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*Organ of the Central Committee, CPI (ML)*

# **New Democracy**

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## **Farmers Overcome the Govt. Conspiracy to Crush their Struggle**

Ever since the farmers marched to Delhi on November 26, 2020 to demand repeal of three Agricultural Acts, RSS-BJP's Central Govt. has been trying to subvert this agitation. At first, they tried to show that this agitation was only of some farmers' organizations and several organizations supported these Acts. When these ploy of fielding RSS linked organizations and so-called peasant leaders fell flat on the face and farmers throughout the country supported this struggle for repeal of these black laws which are designed to hand over entire control over the agriculture to the foreign and domestic corporate, Central Govt. opened dialogue with the farmers' organizations. However, the purpose of conducting this dialogue was to show, with the help of corporate controlled media, how flexible the Govt. was and how rigid farmers' organizations. Govt. was trying to obfuscate the fact that the farmers were fighting for their very existence as farmers and for the livelihood of their families.

When the RSS-BJP Govt. tactics of browbeating the farmers did not succeed, they hatched a nefarious plan to derail the movement and erase its peaceful and mass character. They conducted a number of provocative acts but the farmers and their organizations foiled these designs through their mass protests. When the farmers' organizations felt that the dialogue with the Govt. was going nowhere as the RSS-BJP Govt. was bent on serving the corporate, farmers announced their programme to conduct a "Tractor March" in Delhi on January 26, 2021. This was a perfectly legal, peaceful and legitimate protest of the farmers to air their demands for repeal of three black acts and making a law of MSP for all crops. Farmers' organizations had made it abundantly clear that they had no intention of disturbing the official programme on January 26. This programme evoked a very big response from the farmers who came to Delhi in large numbers with their tractors and also in those states and districts from where farmers could not reach Delhi. From nearly a week before the scheduled march, farmers from Punjab, Haryana and Western UP started arriving at the three border points i.e. Singhu, Tikri and Gazipur. Govt. sources were being reported this number as between 3 to 5 lakh tractors. Obviously, it was going to be one of the largest, if not the largest gathering capital Delhi had ever seen.

However, sinister attempt was made to disturb what would have been one of the biggest shows of strength by the struggling farmers. A section of farmers with their tractors broke away from the announced route and reached Red Fort where some elements hoisted a religious symbol next to the tricolor. This showed the real intent of the authors of this programme i.e. of disrupting this unprecedented movement of the farmers of India which had won support through length and breadth of the country and put the RSS-BJP Govt. on the defensive whose service to the foreign and domestic corporate was tearing asunder its assiduously assumed mask of 'nationalism'. Despite a large number of farmers marching with their tractors on the roads, this show at the Red Fort became the talking point as was the intent of the authors of this disruption. When the news of this 'break out' and a section of farmers reaching Red Fort reached farmers who were yet to get a chance to join the march due to their large number, a good number of them did not even start.

This incident had succeeded in drowning this biggest show of strength of the farmers and a majority of farmers were disturbed and perplexed at this development. A pall of confusion and gloom set over the protest sites of Singhu, Tikri, Gazipur and elsewhere. Farmers however, could soon see through this Govt. orchestrated plan and they could within a short time figure out the real intent of its authors. Farmers' united body "Samyukt Kisan Morcha" spearheading this agitation, in a statement on 27/01/2021, while hailing "unprecedented response to the Kisan Republic Day Parade" put the onus of the violent incidents on the "dirty conspiracy" hatched by the Union Govt. which "had been severely shaken by this peasant agitation" with some organizations including Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee and some individuals like Deep Sidhu who had dubious history of close relations with BJP leaders against this peaceful mass struggle of farmers. "KMSC had set up their separate protest site after 15 days after beginning of the protests and were allowed to set up their site in front of the protest site by the farmers' organizations to pre-empt any march by the farmers into Delhi. KMSC was not part of the organizations which jointly undertook this struggle. Similarly, when Kisan parade was announced for January 26, anti-social elements like Deep Sidhu and others were pressed into service to torpedo the farmers' agitation." SKM appealed to peasants to come in larger number to border protest sites.

