condition continued to deteriorate, and he breathed his last at 9:00 a.m. on 5 July.

Comrade Ram Narayan Thakur was born on 14 August 1943 in B.C. Basaon village of Dinara block in Rohtas district. His parents were Yashoda Devi and Shivdayal Thakur. He dedicated his whole life for the revolution and spent his time always away from his ancestral home, but was the unique member of that family because of whom the entire family has remained a joint family to this day.

A brilliant student from childhood, Comrade R.N. Thakur completed his early education in the village school. He later studied Chemistry (Honours) at the prestigious Science College of Patna University. During 1969-70, when the echoes of the Naxalbari movement were inspiring students and youth across the country, he too was deeply influenced. Under his leadership, an important meeting of students from various colleges in Patna was organised, which was addressed by Comrade Satyanarayan Singh and many other leading leaders of the revolutionary movement. Inspired by Charu Mazumdar's call, he, along with his comrades Ashok Kumar and S.K. Sharma, left college and gave up his family responsibilities and career to go to the villages.

He began his Party life by building CPI(ML) among landless and poor peasants in the Punpun area of Patna district. Soon, when the Party



entered a period of fragmentation and ideological deviation, he remained steadfast. During this period he came into contact with Comrade Johar and Comrade Ram Naresh Ram and enthusiastically joined the work of reorganising CPI(ML) and organising peasant resistance. During the Emergency, he was arrested and lodged in Bankipur (Patna) Jail. There too he led a series of struggles on the issues of prisoners. Leading the historic Bankipur (Patna) Jail break of 4 November 1974, he escaped

Final Tribute in Patna

Comrade R.N. Thakur's mortal remains were kept for final homage at MLA Flat 15/10 in Patna, where a large number of Party leaders, activists, representatives of various political parties, and family members paid their tribu

tes. He was given a final farewell at the electric crematorium at Bans Ghat.

Those who paid tribute included senior Party leader Swadesh Bhattacharya, State Secretary Kunal, Patna District Secretary Amar, AICCTU National General Secretary Rajiv Dimri, All India

Agricultural and Rural Workers' Association General Secretary Dharendra Jha, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari, MPs Rajaram Singh and Sudama Prasad, Scheme Workers' national leader and MLC Shashi Yadav, MLAs Arun Singh and Sandeep Saurabh, K.D. Yadav, Saroj Chaubey, Santosh Sahar, Ranvijay Kumar, Umesh Singh, Jitendra Kumar, Rambali Singh Yadav, Ajit Kumar Singh, Rambali Prasad, Premchand Sinha, and hundreds of leaders and activists from different districts.

Representatives of INTUC, NAPM, UTUC, the Scheme Workers' Federation and other mass

organisations also paid their heartfelt tributes.

Several senior leaders of the Mahagathbandhan and Left parties also paid floral tributes to Comrade R.N. Thakur. Among them were senior Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Abdul Bari Siddiqui, CPI leader Vishwajit Kumar, DYFI leader Asif Ali, CPI(ML) leader Nandkishore Prasad, and many others.

Memorial meetings were organised in many states, and several districts in Bihar including Bhagalpur, Begusarai, Arwal, Jehanabad, East Champaran, Supaul, where leaders and activists paid heartfelt tributes

along with 16 comrades.

After the Emergency, when the Party launched the rectification movement and began the initiative of building mass organisations, uniting peasants, taking their movement to new heights, and taking CPI(ML) among the broader masses, he enthusiastically participated in it. Once again, in 1979, he was arrested at Danapur Railway Station. At that time, the Janata Party government had already announced the release of political prisoners on bail. Despite this, he refused to seek bail and came out of jail only in 1981, after a provision for unconditional release was introduced. The hardships of prison and repression never weakened his resolve, and each time he returned to the people with greater determination than before.

After coming out of jail, he contributed to building the Party organisation and expanding the peasant movement in many districts of Bihar and present-day Jharkhand, including Jehanabad, Gaya, Arwal, Hazaribagh, Purnea, Rohtas, Siwan, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Giridih and Munger. When the Special Committee for the districts of Central Bihar, the Central Bihar Regional Committee, was formed, he became one of its members. He was also a member of the Party's Central Committee from 1983 to 1992. During this period, he also briefly served as the Acting State Secretary of Bihar. From then until the end of his life, he remained a member of the Party's Bihar State Committee.

During the 1990 Bihar Assembly elections, he was in charge of the Bagodar constituency, where the late Comrade Mahendra Prasad Singh was elected for the first time as the IPF candidate.

In the late 1980s, when CPI(ML) began expanding its

intervention in the workers' movement and took the initiative to build a revolutionary workers' organisation, he became one of its principal organisers in Bihar. This process gained momentum after Comrade Yogeshwar Gop, a prominent leader of the employees' movement in Bihar, left CPI(M) and joined CPI(ML), and in 1989 the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) was formed through its Chennai conference. During the same period, when the Party began functioning openly, he also became the spokesperson of the Bihar State Committee.

