

Volume - 26, No. 5

May 2020 (Spl Issue)



Organ of the Central Committee.

CPI (ML)

New Democracy

Naxalbari blazes the Path

Modi Announcement of Relief Package

Decoding Five Tranches of Relief Package

Lift the Lockdown

Raking Up Boundary Dispute with Nepal

Pushing the Agenda of Education 'Deforms'

On US-Taliban Deal

Who Can Stop People From Walking

AP: Strikes & Mass Protests by Jute Workers

Organ of the Central Committee, CPI (ML)

NEW DEMOCRACY

May - 2020 (Spl Issue)

CONTENTS

Editorial : Naxalbari blazes the Path	2
Modi's Announcement of Relief Package	7
Decoding Five Tranches of Relief Package	16
Lift the Lockdown	30
Raking Up Boundary Dispute with Nepal	38
Pushing the Agenda of Education 'Deforms'	48
On US-Taliban Deal	59
Who Can Stop People From Walking	68
AP: Strikes & Mass Protests by Jute Workers	71

Naxalbari Turning Point is Blazing the Path

This year, Naxalbari Day (May 25) has come at a time when Indian people are facing unprecedented hardships due to Govt. utilizing the Corona pandemic to heap untold sufferings on the people. Life of the common people has been forced to a grinding halt while assault on democratic rights is continued with renewed vigour; assault on the hard won rights of workers is being launched with ferocity; assault on peasantry and agriculture and stronger dose of corporate control is being given a push while neglect of hundreds of millions of migrant workers has shown the ruling classes in their true colour. Lockdown had been imposed to save the upper and upper middle classes at the expense of overwhelming majority of toiling people of the country.

This year Naxalbari Day has come at a time when millions of workers have walked back and still walking back to their villages. These were drawn from the landless poor peasants, agricultural labourers and even middle peasant families. Rural India, which has been the cauldron where contradictions were boiling over, had since long been the arena of fierce struggle and revolutionary movements. Rural India had been the main battleground against the rule of big bourgeoisie and big landlords who are subservient to imperialism and had come to power in 1947. Rural India, where overwhelming majority of the people lived, and even now nearly 70% of Indian live, has seen continuous stream of revolutionary

peasant struggles. While India had a long history of peasant revolts, Telengana Armed Struggle (1946-1951) was the first armed struggle of Indian peasants under working class leadership which sustained for five years and covered a large area. This struggle was betrayed by the then CPI leadership and the path of Armed Agrarian Revolution was sought to be drowned in the quagmire of parliamentarianism. Naxalbari peasant armed struggle was re-establishment of the path shown by Telengana Armed Struggle and became a spark which ignited a prairie fire in several regions of the country. More, it became a turning point in the history of the Communist Movement in India drawing a sharp line of demarcation between revolutionaries and revisionists & neo-revisionists.

Naxalbari has been and is a symbol of the path of armed struggle for the liberation of India; for carrying out democratic revolution in India. It also stands for the fact that in India armed struggle of the people takes the form of Armed Agrarian Revolution and path of protracted people's war. Naxalbari stands for New Democratic Revolution with working class as its leader and peasantry as the main force.

Indian ruling classes launched unprecedented repression on the revolutionary peasant movement and created new records in the suppression of democratic rights and unleashing of state violence against the struggling people. While this was the main response of the ruling classes, they also tried to sow illusions among the people and thus emerged the second round of land reforms by ruling classes. Besides, a number of village youth particularly from among the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, went to metropolitan centres to work. Though it was not large enough to make any qualitative change to the distress of the exploited and oppressed peasant masses, it did provide a safety valve to the

pressure of crisis and in many regions the educated youth left for cities. The return of these workers, mostly young, to the villages is bound to increase pressure in rural economic and social life. This will have an important bearing on the struggles in rural areas in large parts of the country, mainly in rural areas, though it will leave its imprint on the workers' struggle in cities as well. This will create fertile ground for struggle for employment, land and against rural backwardness and lack of development, aggravating crisis there.

Rural India is still ruled by landlords and rural elite. There have been changes in the rural life, yet these have been quantitative in nature. These changes have deepened the old pressure points while creating some new ones. The struggle against the ruling classes in the countryside has become more multifarious but is still directed against landlords, money lenders and other business interests. While several issues of struggle have gained in importance, land remains the most important issue of struggle in so far as changing the village life is concerned. There has been no transfer of power in rural India it has only been accretion of avenues of exploitation of landlords and joining of business interests along with traditional allies of landlords, the money lenders. These sections have taken a large share of Govt. schemes and also control the businesses that have risen in the rural areas in alliance with traders. Land continues to be the symbol of power in rural India with nearly three fourth of the wealth of the richest 14% people being land. Land ownership, the basis of semi-feudal exploitation to which have been added other forms of ownership and exploitation, continues to be concentrated in a very small section with only top 2% owning 25% of agricultural land and top 7% owning 47% of land. In fact proportion of landlords, money lenders and traders has shown some increase in the recent past. On the other hand, land

holdings of the bottom half of rural people have further decreased to a mere 0.4% increasing the number of rural landless people, most of them agricultural labourers. In fact according to Socio-Economic Census 2011, 56% of rural people own only homestead land.

Exploitation and oppression of peasants continues in a myriad of ways. While old forms continue, the new are added. Tenancy in agriculture continues to be high though it is not brought on record as there is no proper record of bataidari in most of the rural areas. Its extent is not captured even by NSS as most of these are only verbal deals. To give some examples: K. Ranga Rao Committee had put its extent at 50% in 2006 in Andhra Pradesh (then United AP); D. Bandopadhyay who headed a Commission in Bihar put the figure of tenancy at one third (35%) though lamenting lack of records. The vast extent of tenancy in coastal Odisha is well known. And so, in major parts of the country, tenancy is much more widespread though exploitation of poor peasants and agricultural labourers continues in myriad of other ways. The present scenario in the countryside shows that path shown by Naxalbari remains valid for the liberation of the country.

This skewed ownership of means of production, land being the principal one in rural India, is also at the root of continuing caste oppression in the country. In recent years there has been a rise in the struggles against Caste oppression yet majority of them are not focusing on the issue of ownership of means of production. However, some struggles have focused on this issue which is an integral part of the struggle against caste oppression. Here Naxalbari struggle and its emphasis on elimination of semi-feudal oppression and land distribution remain relevant to the struggle against caste oppression. Similarly struggle of tribals against alienation of their land, which is at the root of the assault on them, have drawn

inspiration from and have been part of the struggle led by the communist revolutionaries on the path shown by Naxalbari. They continue to be so.

Naxalbari Day is being observed at a time when ruling dispensation at the Centre and in most of the states is imposing fascist dictatorship over the country. It is being observed at a time when attacks on peasantry and working class, all the toiling sections are intensified to extreme and ruling regime has become shameless and brazen about its service to imperialism and domestic reactionary ruling classes – big capitalists and big landlords. It is being observed at a time when minorities, especially Muslims are being targeted in an unprecedented way as regime advances to impose RSS vision of Hindu Rashtra, in essence upper caste chauvinism in service of imperialism and reaction. It is opposed to all the aspirations of Indian people that had crystallized in the course of anti-colonial struggle of Indian people.

It is incumbent on those upholding the path of Naxalbari to dexterously combine the struggle against Sangh fascism with building the struggles of the people for revolutionary change. The overwhelming majority of the people- peasants and workers- constitute the main fighting force for the revolutionary change and also against fascist onslaught of RSS-BJP. Struggle of peasant masses will play a significant role in emerging scenario. CRs must devote all energy and initiative to increase their role in this struggle; for it to be realized, full attention and energy should be devoted to build areas of sustained resistance of the peasantry- this resistance will be a strong bulwark against RSS-BJP designs and will be crucial in overcoming defeatism and compromise. This struggle will mainly be fought outside parliamentary arena. This challenge is an

opportunity to Communist Revolutionaries, the followers of Naxalbari Path.

Combine class struggle with struggle against social oppression and offensive of fascist forces!

Revolution is the Future; Naxalbari shows the way!

Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought!

Modi's Announcement does not address Concerns of the Working People

No Effective Measures for revival of the Economy

What was meant to be a relief package was repackaged relief- old stuff with most bags empty. Continuing the trend he established in his earlier addresses, PM Modi in his announcement on May 12 again ignored the basic concerns of the people in the wake of Corona pandemic. There was not even a mention of relief to inter-state migrant workers who have been the worst sufferers of Govt. measures. Nor any concrete action plan to kick start economy particularly to get employment for the workers and relief to the peasants and agricultural labourers. Corona hitherto has not yet shaken the neoliberal policy framework of ruling classes serving foreign and domestic corporate and reactionaries, rather has given an opportunity to the Govt. to put vigour into pursuit.

Modi has talked of five pillars in his speech, namely quantum jump in economy, building of modern infrastructure, technology driven system, vibrant demography and becoming part of global supply chain. Rack your brain to find the 'invisible' link that these measures have specifically to Corona outbreak except that Govt. finds Corona times as opportune to further its longstanding thrusts. The last point is particularly relevant here as Indian ruling classes have been striving to attract capital of US and its western allies from China for which they had kept the red carpet rolled out and which they feel US companies are now ready to step onto. The wait, they hope, will now be over. The reference to vibrant demography was more for the effect but it has been the most visible sight of Corona lockdown on and off the roads.

Now the so-called relief package itself. Modi claimed it to be of Rs. 20 lakh crores ostensibly to meet the demand from several quarters to roll out a package to the tune of 10% of GDP and to bring it in line with developed countries where it has mostly been above that level and counting with Japan's spending amounting to 21% of GDP topping the list. Govt. ministers have now started calling India a developed country, much in line with Trump who has many months back called India a developed country and hence not entitled to relaxations in trade rules meant for developing countries.

But this reel life (on channels) gave way to real life. He included in this relief package so many measures announced earlier. Govt. has a bad sense of history in the sense of mixing fact with fiction and this is an exercise of more of the same. Of particular import is the inclusion of the measures announced by RBI from February 7 to April 27 for liquidity enhancement. These measures are neither new nor of any relief to the people. And these constitute

more than two fifth of what Modi offered to the people. These measures by RBI, totaling Rs. 8.04 lakh crores, include measures amounting to Rs. 2.8 lakh crores announced on February 6, worth Rs. 3.74 lakh crores announced on March 27, other measures announced on March 27 e.g. Targeted Long Term Repo Operations (Introduced by RBI which allows banks to borrow for long period of up to three years from RBI on repo rate- the rate at which banks borrow from RBI if the loans are invested in investment grade corporate debt), cut in Cash Reserve Ratio by 100 bps totally worth Rs. 1.37 lakh crores, Accommodation under marginal standing facility (The facility introduced by RBI in 2011 whereby banks can borrow overnight funds from RBI at slightly higher than Repo Rate against govt. approved securities) hiked from 2% to 3%. On April 27, RBI again announced 2nd installment of TLTRO, along with Refinancing of SIDBI, NABARD and NHB and Special liquidity facility for mutual funds each amounting to 50 thousand crores. All these measures included in this package bring the total to over Rs. 8 lakh crores. Note all these measures are to enhance availability of funds and not any investment.

Also included in this package were the measures announced by Finance Minister on March 27, two days after the lockdown was enforced. That package was included in Modi package, that too on its declared value of Rs. 1.70 lakh crores, it involved only Rs. 61,380 crore in actual transfers over next three months. It included payments of nearly 10 thousand crore transfer to women holders of Jan Dhan accounts and Rs. 3000 crore for pension of widows, elders and disabled, which were already part of Union Budget 2020-'21. Rs. 17,380 crores announced for the farmers was frontloading of an installment from Rs. 6000 per year being given to peasants under PM Kisan scheme and Rs. 31000 crores marked for construction

workers were from their Welfare Fund. This announcement was substantially *jumlonomics*.

The package also includes Rs. 15000 crores announced for health care needs in the wake of Covid. This will also include payments from PM Cares Fund wherefrom PM has announced Rs. 2000 crore for ventilators and Rs. 1000 crores for migrant workers. Given the scale of the latter problem, the allocated amount is peanuts.

Removing these parts, Modi package is reduced to just one half. But it may not be that much also. The exercise substantially is of providing loan guarantees, giving tax breaks and postponement of debt repayment and counting these as part of package. Though PM announced that Finance Minister will outline the actual measures over the next few days but the direction is already established of providing for loans and counting loans as relief. These loans do not address the problems Indian economy is facing, has been facing from earlier which has been aggravated by the senseless (Couldn't Care Less) acts of the Govt. in the wake of Corona pandemic.