RSS-BJP's Union Govt. has been the principal author of this attempt to paint this unprecedented movement of the peasantry against the most thoroughgoing offensive against agriculture and peasantry as violent and directed against Indian state and not on peasant demands. This is borne out by the facts that 'anti-social' elements like Deep Sidhu and others have been close to the ruling dispensation. Several photographs of Deep Sidhu with PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah were splashed on the social media. Deep Sidhu had been election agent of BJP MP from Gurdaspur, Mr. Sunny Deol.

Not only close association with ruling dispensation of likes of Deep Sidhu who were instrumental in Red Fort incident, Delhi police which is under the control of Union Govt. also facilitated the divergence of the Kisan Tractor March from the pre-decided route. All those who were participated in the Rally or assembled to welcome it saw how Police closed the entry to pre-decided route and removed or allowed the removal of barricades from the route taken by some. This was also observed and covered by some media posts.

That the Union Govt. was the principal author is also borne out by the fact that the Union Agriculture Minister, in the last round of talks held on January 22, had told the farmers' organizations delegation that they should make their preparations while Govt. will make its own preparations. What he meant by 'preparations' unfolded on January 26.

The role of MKSC and some other organizations is also noteworthy. They played into the hands of the Govt. in creating a situation which the Union Govt. wished to create. Some among these organizations have little commitment to the peasant while some others have no faith in the mass movement of the peasants. They have little confidence in the strength of the people especially like that exhibited in the ongoing farmers' movement. They do not see any potential in extra-parliamentary mass struggle of the kind that the masses of peasantry are conducting in different parts of the country and the months

long sit-in they have maintained through the peak of winter on the borders of Delhi. On the part of MKSC and some other organizations, it was no innocuous militant action. As SKM release on 27.2.2021 said, “Under this conspiracy, the said Kisan organization and other persons announced that they would march on Ring Road and unfurl a flag on the Red Fort.”

The role of some farmer leaders in creating the confusion which resulted in a good number of farmers falling prey to this design should also be mentioned if only to guard against it in future. SKM meeting had decided on conducting Kisan Tractor March in Delhi on January 26. However, some leaders announced to the media that we will march on Outer Ring Road on that day. This was extensively propagated in the media and through videos. However, the SKM negotiated a route which only touched Outer Ring Road. This ‘new’ decision on the route gave opportunity to the elements mentioned above to mislead the peasants who had assembled in large numbers and did not belong to any organization, especially the youth among them. It should also be mentioned that Punjab organizations did not take timely corrective steps even when the intentions of some organizations and individuals to disturb united parade had become clear.

RSS-BJP had thought that they had done enough through the Red Fort incident to damage the farmers’ movement and to paint this as anti-national. They threw away the pretensions that they were sympathetic to farmers and came out in their true colours of servitors of foreign and domestic corporate. They had totally failed to correctly gauge the determination of the peasantry to get these black laws repealed and get MSP as a legal right. Like all reactionaries, they have no respect for the people’s struggles and oversized confidence in their tools of repression. After the Red Fort incident, Union Govt. unleashed its might and RSS unleashed its cadres against farmers sitting at different places. In fact, the two worked not only in tandem but in open collusion. More than hundred and fifty sit-ins at different places in Haryana, at tolls plazas and other sites were forcibly removed. Dharnas at various sites in UP, a large number of small and big ones, were forcibly removed and at several places, peasants were detained- Palwal, Chilla, Baraut, Baghpat being among them.