Under his guidance, many trade unions including the Bihar State Construction Workers' Union, Bihar State Local Bodies Employees' Federation, Bihar State Unorganised Workers' Union, East Central Railway Employees' Union, Bihar State Rickshaw-Thela-Tamtam Drivers' Union, Private Vehicle Drivers and Employees' Union (Patna), Pataliputra Milk Producers Employees and Officers' Union, Bihar State Democratic Beedi Workers' Union, Coal Mines Workers' Union (Dhanbad), and Motor Workers' Union (Giridih) in Jharkhand were built and expanded. He also played an important role in the formation of the All India Construction Workers' Federation (AISWF) at the national level. He served as president or held other important responsibilities in many of these organisations. From 2001 onwards, he continuously served as the General Secretary of AICCTU Bihar State.

Comrade R.N. Thakur strongly took the initiative for the formation of the Welfare Board for construction workers in Bihar. He first served on its Expert Committee and later became a member of the Welfare Board. He was also a member

of the Bihar State Child Labour Commission during 2010–15. He also served as a member of the Regional Employees' Provident Fund (EPF).

For the last three decades, he played a leading role in strengthening the unity of central trade unions and in the struggle for the rights of workers and employees through the Bihar Labour Organisation. Rising above small differences, he always gave the highest priority to workers' unity.

His life was a living example of communist values. His simplicity, discipline, ideological clarity, unwavering commitment to the organisation, and ability to continue working even under difficult circumstances made him stand out among his contemporaries. Until the last days of his life, he carried out every responsibility assigned by the Party with complete sincerity and commitment. His entire life was dedicated to the rights of the exploited, the oppressed, and the working people.

With his passing, the workers' movement of Bihar has lost a courageous, committed, farsighted and militant leader. This is an irreparable loss not only for CPI(ML), AICCTU or any one organisation, but for the entire workers' movement and the broader Left-democratic movement.

The Party offers a Red Salute to his revolutionary life, struggle, sacrifice and commitment to the people, and resolves to intensify the struggle for building an exploitation-free, democratic and egalitarian society by following the path shown by him.

Red Salute to Comrade R.N. Thakur! ■

OBITUARY

Comrade G. Palani

Comrade G. Palani, former Puducherry State Committee Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation and State Vice-President of AICCTU, passed away on Wednesday, 15 July 2026, at 4:00 PM on the way to the hospital for cardiac arrest.

Comrade GP had been a spirited, dedicated and a disciplined party cadre throughout his party life. He was so warm with comrades despite being so strict about observing party discipline. Wholly committed to the cause of the people. He had led several people's struggles. He had been a source of inspiration to all of us. Heartfelt Condolences to his family, friends and all-party comrades in Puducherry.

Red Salutes to Comrade GP! ■



Comrade Nishan Singh

Comrade Nishan Singh, 77, passed away on the morning of 18 July 2026. He had served as a member of the Party's Uttarakhand State Committee. He was also a National Council member of AICCTU and was serving as the President of AICCTU Uttarakhand. His passing marks the tragic and untimely end of a life that embodied the revolutionary consciousness forged during the movements of the 1980s and remained steadfast in the struggles of the present.

A retired headmaster, Comrade Nishan Singh was popularly known as Nishan Massab. He was a warm-hearted, free-spirited, and cheerful comrade, known for his wit, quick repartee, remarkable presence of mind, and generous hospitality towards comrades. Comrade Nishan Singh was born on 1 March 1949 in Punjab. Following the circumstances arising from the Partition, his family settled in the Terai region of Rudrapur in Nainital district. Punjab was deeply influenced by the legacy of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the communist movement, influences that also shaped the young Nishan Singh. He joined the Communist Party in his youth. As an active worker, he was associated with the CPI and the CPI(M) before joining the CPI(ML) at its very inception.

He maintained close relations with people from all walks of life. His life was marked by simplicity and an unwavering commitment to revolutionary ideals. His home was a centre of constant activity, welcoming Left activists, student leaders, trade unionists, social activists, relatives, teachers, and countless others. The entire family lived in a spirit of collective commitment, and together they made their home a true home for the Party. Comrade Nishan Singh dedicated a part of his house to serve as the Party's district office in Udham Singh Nagar.

Red Salute to Comrade Nishan Singh! ■



Comrade Anwar Jhankar

CPI(ML) Liberation has expressed profound grief over the untimely demise of Comrade Anwar Jhankar, who passed away on Saturday, July 18. For over 25 years, Comrade Anwar Jhankar remained a powerful cultural voice of the people across the Palamu division. Through his revolutionary songs and unwavering commitment, he inspired generations of activists and strengthened people's movements against feudal oppression and communal fascist forces.

CPI(ML) said that Comrade Jhankar played a vital role in the party's major campaigns and mass struggles across Bihar and Jharkhand. His passing is an irreparable loss not only to the party but also to the struggles of the poor and oppressed.

Red Salute to Comrade Anwar Jhankar! ■





Patna (July 22) and Kolkata (July 21): Protest marches by student organizations against the July 20 police repression of students and youth in Delhi.



CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya visited Jantar Mantar on July 2 to express solidarity with climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, six AISA activists and thirteen other students on hunger strike, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the repeal of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the scrapping of the National Testing Agency (NTA).

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