However, there are reasons to believe that the actual expenditure will be far less than that announced. One indication of the same is the decision by the Central Govt. to increase market borrowings for the current fiscal year i.e. 2020-21. Govt. had budgeted Rs. 7.80 lakh crores (BE) which has been increased to Rs. 12 lakh crores on May 8. The decision coming days prior to the announcement of the package may provide a clue that govt. is planning to spend just about 4 lakh crores, nearly 2% of the GDP.

On the other hand, significantly the Govt. is on a spree of mopping up funds. When prices of crude oil plunged to one third in

international market (from roughly US\$ 69 per barrel to roughly US\$ 28 per barrel) Central Govt. increased excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs. 10 and Rs. 13 per litre respectively. Through this measure the govt. is expected to increase its revenue collection by Rs. 2.85 lakh crores. Had it transferred this decline in crude prices to consumers it would have helped agricultural operations and industry but that is too much to expect from this anti-people govt. Further Central Govt. has frozen DA increases of 11.5 million Central Govt. employees and pensioners for eighteen months beginning with January 2020 installment of DA increase. State govts. will follow suit by withholding DR payments at least for the same duration. These will total to Rs. 1.2 lakh crores (Rs. 38 thousand crores saved by the Central Govt.) One can see that govt. has extracted over 4 lakh crores from the people over the last few days only. It becomes tight-fisted only when it is the question of giving to the people; it is not so circumspect in extracting from the people and in handouts to the rich.

PM Modi talked of four emphasis areas in his speech. Each one of them is alarming and poses grave danger to the people. First he mentioned Land. One knows that RSS-BJP Govt. is keen to change LARR (law relating to land acquisition) to make it easier to take land from peasants including tribals. RSS-BJP Govt. also wants to change land use laws to bring about corporate controlled agriculture. These pose grave danger because the only way to spur economy known to Indian ruling classes is to invite foreign capital and create conditions for their investment. In the immediate sense, RSS-BJP govt. plans to sell land with the Govt. and public sector enterprises which can fetch good sum and Govt. can shower bonanza on their corporate friends. This may explain why Modi kept it as his first priority. Missing are peasants and agricultural

labourers. Focus is on land i.e. taking land from them.

His other priority is liquidity i.e. increasing availability of liquidity to entrepreneurs. The whole emphasis is on increasing loans to them and not addressing the causes. This is a goose that lays golden eggs. In the name of addressing crisis, 'sub-prime' lending is being talked of, lending without any chance of recovery with Company Law, barring recovery from other assets and govt. helping the defaulters to escape. This would be creating NPAs on the vast scale. Fund so created may appropriately be called Nirav Modi Fund. One can easily see the trajectory of such funds and where parts of it will land. Further, the Govt. owes dues to MSMEs in huge amount. MSME minister has asked for its payment. It is expected that this payment of dues (which is anyway overdue) may also be accommodated in Modi package.

Moreover, there is no mention that help to companies, even making loans available to them, is dependent on saving or creating jobs. Providing even capital and hence right to get profits from public funds but not even ensuring the wages and jobs of the workers!

Another priority announced by Modi is Labour. Labour could not escape his attention though there is a saying in rural areas of the dangers of being in front of the officer i.e. getting his attention, implying the less the better. Central Govt. announced its intention of taking the Ordinance route to bring in Labour Codes, a euphemism for abolishing rights of workers under the existing laws. While this is in pipe line, two RSS-BJP ruled states namely UP and MP have announced suspension of labour laws. Many more states including Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Rajasthan, Goa, Haryana and Maharashtra have announced increasing the work day up to 12

hours though there are differences among their announcements as to the period of its operation, payment of overtime at double rate etc. When the govt. has announced its intention to ensure payment of salaries to workers, and the industries will open up only gradually, it is to be expected that work day will be reduced to practice physical distancing as well as provide work to all. The govts. on the other hand are increasing working hours. It is clear that govt. has no intention of paying the wages of lockdown period or ensuring their payment.

This whole talk of labour law changes is being projected as necessary for providing employment and hence 'pro-labour'. The lack of implementation of labour laws with respect to overwhelming majority of unorganized workers (for which the govts. themselves are responsible) is used to negate their availability to the sections of workers who can enforce them due to organization. Attacking the workers for their own good is an old, tested but worn out tactic of representatives of big capitalists.

Modi also mentioned Laws as the fourth area. This will include changes in the laws to give effect to what RSS-BJP Govt. plans, i.e. attacking the workers, peasants, in fact all toilers. Corona is too good a crisis to be missed by the reactionaries, too golden an opportunity to miss to squeeze the working people while pretending to save them. As NitiAyog Vice chairman Rajiv Kumar said "You will see a spate of reforms now, as you have seen in case of labour reforms in the states. (The PM) is hell bent on turning this crisis into opportunity". This is also an opportunity to further privatization of PSEs particularly profitable ones and hand them over to corporate – foreign and domestic.

A matter of grave concern in Modi's address was absence of any measures to address the plight of inter-state migrant workers.

Modi's understanding is "it is natural to be home sick". In fact this narrative is built by several ruling class politicians as if workers are leaving on their own, thus absolving themselves of the culpability in one of most horrendous crimes in the history of the country. And building on this false narrative, Modi has proceeded to punish them by laying out a most vicious plan to attack them, all in the name of relief package. One could only marvel at the audacity of impunity! Here Modis of India do not compare their package with other countries, even countries of Modi's close friends- Trump and Johnson. US\$ 2.2 trillion package passed by US Congress (since increased to \$2.8 trillion) provides for payment to all workers in the whole Corona period. One can deduce from the debate in the Senate that some Republicans wanted to change provisions which entitled workers to earn more in this period than they would otherwise have done. The challenge was defeated. In UK relief package includes 80% of the salary (upto 2500 UK pounds roughly equal to 2.32 lakh Rs. per month) to all workers till October 2020. It is in these times that Modi and RSS remember why we should not copy the west; otherwise they sneeze when it gets cold there. Modi package had no words for ensuring payment to industrial workers, agricultural labourers; it had no measures for peasantry.

The most glaring and probably criminal neglect is absence of any measure to revive economy. Even prior to Corona, Indian economy was in downward spiral. Corona has greatly aggravated it. Indian ruling classes are in denial mode on the causes- it is denying that it is the demand deficit i.e. lack of purchasing power of the overwhelming majority of the people. And Modi has not addressed this, not even mentioned it. There is no talk of helping workers and peasants, the overwhelming majority of the Indian people. Without increasing the purchasing power of workers and peasants how does

one address the cause of downturn? There are no prospects of increasing exports. The wave of protectionism, already strong in the developed capitalist countries, will gain further strength in the post-Corona period. So Make in India has to be along with Make for India.

All talk of promoting domestic companies will amount to small measures as Indian ruling classes are pinning all hopes that companies of US and other western countries will flock to India, especially from China. But such movements take place firstly over a long period and secondly not for the cheap labour alone but this along with infrastructure and markets. Here US companies are in a dilemma. But the most important aspect is that a country of 1350 million cannot take on the path of growth and progress without building domestic market i.e. without increasing purchasing power of her people. This also means that economies do not develop in the long run in isolation with the wellbeing of the people, and particularly in a country as big and populous as India. It is here that the direction of Indian ruling classes, including ruling RSS-BJP, is against the needs of Indian people, especially its overwhelming majority. Corona has brought this into sharper focus.

Modi's speech was an admission that Govt. will do little for the people. It was an admission that Govt. only cares for rich and powerful. Modi has announced that Finance Minister will announce details of the package, but when the package is itself empty, details will only be subterfuge, camouflage and downright pedantry. People must see the utter disdain and contempt for their concerns by the rulers.

(Issued by CPI(ML)-New Democracy on May 13, 2020)

Decoding Five Tranches:

Attacking the People while Feigning Help

For five days i.e. from May 13 to 17, the Finance Minister made daily announcements to translate the PM's announcement of a relief package into concrete steps. These announcements were marked by singular absence of any significant relief to the people. With the now well practiced and also well known dexterity, the Minister tried to fool the people. She failed to assure the people of any sincerity of the Govt. and this is well demonstrated by the growing number of migrant workers- who have emerged both the barometer and also the epic characters of this Himalayan tragedy unleashed by the Govt. on the people- desperately walking to their homes. There was nothing for the poor and needy in the package. That side of the packet was empty.

But the other side of the package was not empty. Modi led RSS-BJP govt. has sought to turn this tragedy of the people into festivity for the corporate- foreign and domestic- and landlords. It has unleashed reforms which it could not have pushed through in ordinary times, utilizing this crisis as an opportunity. It has rammed through labour law changes long sought by the corporate and most importantly sought to usher in changes in Agriculture which ruling classes have long dreamt of but could not implement.

First let us take the broad picture. The so-called Relief package was no relief. Finance Minister claimed that the package amounted to Rs. 20,97,053 crores which is roughly 10% of the GDP. Her calculations were like that of the village *mahajan* who enslaved

a poor peasant for his whole life for a mere “*sawa ser gehun*”. Howsoever hard you try to decode the Package, the figures do not add up. There is hardly any expenditure by the Govt. Included in the Package are facilities to increase loans by RBI to banks, measures meant to encourage banks to give loans, loan guarantees that too of partial amounts. Also included in the Package are the expenditure of the Govt. on ongoing schemes, expenditures which will take years to be made and expenditures which are part of the already planned schemes. Govt. has sought to portray that it is engaged in tackling Corona and hence all expenditure made by it are Corona relief. The whole exercise shows political distancing by the Govt. from the people, lest Corona relief infects the interests of wealthy and powerful.

The two most important and glaring aspects of the Package announced over five days were the very small amount of expenditure for the relief of the people and total avoidance of measures to boost demand to revive the economy. The two are also overlapping to an extent. The package is singularly devoid of any measures for relief of migrant workers. The total amount laid out for providing them food and ration is an abysmal 3500 crore rupees. The decision is to provide 5 kg of wheat per person per month and 1 kg of *chana* per family per month for two months. Besides, FM even forgot to provide how these peanuts will be fried i.e. oil and fuel. Govt. has taken the number of such migrant workers who need this assistance to be 8 crores which is much less than their real number. Even then it works out to be only about Rs 400 per head. Modi govt. has announced it is subsidizing 85% of the fare of migrant workers returning home, but that is what Govt. claims it subsidizes in all passenger fares and has nothing to do with migrant workers returning home. That is a cruel joke.

The second aspect is total disregard to boosting demand. In fact, Govt. of India has been in denial mode about the demand deficit which was at the root of the pre Corona economic slowdown, which has now gone into contraction. It is pursuing worn out supply side economics i.e. attracting investments. In the times of decline in domestic demand and no hope of boosting exports, this is a failed strategy for even pursuing growth. But increasing domestic demand is the last thing on the mind of the Indian govt. This would involve increasing purchasing power of peasants, agricultural labourers and workers, the overwhelming majority of the people. Without increasing domestic demand no amount of easy loans or interest subvention will address the decline of economic activity. After all, for whom will they produce?

With these glaring weaknesses, the Relief package should be analyzed for what it has done. Nearly half of the package is postdated. It included FM statement on March 26 as well as RBI decisions between February to April, 2020. RBI decisions were in the nature of liquidity enhancement, meaning increasing the availability of money to Banks, cheapening such borrowing, increasing the amount they can keep etc. (Statement 'On Modi Announcement' dated 13.5.2020) These measures, amounting to over 8 lakh crores, do not put one paisa of burden on the Govt. nor involve any investment at all. The ostensible purpose of this is to increase availability of money for industries and other occupations but with no prospect of market recovery. In view of collapse of demand no loans will be taken except by those who wish to simply defraud. RSS-BJP have many friends with that expertise. This fact i.e. loans not being taken, is amply borne out by the growing money that banks have parked with RBI to avail of reverse repo rate, after liquidity enhancement steps. Money so parked increased from Rs 3 lakh crore on March 27 to Rs 8.4 lakh crore by the end of April.