RSS machinery tried to mobilize their supporters against the peasant movement. A massive propaganda campaign was launched and sections of corporate media rendered help in this misinformation. RSS cadres mobilized their supporters to threaten the peasants who were sitting near Dharuhera in Haryana and forced them to retreat. Similar exercises were taken at a number of places. With these initial successes, RSS cadres and security forces of Union Govt. moved to attack the main protest sites i.e. Singhu, Tikri and Gazipur. From 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of January was a time of test of the farmers’ determination and trial of the strength of the farmers’ movement.

Union Govt. and RSS-BJP selected Gazipur as the first centre of attack for uprooting the protest sites though disturbances were created at Tikri and Singhu as well. There was a decrease of strength at these sites, mainly at Gazipur and also to an extent Tikri. It was partly due to the fact that those who had come to participate in 26<sup>th</sup> programme were any way to return and partly some people left the site due to the confusion created by the Govt. RSS cadres were mobilized to create disturbance at Tikri. However, participants quickly overcame them as they were small in number and local people were supporting the farmers movement. An attack by RSS cadres was also made with police connivance

at a site in Singhu. But their main attack was concentrated at Gazipur. It appeared they hoped that if they succeed at Gazipur, they would replicate this at Tikri and Singhu as well.

A large number of riot police were deployed at Gazipur. DM and SP made inspection of every camp mainly to demoralize the farmers sitting there. On 27<sup>th</sup> night, the electricity was cut off and the propaganda of impending police action was intensified for the same purpose of demoralizing the peasants. Govt.-RSS game plan was to force the peasants there to go away. However, farmers and their leaders made it clear to them that they would not retreat. Govt. had to either arrest them or use force to remove them. For this apparently Govt. was not prepared in view of its reaction in the surrounding peasant belt. Next day further pressure was mounted. Hundreds of lathi wielding RSS cadres shouted slogans against the farmers threatening to assault them. On the other hand, police kept threatening the leaders of the action to remove them. On 28<sup>th</sup> evening, police and administration issued threats from the stage. In face of these threats and provocations, farmers stood firm and condemned the threats and issued an appeal to farmers to rally. There was a big reaction to these threats of RSS cadres and security forces and to the tearful appeal of BKU leader Rakesh Tikait. Mass rallies started in villages of western UP and they started moving to Gazipur. By midnight of 28<sup>th</sup> contingents started from Western UP villages started arriving at Gazipur. Threat of Union Govt. security forces and RSS cadres was defeated. At Tikri also the participants from Haryana villages started arriving from 28<sup>th</sup> noon thereby dissipating the threat of Haryana Govt. and RSS. At Singhu, with the resumption of protest meetings on 27<sup>th</sup> pale of gloom was lifted and a fresh determination ensued. Fresh batches of peasants from Punjab too joined the protest sites.

Then followed big mass mobilizations in UP, especially in West UP and also in Haryana. Lakhs attended the Mahapanchayats. These big gatherings showed hollowness of the Govt. propaganda that the movement had lost its support among peasants. These Mahapanchayats are continuing as more and more centres are opting for big gatherings. Peasants in other states as well are planning to organize the mass gatherings named Mahapanchayats.

Thus, the peasants defeated the Govt. conspiracy to crush their struggle and overcame a serious challenge to their movement. It has been due to the mass support that the cause of repeal of these black laws and getting MSP as a legal right enjoys among peasants of the country. Peasants could overcome this challenge of the Govt. due to their determination of carrying on their struggle and willingness to offer sacrifices for saving agriculture and their own existence. It has been a big success of the farmers' movement that they could defeat such a heinous conspiracy. It shows the strength of the farmers to overcome all adversities. While road of the struggle may be long, but the determination of farmers offers best guarantee for the success of their struggle.

February 8, 2021

As the Covid19 Sweeps Across India

## **Act Immediately, Act Decisively**

Desperation and fear; despondency and helplessness have gripped a large section of people of the country including generally complacent urban middle classes due to raging Corona pandemic in the country. Govts. are blaming the people for the current wave to justify their criminal waste of 14 months since the global dimension of the pandemic was acknowledged. India has already set world records in daily rise of cases and deaths recorded every day though these are believed to be only a fraction of cases and deaths every day.