Also included in this package were the measures announced by Finance Minister on March 27. That package, also mentioned in earlier comment, involved only Rs. 61,380 crore in actual transfers over next three months. It included payments of Rs. 10,025 crore to women holders of Jan Dhan accounts and Rs. 2807 crore for pension of widows, elders and disabled. These were already part of Union Budget 2020-'21. Rs. 16,394 crores announced for the farmers was frontloading of an installment from Rs. 6000 per year being given to peasants under PM Kisan scheme and Rs. 31000 crores marked for construction workers were from their Welfare Fund. Most of the Package reminds one of the person who, seeing a robber on the highway, promptly hands over money to the friend walking with him, saying this is to clear an old loan.

Commentators are generally agreed that this package involves sums less than 1% of GDP. However, such estimates also include payments which were either already part of existing schemes or fictitious payments like loss of revenue. The actual projected expenditure amounts to much less and that too will occur over a long period of time. Of the five tranches declared by FM, in the First tranche Rs. 25,500 crore was estimated to be spent, Rs. 5000 crore in 2nd tranche, Rs. 30,000 crore in 3rd tranche, Rs. 8,100 crore in 4th tranche and Rs. 40,000 crore in 5th and final tranche. Rs. 40,000 crore in the final tranche is enhancement of the Budget estimate of Rs. 61,000 crores for MNREGA. However, the money spent last year on MNREGA was Rs. 71,000 crores (RE). Further, wages under MNREGA have been increased from Rs. 182 per day to Rs. 202 per day. These two would account for nearly half of the announced increase. The enhancement of allocation will only result in roughly 20% more workdays under MNREGA. There is however, already 65% increase in the people seeking work under MNREGA.

Even the media commentators are pegging the whole package at about 0.8% of the GDP. However, a close scrutiny would reveal that the package will cost only Rs. 65,000 crores in expenses in near future- roughly 0.3% of the GDP. It probably is sheer coincidence that the former Director of RBI too had demanded Rs. 65,000 crores to be given to poor- though the head is different, amount is similar.

From the above it is clear that this virtual package is designed to fool the gullible and give corporate media and apologists of the Govt. a sense of something being done. It is a hoax on the people and exposes the rotten, anti-people character of the regime.

First Tranche was avowedly addressed to reviving Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). They contribute 30% to the GDP, do 45% of the total manufacture, account for 40% of the exports and employ 11 to 12 crore workers. This sector is the backbone of industrial production and is also the supplier of ancillary parts to large industries. These industries were suffering even prior to Corona, the pandemic has just brought them to a halt. Corona any way causes mortality only among infirm, seriously ill people! In a way Corona outbreak has been a mixed blessing for the ruling classes. They are trying to hide the systemic nature of the economic illness under the pretext of Corona which has only brought it into a sharper focus. It should be borne in mind that consumer demand accounts for 60% of the GDP and this is the most critical aspect for revival and is totally neglected by the Govt. in its so-called Relief package. Since the lockdown, more than 12 crore have been added to the unemployed, nearly three fourth of them daily wage workers.

First tranche was like a loan *mela*. Rs. 3.7 lakh crores were marked under different heads- Rs. 3 lakh crore for loan guarantees

and rest for tax deferment, cap on interest component etc. 20% of the outstanding loans as on 2.2.2020 could be taken without collaterals for working capital. This loan will have 4year tenure and no payment of principal amount for first year. Govt. will provide support through Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises. Total loans of estimated 45 lakh MSMEs is around 16-18 lakh crores and 20% of it will be more than 3 lakh crores. The definition of MSME has been changed to bring larger owners into its fold. Equity infusion is limited to Rs. 10,000 crores. It is anybody's guess who will take these loans when there are no prospects of the sale of their goods. As a blow to the workers, PF contribution is reduced from 12% to 10%, no question of PF subvention by the govt. Employee contribution too has been reduced to 10% and it is illogically shown as a relief while all PF money belongs to the workers. On top of it, EPF rate have been cut, giving further blow to the workers.

Another important component of this tranche was to Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) which in India have been one of the main conduits of robbing the state exchequer. 45,000 crores is earmarked for them, again as guarantee for the first 20% of the loss suffered by them and another 30,000 crores for fully guaranteed investment schemes. Finance Minister announced 90,000 crores for power sector to be given by Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and REC, again no expenditure by the Govt. Another 50,000 crores have been marked for reduction in TDS (Tax Deduction at Source) and TCS (Tax Collected at Source) by 25%.

One can see in the first tranche that there was hardly any expenditure and none is due in near future. Even the liability is limited mostly to loan guarantees. It cannot help the sector stand up.

On the other hand, FM approved of the changes in the labour laws by the states and mentioned the Central Govt.'s intention to change labour laws in the country, further squeezing the workers. Along with, no provision was made for payment of wages of workers even for the lockdown period. It was left to the owners to pay the wages and the same order was withheld after the Apex Court, coming out of self-imposed selective quarantine, prohibited coercive action against owners for non-payment. The gimmickry reached some level when rental accommodation for migrant workers was announced under PM Awas Yojana but no funds were allocated for it.

Second Tranche also dealt with workers- again mostly loan schemes e.g. Rs. 5000 crores for street vendors. It provided Rs. 3500 crores for food and ration to migrant workers. Hearts of Modi and Nirmala pain for the migrant workers but with ease! The tranche marked 70,000 crores for housing sector providing credit linked Subsidy Scheme for MIG. It also had a small component of Rs. 1500 crores as Interest Subvention Scheme for small businesses.

However, Second Tranche was mainly for credit to farmers. Rs. 30,000 crores for farmers as additional emergency loans through NABARD. Rs. 2 lakh crores for loans to farmers through Kisan Credit Cards (KCC). KCC has been the main conduit of budgetary allocations for farmers and is a bane for indebted peasantry. All govt. credits have also been a powerful instrument of serving the interests of landlords and rural elite who monopolize use of these funds. They also use these funds for further lending to poor peasants and other sections of rural poor, strengthening their control over the village life as well as extracting surplus from them.

One of the sinister aspects of this tranche was allocation of Rs. 6000 crores of CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund) for employment generation outside the forest areas. This along with cuts in SC and ST sub-plans in the name of Corona pandemic, shows that any crisis is good for the attack on the oppressed sections.

Third Tranche focused on Rural Development Schemes. This was an exercise in subterfuge. Rs. 1 lakh crore has been earmarked for Agri Infrastructure Fund for projects at farm gates and aggregation points- agricultural co-operative societies, producer organizations etc. to develop infrastructure for harvest mostly for storage and processing of agricultural produce. This has been an old scheme for past six years with NABARD as its nodal agency. Again a loan scheme. FM did not provide any details.

Rs. 10,000 crores have been assured for Micro food enterprises for technical up-gradation, to achieve food safety standards and for marketing. Already a scheme for promoting Food Processing Industry exists wherein loans are extended up to 95 per cent of the project cost for setting up, modernization and expansion of food processing units. This loan scheme too is an extension of already existing scheme. Enhancement of the amount of loans (from Rs. 2000 crores to 10,000 crores) too should be viewed with a lot of suspicion because mostly these are for propaganda and not implementation.

Similarly Rs. 20,000 crores have been announced for fishermen through Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana which is extension of already existing scheme wherein expenditure on development of fisheries and aquaculture is shared by Central and State Govts. This scheme has been going on for several years and is being included in this package. Though allotted amount has been

enhanced but no time frame in which this expenditure will be incurred is given.

Rs. 13,343 crores have been announced for National Animal Disease Control Programme to ensure vaccination of cattle and bovines. This too is an old scheme announced earlier with the same allocation which was to be spent over five years i.e. 2019-2024.

Rs. 15,000 crores for Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund to support private investment too is an allocation in an already existing scheme meant for dairy processing including value addition and provision of cattle feed. But this becomes part of Relief Package in the wake of Corona! Though some increase in allocation is there but again there is no time frame in which it will be spent. Similar are Promotion of Herbal Cultivation (Rs. 4000 crores) existing since 2008-09. Beekeeping initiative (500 crores) is also an old scheme existing in some form since 1993. So is also 'Operation Greens' allotted 500 crores (same outlay as in the Budget) which will now be extended to all fruits and vegetables (earlier only for tomatoes, potatoes and onion). All these existing schemes, that too loan schemes, are included in the package.

The most serious aspect of this tranche, all the foregoing only to make the bitter pill palatable, was to further deregulate markets and pave the way for contract farming thereby making peasants enslaved workers on their own land. FM announced plans to amend Essential Commodities Act and Agricultural Produce Marketing Act to provide legal framework for contract farming. This anti-peasant measure being imposed while the people are suffering from effects of Govt. lockdown shows the real intent of RSS-BJP Govt. Commentators have called this as 1991 moment for agriculture. Like new economic policies initiated in 1991 changed the industrial

sector, Modi govt. is planning to change agriculture with entry of corporate, mainly foreign capital into hitherto un-availed parts of agrarian economy.

FM made much noise about abolishing the food zones permitting inter-state transport. It is not going to in anyway help the peasantry, as small and medium and even rich farmers cannot take their produce to the distant markets in the country. It is going to benefit traders and a small section of landlords besides encouraging hoarding as it abolishes stock limit. It is also to prepare ground for government withdrawing from purchase of agriculture produce and altogether doing away with MSP. Package is a big attack on the peasantry. It is also anti-consumer as hording will result in higher rates for consumers.

As the presentation continued, it became more and more anti-people and pro-imperialist pro-corporate. While third tranche rolled out plan for contract farming, Fourth Tranche represented large-scale showering of largesse on the Corporate- foreign and domestic. Here again Modi govt. has intended to take these measures since a long time and has now chosen to push them when people are grounded under the burden of lockdown and scared of Corona- as of ghosts. Decision was announced for commercial auction of coal mining blocks to private players. FM also announced govt. plan to amend Coal Mines (Special Provision) Act, 2015 and Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957 which had provided for the takeover of private coal mines. FM announced e-auctions for minerals.

Finance Minister also announced privatization of fertilizer unit of FCI at Talcher (Odisha). Govt. announced plans to privatize power utilities and distribution companies. FM also announced

plans for privatizing six more airports. Air space availability for commercial use is also increased.

Curiously in Fourth Tranche Govt. announced plans for space research and nuclear research reactors. Research reactors for medical isotopes are to be developed on PPP mode. Space research too is to be privatized permitting entry of private players in Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). One wonders whether RSS-BJP leaders are planning a space stay to evade Corona as they have done little to combat it on ground. However, given initial hiccups in all new ventures of such kind, they better keep in mind that it may well turn out to be a one way affair.

Fourth tranche was privatization tranche.

Fifth and final presentation (tranche) announced increase in the allocation for MNREGA which has been dealt with earlier. It is miniscule considering the scale on which pressure on rural employment has increased due to large-scale migration from cities. This was tokenism at its worst. The additions of millions will further deepen the rural distress. There is not even a mention of allotment of land and employment generation through opening of industries suitable to the region, to lessen the distress.

Another important component of fifth tranche was raising the limit to which states can borrow. This limit has been raised from the present 3% to 5% of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) i.e. from Rs. 6.41 lakh crores to Rs. 10.69 lakh crores. While permitting states to raise more loans, the Union govt. has made it contingent on fulfillment of certain conditions by the state govt. i.e. ration portability, steps for ease of doing business, privatization of power distribution companies and relating to revenues of urban local bodies. Only one fourth of the announced increase in permissible

limit is unconditional, half of it in four installments subject to progress in fulfillment of these conditions and rest one fourth when at least three of the four conditions are fulfilled. Placing of these conditions is a blow to the federal structure and makes state govts. captives of the Centre. On the other hand, GST compensation is not paid to any state since December 2019.

The whole announcement i.e. concretization of the announcement made by Modi on May 12, shows that Govt. has no plan at all to ameliorate sufferings of the people; on the other hand, RSS-BJP Govt. is keen to utilize this situation for speeding up implementation of anti-people, pro-corporate policies. As Niti Ayog Vice-Chairman put it, “(The PM) is hell bent on turning this crisis into opportunity”.

One should not wonder why Indian govt. has chosen not to take the measures which other govts. have taken. Why Indian govt.’s package is only 0.75% of the GDP (even according to bourgeois economists, while it is only 0.3% in terms of actual expenditure in near future)? Besides inherently anti-people character of the rulers, it is also grounded in the interests the rulers serve.

Modi Govt. has sought to project the whole package as one for building “*Atmnirbhar Bharat*”. While the whole package is full of opening more and more sectors to foreign companies, there is a discernable design behind this. Govt. of India has been openly siding with US imperialism in its growing contradiction with China. Corona crisis has greatly accelerated this sharpening contradiction. Indian Govt. has targeted those sectors where imports are mostly from Chinese companies and has further liberalized for foreign capital the sectors where western capital is sought. This drive of Indian Govt. has to be seen in the context of a recent decision by the Govt. to bar

companies from the countries who share geographical borders with India from automatic route of investment in Indian companies. It is obvious that target is China. Further Indian Govt. has rejected offers to be part of RCEP claiming it will harm the interests of Indian agriculture, but it was due to opposition of US imperialism. The decision was taken only after US imperialism came out in open opposition to RCEP, the grouping of 10 South East Asian countries, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. “*Atmnirbhar Bharat*” is the spin RSS-BJP govt. has given to this and has little to do with building self-reliant India.

Indian rulers have been hoping to attract companies of USA and its allies from China. Indian rulers have been rolling out red carpet in the form of dilution of labour laws, tax laws and exemption from scrutiny etc. They hope with sharp aggravation in contradiction between USA and China post Corona pandemic, a contradiction which was intensifying even prior to this outbreak, companies from US and along with them from other US allies may step on to the red carpet. Though availability of cheap labour is definitely one of the important considerations for these companies but they also take into account the infrastructure whose state in India is not comparable despite the recent push and the domestic market. China is estimated to become the largest market in the world by 2030 and some estimates put it by 2025. It is also noteworthy that Vietnam and not India has emerged as the new destination of companies from US and other western countries. But hope rises eternal in the human breast.

To attract foreign companies, and this has become urgent and the only option taken by the Govt., besides changing labour laws, opening up agriculture and retail trade, almost all sectors of economy, govt. is also keen not to incur more expenditure and fiscal

burden. Govt. is keen on not worsening the credit rating of India which is already BBB-, just about investment grade. Any further expenditure may worsen this and foreign companies may not come to India, fear RSS-BJP leaders and their corporate friends. Already the state of health of banking sector in India is well known and is creating anxiety among foreign investors. Govt. does not want to take the path which may involve further govt. expenditure that may alarm the foreign investors. That remains their only way to develop India in the image they want. Not a self-reliant India. Not an India responding to the needs of its people. These may be just about tolerated as by-products but the development paradigm should strengthen dominance of economic and social elite and this can happen only as subservient to imperialism and not through independent development.

Modi has told the people that they should be happy to be even alive under RSS-BJP rule (*Jan hai to Jahan hai*). They should expect nothing more. All Indians are made subjects (not citizens) of the reactionary, archaic rule of ruling classes subservient to imperialism.

Corona has stirred ruling classes but has not shaken them, at least not adequately. It cannot. That can only be done by people through their struggles for which objective conditions have become even better. It is the duty of revolutionary organizations and pro-struggle forces to mobilize the people into struggles against the attacks of the Govt. as well as on the immediate issues of the people.

Central Committee,

CPI(ML)-New Democracy

May 19, 2020

Lift the Lockdown

**MOBILIZE THE PEOPLE TO BUILD A POWERFUL
MOVEMENT TO FORCE CHANGE OF POLICY DIRECTION**

UNITE FOR STRUGGLE & STRUGGLE FOR UNITED ACTION

Today lockdown imposed by the Central Govt. has completed 54 days. Central govt. is expected to extend this. The lockdown imposed to check the spread of Coronavirus has been an all-round failure. While bringing all round hardships to the working people, it failed in its principal declared objective i.e. of checking the spread of the Virus. Till yesterday India had 90,615 confirmed Corona positive cases, overtaking China in the number of cases, and 2,874 reported deaths. This is despite low level of testing and lower level of recording of deaths. There has been a controversy that number of deaths announced by Delhi Govt. are far less than those announced by the hospitals in Delhi. Situation in other states may also be similar and hence needs to be probed. These do not take into account the deaths of migrant workers through accidents/exhaustion/starvation etc. These also do not take into account tens of thousands who have died due to other diseases for lack of treatment as they either could not reach the hospital/doctor or did not receive treatment. These also do not take into account the number of deaths of people with Covid like symptoms but who died before reaching hospitals.

Govt.'s approach in tackling the Corona epidemic has been a total failure. It must be held accountable.

Total disregard of the people has resulted in high casualties in famines and due to starvation and in the period of epidemics since the time of colonial rule in India. Present rulers continue the same attitude towards the people.

Lockdown was bound to be a failure as it was not imposed for medical reasons. Political designs took precedence over medical advice in tackling the pandemic. Lockdown can be logical only if there is a sudden surge in community spread and that too to afford time for ramping up the medical facilities. But the Govt. has been in denial of community spread. Having failed to check its spread in the initial period by testing and compulsory quarantine of those coming from abroad, this countrywide lockdown was imposed without any thought except to create panic for other purposes. It was the harshest lockdown on such a vast scale in the world. It was imposed even where there was no single case. It was imposed without making any arrangements for its proper implementation. It was imposed against the advice of the epidemiologists. There was no attempt to test at a large scale to check the spread through “test, isolate and treat”.

One good purpose to which this ill-advised lockdown could be used was for improving health care services. Govt. did not do it. In fact it had no plans to do it. Private sector accounting for 80% of facilities and employing 80% of doctors was not brought into service. The time was wasted for showing that Govt. cared while its actions cried loud it did not.

On the other hand, miseries were heaped on the toiling people. Inter-state migrant workers, unorganized workers, rural poor, fishermen and almost all sections were tortured to make them aware of the danger of Corona. While it was imperative to take

people's cooperation, making them conscious of the danger, giving them scientific knowledge on the spread and need of precautions, people were simply treated as enemies against whom 'war' was launched. Even those cooperating with the suffering people were prosecuted.

Govt. had other designs. It sought to use the Corona pandemic. It unleashed a massive wave of repression on the people showing that as the only way. The RSS-BJP govt. also sought to utilize this situation as an opportunity to fulfill its designs. Under the Covid cover it has suppressed all protests and launched a witch-hunt of activists engaged in anti-CAA protests, particularly Muslim youth, students and intellectuals. Arrests under Bhima Koregaon case were continued.

Under pressure to do something for the poor, especially on the plight of migrant workers that shook the people but not the Govt., Modi Govt. has launched the biggest attempt to advance implementation of anti-people economic policies though with the help of corporate controlled media it has given it the name of relief package and kowtowing to imperialist powers is being done in the name of "*atmnirbhar bharat*". It is rolling out the red carpet for Capital from western imperialist countries. It has begun an exercise of attacking workers and peasants. Labour laws are being done away with and public sector assets including public land are being given to corporate. Contract farming is being promoted and penetration of corporate, mainly foreign capital, is being increased and laws are being framed for that. Land acquisition law is being attacked to make robbing peasants of their land easier. The whole relief package is full of attacks on the people and relief to corporate and reactionaries. People are being misled by promises which are to

be implemented over the years and in the process further indebting them. No relief is provided at present. On the other hand, even CAMPA funds are being diverted. SC & ST allocations and allocations for people's welfare are being slashed.

The measures Modi govt. is forcing on the people need to be resisted. They are sharp intensification of the attacks on the people.

Modi govt. is giving relaxations in lockdown but in a manner which is against the interests of the toiling people. Lockdown must not be extended any further. It must be lifted now.

The Govt. has demonstrated its incompetence, inability and most of all, unwillingness to tackle Corona epidemic in India. Overwhelming majority of the people are disillusioned with Govt. on this score. Hence the people themselves must take measures to safeguard themselves from Corona epidemic as well as from the present govts. which are its allies.

People must use mask. They must maintain physical distance while going out or to the market place or in the work place or while working in the field. While a campaign must be built for the Govt. to provide masks for them, people must be educated on their need and practice. Advice of cleaning hands and not touching face should be adhered to.

Care should be taken to safeguard vulnerable sections particularly elderly who are suffering from other illnesses. If there is anybody with Corona like symptoms they should be taken promptly to hospitals.

Where ever cases are being reported, those places need to be focused on for extensive testing, isolation and treatment.

While following this advice, working people should be mobilized to demand from the govt. to implement the following demands. People should be mobilized and protests may be spread out. We should educate the people that the govt. attempt to prevent assembly is to force upon them policies against their interest and not to fight Corona, that is why there is continuation of selective lockdown.

People must come out to demand and build a broad-based and determined struggle. We must realize that ruling classes have not yet been shaken enough to come out of their anti-people policy framework even temporarily. RSS-BJP is pursuing, rather has speeded up its fascist agenda and pro-corporate policies. Opposition parties too are not challenging the policy framework, while opposing certain measures. They have not even abandoned their sectarianism in mobilizing the people to fight govt. attacks. For them Corona is still pursuing more of the same.

Immediate arrangement be made for totally free travel for inter-state migrant workers, with food and other facilities provided, and with space for physical distancing. Full payment of wages and other dues, provision of food and shelter be ensured. Transport should be restored and govt. should extend financial help for implementing physical distancing in transport services.

Industries are going to run with less workers and longer hours of work while the need is shorter hours of work on full wages to employ more workers. No deduction in govt. employees' or PSE workers' salaries. No change in labour laws and withdrawal of all Ordinances on Labour law changes and on instituting 12 hours per day work.

All toiling people should be provided Rs. 10,000/- a month for six months i.e. upto October 2020 or till full production is restored.

This will not only help them to tide over this period, it will be helpful in spurring demand.

Immediate procurement of agricultural produce with immediate payment for all crops at remunerative prices as recommended by Swaminathan Committee. All crops should include cereals, pulses and other produce including vegetables and fruits. Limits of days in MNREGA should be scrapped and full employment should be provided at minimum wages to all those coming to take it. With a large number of workers returning to villages, govt. lands, surplus lands and river bed lands should be allotted. Besides, committees of mainly poor peasants and agricultural labourers should be made the main conduit of disbursal of interest free loans and supply of agricultural machinery. Struggle against rural backwardness and for land and development of every region has come on the agenda.

Agitate for universal free quality health care- preventive and curative. Increase allocation on health care to five percent of Budget. Provide PPEs & risk allowance to health workers, regularize all health care staff and make ASHA workers govt. employees. Requisition all private health care facilities in tackling Corona pandemic, stop harassing personnel engaged in them and open all Govt. hospitals taking requisite precautions. Increase budget on science and stop harassing scientists & imposition of obscurantist agenda on them.

All these measures are very much possible if there is a political will. Govt.'s attempts to play with relief package should be opposed and 10% of GDP must be spent to provide immediate relief to the people. Not on long term plans, not as loans, and NO to pro-imperialist pro-corporate changes in land and labour laws.

To meet these expenses, resources can be raised by re-introducing wealth tax, increasing inheritance tax, increasing income tax on people earning more than 1 crore annually in graded manner, bringing back black money stashed abroad and recovery of NPAs from the assets of promoters and defaulters.

Sharp reduction in prices of diesel and petrol to the tune of Rs. 22 per litre as being done for aviation fuel, abolition of indirect taxes to make things cheaper for the people, and large-scale expansion of production mainly of the items of public use, is needed.

Key to overcoming economic decline is increasing purchasing power of the people both by augmenting their income as well as making things cheaper.

Open Universities and Colleges.

Democratic rights be restored and all cases against anti-CAA protesters and Bhima Koregaon case be dropped.

Govts. will not implement these measures. A very powerful movement has to be built to force these on agenda.

Unspeakable hardships faced by the people during the Lockdown and the Govt.'s total disregard of the people have created objective situations for intervention of pro-struggle forces to mobilize people into movement. Many issues long propagated by revolutionary forces are being accepted by the people. However, practical and effective steps have to be taken to muster forces and establish a growing trend of movement. Full flexibility and even fuller initiative are required to develop this struggle and turn it into a challenge to the govt. and policies of ruling classes. This is not and cannot be easy and hence a firm, imaginative, consistent and ambitious approach and practice in furtherance of these objectives

is required. There is a need to mobilize all possible forces in the immediate struggle through joint action but with clear recognition of their limitations and its effect on the movement.

In summary, the whole party should gear up to take up these tasks.