The present dire strait in which the country finds itself is a result of myriads acts of commission and omission, mainly of the former. The last 14 months is a saga of unprecedented neglect and destruction, sadistic pleasure drawn by the rulers from the helplessness of the people. Despite a century having passed, rulers of the day like their predecessor colonial rulers at the time of Spanish Flu (1918-'20) are blaming the people while milking them dry by all possible means. Like rivers overflowing with bodies then, crematoria are packed and bodies lying on the roads. These modern day Chelmsfords are indeed worthy successors!

Govts. and corporate media have been trumpeting the unsubstantiated claims with the result that international media is contradicting their claims of number of cases or deaths.

The pandemic has demonstrated whole-scale abandonment of the people by all agencies of the state- mainly the Central Govt. which has main control over the financial and executive power in the country. RSS-BJP Central Govt. had been patting itself on the back for controlling the pandemic even asserting its claim to be 'Vishwaguru'. Not long back in February 2021 BJP office bearers had credited their govt. with successfully fighting Corona. AAP Govt. in Delhi had been running newspaper advertisements claiming success in the alleged war on pandemic. However, strange are the ways of the tiny virus, which showed the reality of these pygmies who project themselves as giants, before the people.

Supreme Court, Election Commission and all state institutions have been found to have the feet of clay when it comes to the question of even saving the lives of the people let alone upholding the rights of the people. Govt. has blatantly flouted even the suggestions of parliamentary committee made in October 2020 to meet the exigencies of the impending second wave. State has abandoned the people.

The anti-people attitude of RSS was much in evidence when their leader threatened the people with anti-national acts for criticizing the handling the pandemic. They accused those raising questions of spreading negativity while their Govt. is doing commendable work. People can judge themselves.

India has vast potential to handle the pandemic but the govt. has not only failed to mobilize this potential but has obstructed such development.

It is well known that hospital beds, oxygen etc. are the paramount needs for helping people in this pandemic. But no beds were added, oxygen supply was not ensured and moreover hospitals continue to be understaffed. Many well meaning people have come out to help but only Govt. has the resources and reach to address the concerns of the people.

There is much to say about the govt. handling, but the paramount need is to meet the requirements of the people in their urgent need of help. The govt. is dithering because it does not want to make their corporate backers pay their share as increased taxes even as the govts. world over are doing so. Even most of the critiques of the handling of the present crisis evade this question of govt. not increasing taxes on corporate, may be for their future in corporate controlled media.

Now that the Prime Minister has admitted that Covid storm has shaken India but has it shaken his govt. enough to urgently do the following:

Hospital beds should be increased. Not only vacancies in the hospitals should be filled up immediately, extra staff should be appointed to make the hospital work even as health care staff gets afflicted with Covid. Union govt. and all state govts. Hospital beds should be made available for admitting covid patients as many beds are lying unused due to suspension of ordinary care. All big and medium corporate hospitals should be brought under govt. control. All school buildings should be used as Covid centres with oxygen facility. All this can be done without delay.

Covid testing should be made easy and urgent. No queues, no waiting time. Waive the requirement of Covid report for the admission if symptoms are there. No harassment of the people.

All senior doctors should concentrate on meeting patients' needs rather than making rounds of TV studios for govt. needs. They should remember their oath as well as the fact that they are paid by the people of the country. Call may be given to all doctors to come forward and associate them with Corona care while other staff/medical students may be pressed to do the technical/clerical work along with peripheral aspects of care.

All oxygen production should be used for medical purpose to meet this crisis. India has enough of concentrated oxygen and it does not take long to augment the supplies. All bureaucratic delays should be cut out. Cylinders from the major owners of such cylinders like Ambanis, Jindals, Tatas and Mittals etc. should be taken over by the Govt. and not left to their philanthropic urges. All Govt. agencies must be directed to ensure that movement of Oxygen is not hampered anywhere. Govt. should not falsely blame farmers' movement but correct its own incompetence and act against those responsible for scarcity of Oxygen.