Central Committee

CPI(ML)-New Democracy

Dt. May 17, 2020)

Read and Subscribe

CPI(ML) Organs

New Democracy

English

Pratirodh Ka Swar

Hindi

Voice of New Democracy

Telugu

Biplabi Ganaline

Bengali

Inquilabi Sada Rah

Punjabi

Sangrami Ekta

Odia

Raking up of Boundary Dispute with Nepal

When South Asian countries are battling Corona Pandemic, Indian Govt. has taken a step which has soured relations with our neighbouring country, Nepal. On 8th May Defense Minister Rajnath Singh remote-flagged off a new road to Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet (China). Nepal immediately registered its protest against this road saying that 22 kms of the road passes through Nepal's territory which is under India's occupation. There was widespread anger in Nepal over this. Earlier, after dissolving the state of J&K and forming two union territories, India had published a new map in November 2019 wherein this area was shown to be Indian territory. Nepal had objected to this at the time as well. In fact, Nepal has seen increasing protests on the issue since 2015 when India and China agreed to open a trading post at Lipulekh.

The 80-km. long road in question is built by India to five kilometers short of the Lipulekh pass which lies at the trijunction between India, Nepal and China. The road when completed will considerably shorten the distance to Kailash Mansarovar. For the rulers in Delhi, their Hindu Rashtra project takes precedence over Hindus, who like other Indians are battling Corona outbreak and Govt.'s handling of it.

It is not the question of existence of a border dispute with a neighbouring country. It is the attitude adopted by Indian govt., its timing and the Govt. response to objections by Nepal govt. It has been a display of arrogance and big brotherly attitude all the way.

To the objections by Nepal Govt. on laying of the road by India, Indian Army Chief General M.M. Naravane responded on May 15 speaking in a Webinar on “Covid and Indian Army: Responses and Beyond” organized by Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses. He said Kathmandu might have objected to the Indian road to Kailash Mansarovar via Lipulekh pass, “There is a reason to believe that they might have raised the issue at the behest of someone else and that is very much a possibility.” Though he did not name China directly but his response to a question left no one in doubt about country he was referring to. (Statesman, 16.5.20) This added fuel to the raging fire of anger in Nepal. Nepal’s foreign minister, Pradeep Gyawali, summoned Vinay Mohan Kwatra, the Indian envoy to Nepal, and handed him an official note of protest.

The area in dispute between the two Govts. is referred to as Kalapani area. It comprises Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani areas which Nepal considers as being part of their Drachula district and Indian Govt. calls them part of Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand. This has been one of the two main disputes between India and Nepal- other being Susta in Nepal’s South Central border (Nawalparasi district) with West Champaran district in Bihar.

After flagging off of the road by Rajnath Singh, Nepal asked for senior official level talks with India to discuss the issue. But India answered that this could be done only after Corona pandemic is over, in a way refusing such talks. Nepal Govt. was frustrated over this denial. In this situation, came the statement of India’s Army Chief. Besides lodging protest, Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli told Parliament on May 18 that he would not let the issue of Kalapani disappear. He also accused his predecessors of not having taken up the issue earlier as strongly as they should have. He asserted that Nepal will take recourse to diplomatic efforts to solve

the issue. Next day, Pradeep Gyawali announced that Nepal will republish its maps. On 20th May Nepal did so which according to Nepal media increases Nepal's total area by 335 kilometres. "The areas including Guni, Navi and Kuti near Kalapani, which had been left out in earlier maps, are also included in the new map" said Aryal, Minister of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation in Nepal. To this cartographic declaration of not succumbing to India, Indian Govt. reacted through a statement by the Spokesperson for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Anurag Srivastava. He said, "The government of Nepal has released a revised official map of Nepal today that includes parts of Indian territory. This unilateral act is not based on historical fact and evidence. It is contrary to the bilateral understanding to resolve the outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue. Such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India."

This allusion to diplomatic dialogue by the MEA spokesperson is not quite honest as India had not accepted Nepal's demand for Foreign Secretary level discussion on the issue. Refusal to engage diplomatically while showing diplomacy as the sole method of engagement is a favourite symptom of big power syndrome while dealing with smaller neighbours.

Before discussing the dispute, it is important to see that General Naravane's statement of Nepal protesting at the behest of someone else is both insensitive and inaccurate. It shows that Indian rulers think that a small neighbouring country like Nepal should acquiesce in everything big brother India does in the region. That Indian rulers do not attach much importance to any country's love for its own independence is clear and has been drilled deep by nearly two centuries of colonial rule over India. The elite that came to power after its transfer from British colonialism put no store by it. The Indian Govt. could not appreciate that Nepal govt. was acting

under pressure of the people. It can be gauged from a report in major Nepal daily Kantipur that decision to stand up to India and publish Nepal's new map is so popular that there is a race among the sections of ruling NCP to take credit for it. While Prime Minister Oli and his friends are giving Nepal govt. credit for it, his rivals within ruling Party are claiming that this was done after a unanimous decision by the ruling Party leadership. Hence credit for this should go to all the leaders and not Oli alone.

The assertion by the Army Chief is inaccurate as well. As Mr. Biswas Baral the Editor of a weekly published from Kathmandu, The Annapurna Express, wrote in The Wire, "The feeling in Kathmandu is that China is not ready to compromise its relationship with India over Nepal." In fact, Nepal had raised the issue with China after its agreement with India in 2015 to open a trade point at Lipulekh. Nepal Foreign Minister Gyawali met the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal seeking clarification "Why did China let India build the road on a traditional tri-junction point without consulting Nepal?" China too has come under criticism in Nepal on this issue. While the form of expression of the dispute between India and Nepal will be conditioned by the attitude of major powers, particularly China which shares a long border with Nepal like India, but the very anger among the people of Nepal is due to what they consider as an attack on the sovereignty of their country. Nepal had not been under direct colonial rule and its elite did not have training of the kind Indian elite had.

Border between India and Nepal is governed by Sugauli Treaty in 1816 between British colonial power ruling India and Nepal. The treaty demarcated the border according to geographical landmarks. The treaty was followed by another in the latter part of that year and subsequently many border demarcation efforts putting up pillars. Indian rulers who succeeded the colonial power, combined colonial arrogance with visions of ancient *aryavrata*, with

Nepal a part of it. Colonial rulers took Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim as buffer between British India and China like they insisted on incorporating Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan to link it with China, geographically cutting off Russia from British India. Post-1947, Indian rulers modified the approach to the extent that these became more than mere buffers and were sought to be made vassals. Sikkim was incorporated in India in 1975.

The two disputes relate to geographical demarcation in terms of rivers. While Kalapani dispute relates to identification of the course of a river, Susta dispute relates to a river changing its course. Border in the Kalapani area is identified as Mahakali river with Nepal to the east and India to the West. The dispute arose as to which of the two tributaries of Mahakali should be taken as the border. It means the dispute is over the area between two tributaries of Mahakali. India takes the eastern tributary as a border and Nepal the one that lies to the west. No pillars were erected due to this being a river area. The matter can be solved by ascertaining the actual possession of the area by the respective state if there is a political will to resolve the dispute. There are reports that the records of the village revenue collections show that these villages were part of Nepal. However, facts can be ascertained if the principle is agreed on and the dispute can be resolved with mutual goodwill.

Susta dispute relates to river Gandak (called Narayani in Nepal) shifting its course thus bringing some villages earlier in Nepal to that bank of the river which is deemed to be part of India. When the river changes course, if it is through avulsion i.e. sudden change, in that case border remains as earlier but when it is through accretion i.e. change over a very long period, then border shifts accordingly. India bases its claim on accretion principle. However, the underlying reason behind this principle is that when change takes place over a very long period of time, people also adjust i.e.

keep on shifting so that in terms of people, the border does not change. However, in case of avulsion i.e. sudden change, people do not shift and even if they are forced to flee the area they wish to come back i.e. are not settled in a new area. This dispute too can be solved on the basis of whether people have continued to live as from the period before river changed its course or they are settled afresh. There are enough records from which this fact can be ascertained if the principle is accepted. Nations are not mere geography but people living in a geographical area.

In Kalapani area India has maintained a military post since early 1960s. India had established 17 posts in Nepal in the wake of its conflict with China to watch China's military preparedness and movements. In 1970, King Mahendra asked India to remove the posts. India removed others but retained Kalapani post. Since then this has been a bone of contention between the two countries. However, the dispute flared up whenever there was an attempt by any one of the countries to try to change the status quo while it was relegated to boundary settlement mechanism to decide upon the issue. Recently Nepal has set up a new border post close to Lipulekh manned by its paramilitary Armed Police Force (APF) (on the lines of BSF of India) following India's inauguration of the new road. APF has been in charge of checking influx of Tibetan refugees. Hence China's interest in APF.

India shares a strong bond of social and cultural affinity besides geographical contiguity with Nepal. Nepal essentially is an India locked country, India being on three sides and fourth side to the North bordering China being inaccessible due to high mountainous ranges. This millennia old bond makes India a natural friend of Nepal. Besides, a large part of youth of Nepal works and toils in India and is based here. There are also traditional Nepali speaking regions in India. Rather than basing on these bonds to forge mutually beneficial close relations with people of Nepal, Indian

rulers have been adopting big brotherly attitude towards them. They in fact continue to look through the glasses inherited from British colonial rulers who viewed Nepal from the angle of safeguarding their Indian possession. Indian rulers have been insisting on Nepal not forging any links with China, at least not in military field. Indian rulers have always reacted whenever Nepal rulers made such attempts. Nepal rulers also understood their utility as a buffer state between India and China. Being a small country, they saw in the presence of two strong neighbours on their borders a safeguard for their independence. Forging closer links with both was not only in the economic interest of Nepal but also in the interest of its independence.

However, with development of technology, what was once practically impregnable is no longer so. Development of satellite imagery has reduced the need to maintain high altitude posts to watch deployment and movement of forces and their fortifications across the border. Roads have been laid down throughout Tibet right up to Nepal border. Though transport through China is still not so viable as link through India but it has become ponderable in the event of need.

China has of course made efforts to befriend Nepal. Besides Nepal bordering Tibet Autonomous Region of China wherefrom dissidents cross over to Nepal and hence China's desire to monitor it, China sees in Nepal an economic gateway to South Asia mainly India. Since long, Nepal has been a market for Chinese goods even when Chinese goods were forbidden in India. With China emerging a social imperialist power and main economic contender of US imperialism, befriending Nepal has been all the more important for China. As China's influence is still limited, it does not appear to be as overbearing as India's though that perception is also gradually changing with increase in Chinese economic penetration in Nepal which is transforming Nepal from a India-locked to a landlocked

country. China has emerged a viable imperialist patron for sections of ruling classes in Nepal. Western imperialist powers on the other hand are increasingly relying on India for their influence in Nepal. Contention between these two sets is intensifying conflicts in Nepal and is also at the root of growing re-alignment and conflict among the ruling class sections in that country.

Growing influence of China has provided the necessary strength to sections who would fashion their nationalist platform on opposition to Indian domination. In fact, this has been so since decades but the ruling class sections knew the limits of such exertions and would capitulate after extracting their pound of flesh. So it has repeatedly happened with politicians emerging as so-called firebrands and ending up in Delhi *darbar*. However, this has to change with ruling CPN taking up that platform while in power. For itself, CPN, a conglomeration of revisionists of different descents and dispositions, has no plan to change the socio-economic structure of Nepalese society and has found in the present situation the way to redeem itself by an anti-India platform.

Indian rulers have not reckoned with this change. They are continuing to treat Nepal as an errant child who needs periodic disciplining for demanding undesirable things. India had in the past used such arm-twisting tactic to great effect, with India as the dominant power in the region and imperialist powers too mainly relying on India. Most importantly, Nepal was dependent for supplies from India and through India. Relations with China has been one important trigger for retaliation by India. In 1989, when Nepal contracted some military purchases from China, Rajiv Gandhi govt. closed 13 out of 15 transit points for transport of supplies to Nepal, thereby causing severe shortages in that country. That blockade lasting for several months played its role in building up movement against monarchy which resulted in overthrow of the *panchayat* rule and ushered in multiparty democracy. Again, India

did not take kindly to the then King Gyanendra supporting China's inclusion in SAARC at Dhaka summit. Indian Govt.'s (UPA-I) opposition to Gyanendra egged pro-India forces to join the movement which led to ultimate overthrow of Monarchy in Nepal.