Vaccines should be made available to all who desire without any charges at all. All necessities for the treatment like Oxygen, medicines should be made freely available and free of charge. Scarcity of medicines should be urgently addressed and it can be done if govt. is willing to not work for the profit of the owners.

All information should be made transparent. Results of the tests should be declared. Hiding or obfuscating of scientific data should stop forthwith. Knowing the facts enables one to tackle them rather than terming it negativity. Do not ban social media rather give correct facts from the govt.

To meet the need of manpower, personnel of Army, paramilitary and police should be mobilized, relocated and trained for Covid related work. These forces should be utilized to serve the people in this critical period.

To meet the expenses should not be very difficult if govt. is willing to take even half of the income of the corporate since the outbreak of pandemic i.e. last fifteen months. Further a 3% wealth tax increase on the incomes above 10 million rupees may raise enough funds. Corporate who are pumping funds into 'nationalist' propaganda should be able to bear at least this much.

Country is going through a most critical period. Saving the people and lessening their sorrows should be the primary aim. Covid tragedy should not be augmented by govt. action/inaction. It is late to act but better late than never. Stakes are just too high.

CPIML (New Democracy)

April 25, 2021

**IFTU NC Statement**

## **Covid Re Rampage Exposes Anti People Callous Governance!**

### **Workers Begin Fleeing Homeward Once Again!**

The entire edifice of anti people governance in the country stands exposed as the corona virus goes through the expected second wave. Govts did not pay any attention to setting up adequate health care facilities despite having over a whole year's time to do so. Rather, the Central Govt. allows kumbh type super spreader events while its yes-men team of medical specialists preach preventive measures to the people. Thus, as hospital facilities run out in state after state, lockdown threats loom. Resultantly, anticipating a re run of the days without wage, roof, food, transport or acknowledgement from govts, migrant workers throughout the country are fleeing homeward again. Trains and buses are packed and overcrowded, putting distancing norms to shame. But the Govts couldn't care less about ensuring safe travel for workers and ordinary people.

And so, workers have begun to flee again. From Mumbai and other cities of Maharashtra, from Bengaluru. From Delhi too, though this is being covered up under

pretext of routine movement for harvesting and marriage season. And from most other major cities of different states towards the rural areas.

Even where lockdowns are not announced, many measures hit workers. Domestic part timers are being told to stay away from apartments they worked in. Workers are rendered defunct as furnaces which need to work continually are shut down in night curfews. Transport curbs disallow workers from reaching workplaces. And all over the country, workers are still paying back loans incurred due to the false assurance of the Prime Minister that wages of lockdown periods would all be paid, just tide over the period.

As the situation threatens to worsen, Central Govt's medical advisors advise people to turn to chawanprash while RSS leaders and Central Govt Ministers are treated at major allopathic centres; the Central Govt's AIIMS facility at New Delhi has closed doors for routine commoners and Central Govt. is moving full steam ahead pushing through policies of sale to corporate under cover of epidemic.

IFTU NC calls on all units to lead the workers to demand dignified and free travel home, enrolment by labour depts of all workers going home or losing workdays so that they can be paid wages by owners for closure periods upto 7 days after work restarts and that those workers staying back should be provided food and shelter at state expenses.

IFTU National Committee Demands :

\*Free train travel for workers going home. Adequate number of fast trains to allow safe travel.

\* Govts, through their Labour Departments, must ensure payment of wages to workers in all establishments in all cities where restrictions on work hours or partial or total lockdowns are being announced. Domestic workers must be included in such calculations.

\*Free all covid care for all. Reopen all medical facilities for non Covid ailments.

\*Free and adequate cooked food distribution in all industrial areas, all working class areas where ever working has been restricted.