After the overthrow of Monarchy, Constitution drafting became a protracted business. First Constituent Assembly could not draft the Constitution as Nepali Congress and UML ganged up against CPN (Maoist) which had emerged as the single largest party. Elections were held again and UCPN(M) declined. By the time it had abandoned revolutionary path and had become a representative of the ruling classes. Constitution could be drafted. It did not accord to the interests of Madhesis, a large minority in Nepal and who shared a closer bond with India. By the time Constitution was drafted in Nepal, in India RSS-BJP had come to power. They had been supporting Monarchy. They were opposed to Constitution abandoning Hindu Rashtra and embracing secularism. For centuries, Nepal had been a Hindu state. RSS-BJP sought to use the Madhesis' grievances against Constitution for their purpose. This led to total blockade of Nepal with Indian Govt. blocking all passages, taking advantage of protests by Madhesis. RSS-BJP did not want redressal of Madhesis' grievances but wanted to pressurize Nepal Govt. to abandon Constitution for its anti-monarchy secular framework. Serious hardships followed for Nepali people. But this time, then Prime Minister Oli stood firm and concluded an agreement for transit of goods through China, mostly for effect. Nepal Govt. did not bend so it was brought down. Prachanda was won over and was made Prime Minister in alliance with Nepali Congress.

However, the people drew the lesson that it was possible to stand up to India. In the coming elections, sensing the people's mood, Prachanda led UCPN(M) made another somersault and formed alliance with UML jointly capturing two third majority.

After the election they merged to form CPN, the current ruling party. As mentioned earlier, CPN has no intent to carry out any radical change in the socio-economic structure of Nepal. It has emerged as the main ruling class party. Rise of China and Nepali youth also going to countries other than India for earning their livelihood has given ruling classes options other than total reliance on India. CPN obviously does not stand for the change which can obliterate the need for youth of Nepal to have to go abroad for mere survival of their families and for them to participate in building a new, democratic Nepal. This change can only come through revolution and that can only be spearheaded by a real revolutionary party, and not a party communist only in name.

It is in the interest of the people of the two countries that this dispute should be resolved through dialogue. But for this to succeed, Indian Govt. has to draw a muchneeded lesson that the past pressure tactics need to be changed i.e. have to be abandoned. The dispute on Kalapani and also Susta area can easily be resolved if there is an agreement to respect the historical facts and not gain territorial advantage. For this Indian Govt. should abandon pressure tactics of disciplining Nepal but sit for dialogue in the spirit of resolving the dispute. This would be in keeping with traditional close bonds between people of India and Nepal. This would also be in the interest of the struggles of the toiling people of the two countries who have been close comrades in the struggle against imperialism and reaction. It will be in the interest of revolutionary movement and people's struggles in two countries. And for this, we should mobilize the people to put pressure on Indian Govt. to take to meaningful dialogue and abandon its big brotherly attitude towards small neighbouring countries.



Covid Pandemic:

Excuse To Intensify Attacks And To Push Further The Agenda of 'Education Reforms'

Mrigank

The current Covid-19 pandemic has given the ruling class opportunities to increase its attack on people in different arenas and to speed up the pace of its unfinished agenda. Education too is not left untouched. The current emphasis on online education and examinations in the pretext of lock down is one such measure. The governments, both central as well as of different states, have resorted to this even at school level. The sudden lock-down has put students and teachers in many problems. And in this, the government has also found an excuse to push the agenda of National Education policy 2019, tailor made to the designs of WTO/WB. We shall briefly examine these.

Problems during Lock down

Let us see effects on education during lock down first. The lock-down was sudden and no preparation was done beforehand. It had come as a shock and no preparation could be done either by students or teachers or even by institutions. And social and economic problems that came with it have only aggravated the crisis.

Stranded Students

As the lock-down was declared suddenly, many students were stranded away from home. Those living in PG/rented

accommodation were worst affected. They have to foot the bill for their food and stay. It has put additional financial burden on them, particularly on those coming from not so sound financial background. The problem has been compounded by loss of job, lack of payment and agricultural crisis affecting the parents, and those sustaining themselves with odd jobs and tuitions too became jobless. They are forced to bear the threats and humiliation by landlords. Despite the Delhi government declaring that charging rent from students is punitive, most of the students live without proper rent agreement to seek legal remedy or complain. At times landlords are local influential people and students do not have courage to go against them. Instead of empty declaration, the government should have compensated the landlords.

The government chose to bring students from the private coaching centre of Kota, but has shown no concern for common students. They too deserve a safe passage back to their homes.

Anxiety

The suddenness of lock down has put students in a state of shock. Board examinations of class X and XII were going on and suddenly they were told exams are postponed. Unsure of when the exams will take place, the tension that is built by our system regarding board exams has caused prevalence of continuous tension among these students.

College students, particularly those in final year have their share of anxiety by this. They do not know what will happen next. They all have an agenda of doing something next after final year. This could be PG, some other degree, some job, doctorate, NET. They may have to choose another university or place of study. If the next place does not allow flexibility in admission as per their

university, what happens to their future career is a big tension causing question. Since all the universities will have different plans for examinations and entrance, the uncertainty will remain and so will remain anxiety.

The government, emphasizing too much centralized control, must this time exercise central control to synchronize these events.

Throttling Voices

The present government has lost no opportunity in using the situation of lock-down to fulfil its communal fascist agenda. Jamia students were first and easy targets. Student leaders who led the Anti CAA-NPR-NRC movement were harassed on false charges. Many of them have been arrested on pretext of ‘masterminding’ the violence in north east Delhi or protest at Jaffarabad, where they had no possible role. It includes Meeran Haider, Shafoora Zaragar. People who raised their voice to save the multi-hued fabric of the country became targets at a time when protests are not allowed, courts are not fully functional, legal aid is difficult to get. This is a highly condemnable act and the government is also trying to give a message through this to the rest.

Online Education

Taking lock down as a big excuse they have suddenly started Online classes and are now even trying to propose online examinations. Its implications and designs are multifarious. The impact of its sudden declaration, on both teachers and students, has exposed and widened the class as well as gender divide in education. There are problems faced by online education worldwide. Teachers were not told how to impart online education. They were untrained and were not trained later or given any proper guidelines. Even later, confusion was the only thing which was clearly happening.

Some engineering colleges have started following the timetable strictly through online classes but that was not the case everywhere. The teachers of Delhi University were not even told what and how to take online classes. As a consequence, a lot of arbitrariness prevailed. They were not given any institutional support. Neither curriculum nor course was designed. Even teachers were new to the concept. So many of them just distributed notes, gave some assignments. Very few could start online classes.

And when they could, students could not be very receptive due to a variety of reasons. The most common reason was lack of connectivity or equipment. Many students do not have good enough smartphone/Tablet/Laptop to take these classes. There were always issues of network and connectivity. Network is not always good or continuous at many places. Even in the capital, there were problems with power supply, leave alone internet. Then data available was not always affordable for a large number of students to take many classes.

A survey conducted by University of Hyderabad is truly revealing in this matter. A team led by Prof Vinod Pavarala and Prof Vasuki Belavadi at the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, designed and administered an online survey among the student population to elicit information about access to the Internet and their views on online classes. About 2500 students responded to the survey. Though about 90% of students had mobile phones, only about half had laptop access. While 90% agreed they had some kind of internet access, most of them (75%) were doing so using mobile data package. Only 37% of students emphatically agreed for online classes if offered, 45% said they would be able to attend 'infrequently' and 18% said they cannot access at all. About 40% students said that the most concerning aspect is 'reliable

connectivity” and 30% “cost of connectivity”, whereas 8% said they have a problem of power at home. It must be noted that many of the students have gone home, which is also true for Delhi university students. They also expressed concern that apart from poor power and network, taking notes, going through PowerPoint presentations, is very difficult on mobile phones. Then students having practical courses requiring laboratory or studios wondered how they will benefit from these classes. It was also raised by some that students could be having mental health issues, living in small, cramped places and the anomalies it could create because students come from different social backgrounds. Fortunately, this university surveyed before starting online classes, and though did not exclude e-learning from future curriculum, has decided not to impose online classes now.

Another survey done among Delhi University students reveals similar findings. This was done after the University decided to conduct online examination. About 75% of students said that they will not be able to take online examinations. 72% of students could not even take online classes due to poor connectivity and about 11% of them due to financial crunch.

Above surveys clearly indicate the futility of Online education in India. This survey may not be comprehensive but surely give hint of the reality. It shows that the majority of students do not have either appropriate equipment like smartphone/laptop/tablet or have very poor internet access if at all. This will mean that online education will ensure that a large section of students will be pushed out of the education network. Since it will be unlikely that these students will be given regular classes in future, this would mean that they will be without any sort of classes but will be expected to know the material, and the institutions will consider the duties

fulfilled. At best this is just completing the formalities and filling in the record books that tasks have been done while in practice they remain unfulfilled. *This is a digital divide.* A DU faculty reportedly told Edexlive, “Some students have gone back home to remote areas (small towns and villages) where the internet service is not good enough. They have to rely on just the written notes and articles which are not enough.”

Hindi medium

Students of Hindi medium are in even worse situation. Online classes are mostly in English. Even if teachers explain briefly in Hindi, there is no Hindi material available. Neither teachers are able to provide it nor it is available online. Hindi books in libraries cannot be accessed. So, most of these students are virtually without classes. Universities have no plans for them.

Online Examinations

Online examinations are bigger problems. Firstly, most of the students have not been able to attend the classes and hence are not equipped to take examinations of any kind. Secondly, many of them will not be having internet connectivity, then how can one expect them to write the exams. Last but not the least, even teachers are not properly trained to design online question papers.

Schools

School students have bigger problems. Apart from age and immaturity to take online classes, there are many other issues too. The availability of smartphones at most of the households of government school students is a very big issue. Many of them do not have it at all. NSSO data says only 8% of all households with members aged between five and 24 have both a computer and an internet connection. In households where smartphones are there, it

is not always free at the appropriate time. Parents too need it. If there is more than one sibling, the problem is just compounded. Small cramped houses are not at all suitable for taking classes and when there is more than one student to attend class, it is nearly impossible.

There is a gender issue too operating here. This is both in case of teachers as well as students. The general discrimination that prevails in society operates here. When there are limited facilities, boys get preference. Since girls are sitting at home, they have to help in household work, even if it is class time they may not be able to leave it. Same is true for women teachers as well. The patriarchal order does not permit them to take classes while at home because some household work is waiting, or men in the house are using the equipment. At times, when ration is being distributed, it becomes more important than the classes.

In the schools of Delhi government, no time table is being followed for these classes. There are no proper announcements, and very few classes are being taken. Even teachers were not aware of what to do and how to do. Most of the time students are given some notes in PDF format, images of written sheets, and some assignments. In the initial phase of lock-down, students were not able to buy books and other stationery items. Since they were promoted to new classes, they needed new books and stationary. As a consequence, they could not make any fruitful use of the material given to them, since most of the material was in the form of a worksheet for assignments. And of course, there is no planning for courses having practicals. This is worth mentioning that in many schools, girls are forced to take Home Science as one of the subjects, which has a large part as practicals. There was no planning by the

government and these online classes were imposed just for propaganda and to show concern without actually having it.

Closing down of schools has also closed down mid-day meals. Mid-day meal schemes are a big relief to students from underprivileged backgrounds to get a healthy meal a day. It had helped in increasing enrolment rate in schools. But now, already unemployed parents, parents in deep financial crisis, will have an additional burden to feed their children.

Interestingly, these problems are not unique to India. Even one of the most developed countries, the United States of America, is facing such problems. In the May 12 issue of *Popular Resistance*, Belle Chesler, a visual arts teacher in Beaverton, Oregon, who is now teaching from her home in Portland, narrates the travails of online teaching in her school. She used to take courses like painting, drawing, ceramics, and film-making in three different studio classrooms. She said “... There, groups of students ranging across the economic, ethnic, religious, racial, and linguistic spectrum sat shoulder to shoulder, chatting and creating, day after day, year after year. Music played and we talked....” but Now, on one hand there is no studio and on the other hand she cannot see the body language in expressions of the students. Some of her concerns were similar to that in India that there are privileged students who have stable Wi-Fi and other equipment at their home, well-stocked foods and other items and on other hand there is a huge section of students who do not have all these. She further argues that “If schools are closed, so is the critical infrastructure that helps keep our nation’s children fed. Aside from SNAP (the food stamp program), the National School Lunch Program is the largest anti-hunger initiative in the country. It feeds 29.7 million children on school days, with an additional 14.7 million children fed thanks to

the School Breakfast Program and more than 6.1 million via the Child and Adult Care Food Program.” Students from different cultural and economic background attending the same class facilitates not just the cultural exchange rather imbibing of empathy among privileged ones by closer exposure of issues of under-privileged ones. Online education system will lead to withering away of all these values and people will become alienated from each other and eventually more selfish and with much wider class division.