\*Central and State Govts must open workplaces for covid related work like making masks for free distribution, where employment opportunities can be generated.

## **National Committee**

### **Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU)**

*15th April 2021*

# **Massive Protests by Workers and People Against Centre's Privatization Plan of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant**

**(The Centre's decision for 100% disinvestment in Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, has triggered massive protests in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The state observed a total Bandh on the call of Trade Unions and other mass organizations against the privatization of this plant. IFTU has organized several programmes against this privatization, including a well attended Convention on the issue. This privatization decision has seriously agitated workers and people of Andhra Pradesh.)**

Massive protests erupted in Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd. (RINL) in Visakhapatnam, better known as Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), on 8<sup>th</sup> March (Monday), 2021 following a statement made by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman in the parliament that the Centre would go ahead with privatization of the Steel Plant on 100% disinvestment.

A Navaratna PSU (Public Sector Unit) since 2010, RINL's Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is India's first shore-based integrated steel plant. VSP, with a capacity of 3.0 MTPA of liquid steel, was started in 1992. Subsequently its capacity was enhanced to 6.3 MTPA in 2015 and to 7.3 MTPA in 2017. VSP has recorded an annual turnover of Rs.20844 crores in 2018-19. The products of RINL include bars, wire rods, pig irons, billets etc.

The government had acquired over 22,000 acres of farm lands from 64 villages on the sea coast for the steel plant to come up. Now about one lakh people are dependent on the steel plant, including 17,000 permanent employees and workers and 16,000 contract workers. VSP was established in 1988 after a prolonged 'Visakha Ukku – Andhrula Hakku' movement, in which 32 people laid down their lives. Four MPs belonging to Andhra region had resigned from Parliament on the demand of setting up this plant, as a part of the movement on the issue.

A large number of those ousted for setting up the plant are yet to be rehabilitated and they and their descendants have been agitating on this issue.

In 2011, the Centre had decided to sell 10% of its stake in this plant through an initial public offering (IPO). But the plan had been kept on hold for various reasons including protests by workers of the plant until the decision to privatize it completely now. However, Central Govt. did not help the functioning of the plant and captive mines were not allotted to the plant despite long standing demand for the same.

## **Privatization for Imperialist Interest**

On February 10, Union Minister of Steel, Dharmendra Pradhan, went on record in the Rajya Sabha favouring giant corporate South Korean company POSCO to establish a steel plant on the RINL's lands. Replying to a question raised by YSR Congress MP Vijayasai Reddy, the minister stated, "The POSCO has evinced interest to set up a steel plant on RINL's land".

Pradhan added, "Shareholding pattern has not been determined at this stage. However, as per MoU, POSCO wishes to have at least 50% of shareholding while the shareholding of RINL would be worked out on the basis of valuation of its contribution of the land for setting up of the plant."

The Modi government's disinvestment motivation unveils its plans for sale of the steel plant to imperialist corporate entities.

## **Agitation against privatization**

Following the Centre's announcement to privatize VSP, thousands of employees and workers held a protest demonstration at the plant. They blocked the traffic on the Visakhapatnam-Kolkata National Highway (NH 16) till midnight, raising slogans against the Centre's unilateral decision and demanding a rollback. Later, the workers squatted near the steel plant gate all through night. Next day morning the protesters laid siege to the administrative block of the RINL and refused to allow senior officials to enter the plant's premises. Workers gheraoed the Director of the plant and held him captive for nearly six hours, refusing to allow him into the office. Various Trade Unions including IFTU talked with the top management which assured that it would take up the workers' demand with the Centre.

Andhra Pradesh Chief minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, under the heat of protests, expressed his resolve to lead an all-party delegation to the Prime Minister requesting to drop the disinvestment move.

Intellectuals, academicians, researchers of the area expressed their strong opposition to the government's proposal to give up the RINL's lands to a private entity. A successful state Bandh has been observed against this privatization plan.