II. MOOC and online education

Historical background

Online education is in question worldwide for quite some time. Distance education was started with the idea of imparting education to those who have no access to regular higher education. It was meant for those who are in a job, for housewives bogged down with household work after marriage but wanting to continue education. This was not visualised as a replacement for regular education. Regular growth in this education worldwide has been going on at a very slow pace. It progressed with the advent of radio (in the US in 1922 Penn State University started a course through radio), television (in US, 1968, Stanford University started a course with instructions on TV), in 1976 computer assisted education started and 1994 saw the first fully online course in US by CalCapmus (a University named this way in US). But these were not to replace regular education.

Came WTO in 1995. One of its treaties, GATS, considered both health and education as tradable services. The picture began to change. It has given special emphasis to distance, nonformal education in the name of cost reduction and structural adjustment.

GATS specifically recommended Cross border delivery i.e. delivery of education services via the internet. Online education became a priority in policy. In 1995 itself, 19 US governors founded Governors University to maximize resources in open distance education. By 1999 many new educational tools began to appear like e-Blackboard, e-College etc. By 2003 81% of US universities had at least one online course. 2007 saw the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC).

Business

Though projected idea was to provide open and free learning, business sharks plugged on to opportunity. Many business groups and startups jumped in. They saw it as a lowcost business and lobbying began.

Pedagogical and other problems

But all this does not speak of Success of MOOC. A study conducted by MIT and Harvard showed that about 95% of students enrolled for MOOC dropped out. Most common reason given by the students is that there is no live teacher engagement. Even of universities offering free online courses, only 10% completed the course. These figures are for well-structured MOOCs where pre-recorded video, other material is available with the click of a mouse and learning can be self paced. Some of the problems faced both by students as well as teachers are similar. No face to face interaction, no exchange of ideas, no development of thought, no visualization of body language. This does not promote different thoughts and discussions. Teachers cannot visualize the learning trajectory of students, including what needs to be mended while learning. For students too, apart from no interaction with teachers, no interaction with peers, there is no discussion, just mechanical learning. Even if

some platforms offer some live interaction, it is practically impossible to have any meaningful interaction with more than 500 students participating simultaneously.

In short, MOOCs have not been successful as learning tools anywhere. The shown heavy enrolment is not indicative of its success as evident by poor completion rates. There are many more questions, but only prominent ones are kept here. MOOCs are not free, even if they are low cost, they are not at all equivalent to regular courses. And these studies are from the USA, where facilities available with providers as well as with students are probably better than elsewhere in the world and definitely far better than India.

III. WTO agenda being pushed

In the current scenario, it looks like online education is the only option left. But this idea has not come just for lock down. Long back, when GATS had declared education to be treated as tradable service, it was proposed to replace conventional on campus education with open distance learning and online education. The new National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 puts specific emphasis on this. It goes further to imply that gradually Open Distance Learning should be the mode of learning for both schools as well as higher education. It specifically mentions Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) to achieve this. The Government is using this opportunity to push this agenda. At least to experiment with it. It will pave the way for the future. NEP implies that to increase enrolment ratio, open distance learning is the most suitable option. The PM has already stated that NEP should not wait for parliament and the Cabinet should approve it and it needs to be implemented fast. Former president of DUTA, Nandita Narain, said, "There is no

system in place. A lot of students have no access to a steady connection. The university is using the pandemic to push an agenda that they had for a long time.”

It is clear that lock-down is being used by BJP-RSS Govt. as a pretext for both implementing its communal fascist agenda as well as for kowtowing to imperialist masters. The government is doing so in every sector and education is not untouched. It has to be opposed by the entire education fraternity- teachers, students and other staff with broadest possible unity and spread.



US-Taliban Deal : Attempt to Afghanize the War or Outcome Foretold

Corona pandemic has put in shadow developments in Afghanistan. US imperialism is trying to implement the agreement it had signed with Taliban on February 29 in Doha (Qatar). Beyond the spotlight, attempts are on to see through the deal.

Recently, on May 8, US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was in Delhi. He met Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. In an interview he emphasized “US-Taliban agreement is a necessary step to transition to the Afghan owned process.” (The Hindu May 9) In that interview he advised, “India should talk directly to Taliban, discuss terror concerns directly.” Khalilzad was trying to enlist India in support of the deal and was

exhorting India to have direct talks with Taliban, driving home the point that US has turned a chapter on militarily defeating Taliban.

Khalilzad was here earlier as well i.e. after Doha deal. The immediate context of his visit this time seems to be the deal between two claimants to Presidency in Afghanistan after the so-called election there. It took an aid cut of US\$1 billion and threat of some more to bring them to a deal, with Abdul Ghani continuing as President, Abdullah leading the team to negotiate with Taliban and cabinet posts divided among their supporters. With Afghan govt. coerced to support the deal, Khalilzad made one more attempt to rope in India in a supporting role. It is not that US views India as an important player in Afghanistan, but wants to humour India for its role in containment of China and co-operation in policing Indian Ocean trade routes

What importance the US actually attaches to India's role in Afghanistan was apparent when Trump mocked at Modi's alleged boast of having built a library in Kabul. Even if that is taken to be in the distant past, only last month i.e. in April, 2020, United Nations Secretariat organized a meeting on Afghanistan. To this meeting it invited six physical neighbours of Afghanistan i.e. Pakistan, China, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. To this meeting Russia, America and Ghani Govt. were also invited and they participated. Neither US nor Ghani Govt. insisted on India too being invited to that meeting. (The Hindu, 16.5.2020) Interestingly, Khalilzad, in the 9th May Interview, had said, "Our strong position is that there shouldn't be (terror) sanctuaries on either side of the Afghan-Pakistan border..." This was at variance with earlier statements by US President wherein he talked of closure of only Pakistan based sanctuaries.

Deal with Taliban has been in the pipeline for quite some time to provide an escape route to US imperialism from the “Graveyard of empires run amuck”. In the penultimate year of his Presidency, in 2015, Obama had allowed Taliban an office in Doha. This was after the failure of the ‘surge’ that he had opted for to win what he had called “a necessary war”. The frustration in the US Administration with the conduct of the war was building over a long time. Bush Administration had embarked on a ‘nation building’ exercise in Afghanistan to colonize that country and Obama continued the war though without those bombastic phrases. But on the ground, Taliban continued to gain ground and inflict casualties on US and allies. By 2018, UN reports admitted that nearly half of Afghanistan was under the control of Taliban. The report said that Taliban contended for control over 70% of Afghanistan. War was not only in stalemate, in fact Taliban were having an upper hand on the battle field. US supported Afghanistan Govt. controlled Capital Kabul and some other provincial centres but there too, Taliban could strike at will.

While all the ground work was completed for the deal to be inked in Washington in September 2019, then NSA Bolton bolted and the signing was put off. However, Washington Post published a set of internal documents from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. On December 9, 2019 a Washington Post reporter published an article based on these papers, “At War With the Truth.” The documents revealed that war was not going well and the officials leading US troops on the ground were of the opinion that war was not winnable. However, US Administrations including Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump, and military leaders continuously lied to the people that the US troops are making

progress and they are winning the war while in fact the ground leaders had an opposite opinion. Increasingly larger areas were contested by Taliban and areas under Taliban control kept on increasing.

Publication of Washington Papers brought to the people the truth of the war and further eroded support for the war among the people. To an extent the Washington Papers played the role Pentagon Papers had played in bringing home the truth of Vietnam War. Trump again brought signing the deal on the agenda. Discussions were revived in January 2020 again. Draft was anyway ready for signing in September itself. It was signed on February 29 in Doha.

Optics said it all. A listless Khalilzad and an exuberant Barader rose to exchange the signed copies of the “Agreement between Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan whom US does not recognize and calls Taliban and United States of America.” The agreement signed at Doha does not hide who won this longest running war in the history of United States sans some face saving clauses. The Agreement entails total withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan within 14 months, nearly half of them in 135 days. The agreement also includes commitment by Taliban not to allow territory under their control for the use by organizations especially Al Queda and ISIS-Khorasan for attacking US and its allies (not named in the Agreement). The other two aspects are intra-Afghan dialogue and ceasefire for which there are no binding commitments. The agreement is basically a face saving device for US Admn. to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan which Trump had promised in his election campaign and on which he wants to show progress when he seeks re-election in November this year.

The agreement was preceded by a weeklong cessation of attacks by Taliban. It was meant to demonstrate that Taliban does exercise control over the forces fighting against US occupation of Afghanistan. With violence free week, the stage was set for signing the Agreement. The agreement envisages release of 5000 Taliban prisoners (of a reported total of nearly 10,000) in exchange for 1000 prisoners by Taliban by March 10 and removal of Taliban leaders from Terrorist List by the end of May i.e. within three months. These commitments are mentioned in the Agreement. It is noteworthy that the Afghanistan Govt. was not a signatory to the Agreement in Doha.

Implementation of the agreement has not been smooth. It reflects the contradictions in the US Administration as well as contradictions among different sections in Afghan govt. installed by US and its allies and the different powers supporting this govt. While US started drawing down its troops, the follow up action ran into problems. Ghani Govt. did not agree to release of Taliban prisoners. It took US Admin. some coercing and cajoling to bring different sections in Afghanistan Govt. to honour the agreement. Release of prisoners started, albeit slowly.

Divisions in Afghanistan set up also prevented the follow-up action i.e. intra-Afghan dialogue. Power sharing arrangement was reached after US intervened. Those who talk of Afghan-led process, simply pull the wool over the eyes that this is the Govt. sustained by US troops. With foreign troops controlling the country, the peace talks have to essentially be between the occupying power and the main resistance group, nobody doubting the latter to be Taliban. The whole propaganda of purely Afghan-led peace process, with US troops militarily controlling the country, is a mere sham which is

being thrust on the people. The fly in the ointment is that the occupying power does not want to maintain the occupation in the earlier way and would like to reach agreement with Taliban to save some influence.

The hypocrisy of those who claim to defend non-existent democracy in Afghanistan is laughable. Take the recently held election for the President of Afghanistan, held after 18 years of occupation which was meant to bring democracy. The results of the elections are disputed. But leave that alone. Of the 37 million Afghans, around one fourth were registered as voters i.e. 9.6 million. Of these registered voters, only one third, i.e. nearly 3.2 million reportedly exercised their vote. In over a third of Afghanistan no vote could take place and nearly 5000 polling booths remained non-functional. Of the votes cast, over a million were deemed invalid leaving only 1.9 million 'valid' votes. Abdul Ghani reportedly got less than a million votes and was declared a winner. His opponent says that nearly 3 lakh of these votes are fraudulent. With a person getting less than a million votes in a country of 37 million, getting elected in a stage managed election is being called democracy! It is hypocrisy even by bourgeois standards. US Administration and Govts. the world over well know that the Govt. in Kabul enjoys no legitimacy among Afghans.

Govt. of India finds itself in a bind over the change of strategy of US imperialism in Afghanistan. Indian ruling classes have viewed the question of Afghanistan solely through the prism of Pakistan, viewing success of Taliban as gain of strategic depth by Pakistan. They have further endangered the traditional relations between people of India and Afghanistan. Earlier they had supported occupation of Afghanistan by the then social imperialist superpower

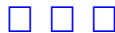
Soviet Union. Support of US occupation of Afghanistan has not endeared India to the people of Afghanistan who have fought against foreign occupation of their land. India has not been in a position of taking up combat role in Afghanistan and has been asking US to continue its occupation of Afghanistan. Now with US deciding to reduce its military presence in Afghanistan, Indian Govt. does not have a clue of how to cope with this situation. Had India opposed the US invasion of Afghanistan, India would have earned the goodwill of the people of that country which had historically been a gateway to India prior to the advent of Naval powers. But the Indian ruling classes, subservient to imperialist powers, squandered that opportunity to earn goodwill. And that would have happened without spending any public money. India should also have opposed invasion and military occupation by US and its allies as an attack on a sovereign country despite all imperialist powers lining behind this attack in the then unipolar world. Now India, having spent over 3 billion US dollars, finds itself increasingly isolated in that country. Indian media noted that Taliban thanked all regional powers – Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia etc. in their address but did not include India in that list. Who is to blame for that except rulers in Delhi who have abiding faith in imperialist powers? Afghans view Pakistan differently despite its support to US ‘global war on terror’ because Pakistan was threatened by the then Bush Admn. but India chose to support that foreign occupation on its own.

Here it is worthwhile to comment on some apologists of colonial occupation of Afghanistan who cite medieval, archaic, anti-democratic nature of Taliban. That is the case but that is the case with Afghanistan society. Extending support to progressive forces or progressive movements there is not the same thing and cannot

be the excuse for supporting colonial occupation of that country. Imperialist US had been a supporter of the forces that led to the emergence of Taliban and still does not mind cutting a deal with them. So any talk of progressivism in this colonial occupation reminds one of the non-sense of 'white man's burden' which had attracted a good number of coloured compradors and continues to do so.

To many commentators, the situation is reminiscent of US withdrawal from Vietnam. Despite obvious differences, parallels are indeed being drawn between the two. However, the outline post US reduction of forces to nearly half is hazy and will probably be determined by the ground situation. But one thing is clear, and everybody is recognizing this- that Taliban will play a dominant role in the new dispensation. It is noteworthy that attacks between US troops and Taliban are forbidden in the agreement, including drone attacks by USA and suicide bomb attacks by Taliban. There is no bar on the attacks between Taliban and Afghanistan govt. There is only talk of reduction of violence. In fact, violence between Taliban and Govt. forces has continued but it has not stopped US from continuing its drawdown. What will happen to Afghanistan Govt. is anybody's guess. With the writing on the wall being clear some sections supporting Kabul Govt. may switch sides and negotiate their terms with Taliban. Or Taliban may simply unseat the govt. post withdrawal. When asked if the US withdrawal might result in the Taliban eventually unseating the existing Afghan government, President Trump told the press that it is "not supposed to happen that way but it possibly will." Trump added that "Eventually, countries have to take care of themselves. We can't be there for another 20 years... You can only hold someone's hand for so long."

No wonder this scenario is reminding the people of the fall of US propped up South Vietnam govt. once US withdrew troops. In 1973, the then US President Richard Nixon had referred to the peace accord between US and North Vietnam as 'Peace with honour'. US attempted what was called Vietnamization of war. The US wants the same in Afghanistan and probably the period of 14 months envisaged for total withdrawal is meant to see the progress of the conflict between Taliban and Kabul Govt. However, the ultimate outcome may not be very different in respect to the fall of US propped up Govt. except the time line. Though stakes for the US Govt. are quite high, with nineteen years of war, nearly three thousand military casualties and another thousand from the allies, tens of thousands having sustained injuries and trillions of dollars disappearing in labyrinthine caves, the outcome stares starkly in the face. US imperialism may be left to rue the inhospitable scorching desert plains and commentators may figure out in leisure the fatal universal pull of Afghanistan for powers looking for world hegemony, a trophy sought by many but won by none.



When People Know Govts Couldn't Care Less..

Who Can Stop People From Walking

- Aparna

Is it a few hours, days or maybe a week into the harshest lockdown in the world? No, it is 50 days. The tide of workers which started walking home from day



one, fully sure that it would not count for govts, fully sure that sure starvation and penury was guaranteed in the days ahead, has turned into a torrent and goes on and on. How is that? Considering that the highest Court was assured that Govt. had provided food and shelter, considering that govts are 'considerately' providing transport, why do the internal migrant workers of India still walk? Why be upset if the Highest Court expresses frustration at this recalcitrance? Would it tax human intelligence really, to realize that if you sleep on railway tracks, a train would crush you? What death wish is upon the migrant workers of India that they are making

such a spectacle of themselves ? That too while the Govts do so much for them? And they are not even 'migrants'!- as their friends are asserting; how dare they be called 'migrants' in their own country, that too in those cities they build and run? They are co owners, equal claimants, it is being asserted.

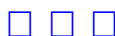
But they are uncaring of these assertions, these debates. They walk back to their natal homes. They know that for those who are ruling, for those who wield the power over the cities and wealth, they do not count. Unless of course, the wheels of the world are running, when they count to run the wheels. So they walked from day one and their number is multiplying, their flow unceasing and increasing. They are blindingly clear and no hollow assurance has distracted them. Sheer physical violence, chains of a colonial law and mass detention by the police may have forced the numbers to bide their chance for a while. They knew, with the clarity of the dispossessed, that when work is not on, how could their existence count with rulers or their justice? No Govt. was going to actually arrange shelter or food for them. No one would run vehicles for just '72 hours more' on 25th of March so that they could go home. Nor will there be '*vande bharats*' for them. They have no fantasies that cities in which they led roadside existences, were theirs. They know full well that in their lot, governance is the Police. So undoubting, they are walking back to homes, to hunger may be, back to where they had started empty handed but with dreams of building a future. Back empty handed towards natal land and ties. Not that they are welcome by natal govts or even by the locals too whose vision has been distorted by the system to see one's own as vectors. Yet they walk. The villages they walk past often give food and water. They avoid roads and walk on rail tracks, playing hide and seek with the Law. Found out by being crushed under trains,

they now walk in the fields, negotiating even an occasional river on foot guided by locals until caught by the Police. Trees shade them in the day, they walk by night.

Yes, they slept to their death, exhausted, on railway tracks of trains that did not run for them. They are dying in road accidents, sitting to eat food, exhausted, dehydrated and unheeding the exempted traffic speeding by. They have blisters on their feet, their footwear is broken, the children are sound asleep on the shoulders of fathers, pregnant women give birth on the roadside and walk carrying the newborns, old and sick are borne along on the shoulders of worn out youth. Even a 12year old walks to her death- the girl child face of migrant agricultural worker in India.

They are walking away from trains and buses that need online tickets and apps on nonexistent phones. They are walking away from tokenism- a token no of trains, of buses, of shelters, token distribution of rations. If transport is actually being arranged, don't governments know the numbers? Does it not know how many migrants are located in which cities? If food was being given to all would it need 50 days to announce rations without cards?

Not relevant are assertions that they need not consider themselves not of the system. Not enough is anger at the reality of India. Not needed is debate about what small part of the working class they represent. They are the mirror and are showing us the stark realities of our society. There is little point agonizing why the wings of the system are blind and deaf and seem paralyzed. This is the Real, stark and without frills. Covid has forced- covers are off. All wings of the system are revealing their face. One can stand in the middle, be surprised, shocked, empathize, criticize, deny, rearrange. Or move to change Reality.



Strikes & Mass Protests by Jute Mill Workers in AP

On May 20, workers of two of the Jute Mills in Andhra Pradesh came out in strength to demand their wages for the lock down period. They joined workers of Jute mills in Eluru district, which have been on strike since earlier under the leadership of IFTU, in strike actions. Over 13,000 workers thus went on strike that day for their legitimate right. It was the day when jute workers of Vizainagram joined already striking jute workers in Eluru and broke the lock down on protests in a big way.

On 20th May morning at 6 AM, workers of AP Fibres Jute Mill located in Saluru town, Vijayanagram district of AP, went on a flash strike for payment of wages as per GO for the period of lock down. Majority were women workers. They began a massive Sit-in with



nearly 600 workers belonging to 'A' shift. This sit-in was held in front of the jute mill gate, under the leadership of IFTU. Workers raised slogans demanding that the mill management come immediately and agree to pay said wages as per agreements done in other jute mills in AP according to said GO.

Later in the morning, workers of Nellimarla Jute Mill also went on flash strike for same demand. It was started by workers belong to B shift at exactly 10 AM. It is at the time of commencement of their shift. They sat in front of Nellimarla jute mill gate shouting slogans. Nearly 600 workers joined the sit-in to start with. The number swelled later. These two mills had been running since nearly 3 weeks with recoverable Advance amount instead of payment of statutory wages as per GOs.

All the TUs are unitedly fighting for this demand in AP jute sector. Nearly 10 thousand workers fighting under joint banner including all TUs- IFTU, CITU, AITUC, TNTUC, INTUC etc. Protests have been on since the second phase of lockdown came to an end.

Three mills' managements in Srikakulam, Vizainagram and Vishakhapatnam came down and made agreements with concerned TUs on May 8th, May 9th and May 16th respectively to pay Rs. 5,000 to each worker against wages as per GOs. Those three mills are running.

Since beginning of restarting work after lockdown, nearly 5000 workers belong to two jute mills located in Eluru, West Godavari district, AP were in strike. Though management had taken unilateral steps to make workers join duties without an agreement with unions, the workers were not following it. They are under JAC, which is formed with 9 unions. In Eluru, a big Dharna

took place with over one thousand workers on May 19 in front of Sri Krishna Jute Mill, Eluru, defying all types of police restrictions.

At around 11 AM on 20th May talks started between IFTU Union and jute mill management in Saluru Jute Mill. Dharna went on outside in front of mill gate. The number of workers increased despite blazing heat. Their number kept on increasing as workers not on duty came from their homes and joined it. It increased to 700, mainly women workers. Finally the District Administration gave an assurance that the payment issue would be looked into immediately. A little later, Management came into negotiation through the Admn. in Nellimarla too and the three unions in negotiations, including IFTU, called off the protest saying it would be restarted if the GO was not honoured.

Meanwhile more than one thousand jute workers began a Dharna in front of district Collector office Eluru, West Godavari district, AP, demanding to implement GO, issued by Central Govt, on 29-5-2020 and also followed by state govt. in same way. It says to pay wages to workers in period of lockdown. Dharna was led by 5 union JAC i.e. IFTU, AITUC, CITU, INTUC and TNTUC. Dist administration assured to take proper action immediately. This is till now the biggest gathering in lock down period. Police in their style made many attempts to foil it, but workers stood firmly unitedly. Finally the Dist administration was forced to give assurance that the issue of wage payment for lockdown period would be solved.

(Based on Reports by IFTU AP State President Com. P. Prasad)



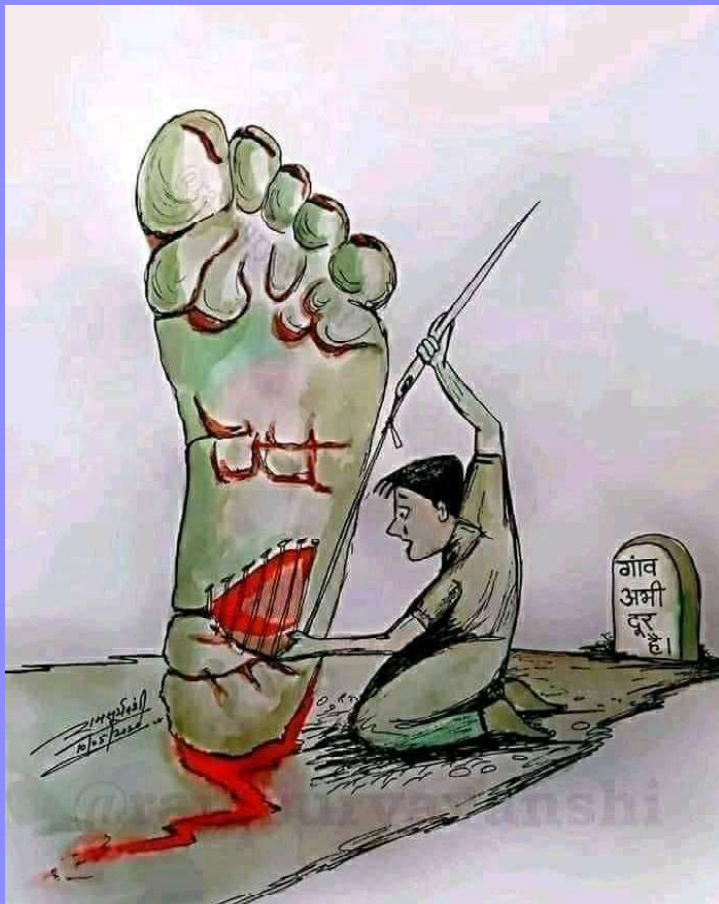
Organ of the Central Committee, CPI(ML)

NEW DEMOCRACY

RNINo. 63838/95

May - 2020 (Spl Issue)

Price : Rs.20



Editor : Com. Y. S. Rao

Published, printed and owned by Dr. V. K. Patole from Balmukand Khand, Giri Nagar, New Delhi - 110019 and printed at Star Offset Printers. 1-215/8-A-2 New Patel Nagar. New Delhi - 8

Email : cpimlnd@hotmail.com

<http://www.cpimlnd.org>