Sale of these lands to private companies is nothing but a breach of public trust and in violation of the statutory provisions under which the lands were acquired by the then government. Protesters also added that the experience of the Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL)'s smelter unit, located in the vicinity of the steel plant and which was divested to a private company two decades ago, has left a bitter taste for the locals. The unit shut without adequate compensation being paid by the company to those thrown out of employment. The management entrusted with the PSU plant is accused of diverting 360 acres of land acquired for it from farmers for real estate business.

Workers said we shall intensify our agitation. There is no question of allowing the steel plant to be sold out to the corporate. For us it is a question of do or die. The Joint Action Committee (JAC) has decided to continue the agitation with a long-term approach on the lines of the farmers' protests in Delhi until the government withdraws its privatization plans. Trade Unions have come out in support of this agitation. A number of political parties and mass organizations of different sections are also lending support.

## **IFTU CALL on MAY DAY 2021**

**Hold Aloft the Banner of Struggle**

**MAY DAY Zindabad**

# **FIGHT FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF ANTI- WORKER LABOUR CODES**

## **FIGHT PRIVATISATION and PROTECT PUBLIC ASSETS**

The 135<sup>th</sup> year of the historic May Day will be celebrated by the workers of the world under conditions of the pandemic and consequent restrictions used as a tool by the ruling classes to stifle normal democratic activity. Last year around this time, our country witnessed one of the harshest lockdowns, imposed by the BJP-led government ostensibly to arrest the spread of the virus. What this lockdown did to those millions, called as migrant workers is a dark chapter in the history of the country that remains etched in our memories. They were all invisible and inconsequential to the rulers till the lockdown happened. Those in power and society at large woke up to witness these migrants trudging away to their distant native places in the scorching heat after being thrown out of work. Some dying on the way on the highways, on rail tracks, in trains and in accidents. How many died? The Union Labour Minister on the floor of the Parliament said that the government has no data! In fact, he said that there is no data regarding the number of these workers in the country. A survey revealed that in Surat in Gujarat there are around twenty lakh migrant workers out of whom only 7000 were registered. There are over 15 crore migrant workers in the country who slog at the construction sites, metro rail etc. but are nameless as they are not registered despite the Migrant Workers

Act,1979 which has also been done away with by the Four Labour Codes. These Labour Codes adversely affect millions of workers in the unorganized sectors of the economy as many are pushed out of the ambit of any law.

It is a well-known fact that since long the World Bank, foreign capital and the native corporate have been demanding reforms in labour laws to their advantage. While the agenda of these labour law reforms could not be pushed through by the government all these years, the pandemic came in handy to bulldoze three labour codes in the winter session of the parliament in 2020, the Wage Code having been passed in 2019. Determining the criteria for fixing the minimum wage, allocating a mere 10% of expenditure of food and clothing towards house rent are flaws in the Wage Code and do not serve the interests of workers. The most important of the four labour codes is the IR Code that effectively takes away the hard-won rights of the working class. What was being demanded by the big managements to realize labour flexibility has now been granted by this Code with freedom to hire and fire workers. Managements owning companies employing less than 300 need not seek permission from the government to retrench workers or close down the unit. A legal strike has been made impossible with sixty days' notice and other riders. Forms of workers' struggle like mass casual leave and go-slow have now been pushed into the category of strike. The inspection system has now been almost dismantled with labour inspectors acting as facilitators. Web-based self certification by the managements is aimed at protecting management interests. Fixed Term Employment is another instrument to cut regular workers and push out a large chunk of the workforce from the ambit of labour laws. In essence all the four labour codes stand to benefit the managements and hit hard the interests of the workers.

For long the World Bank has been advocating private-sector led growth and privatization as a remedy to the various economic maladies facing a country. It has been saying that governments have no business to be in business, that is, in economic activity. How well our prime minister parrots this slogan when he shouts that government has no business to be in business! What is to be done then? Privatize, privatize and private all that is public held, government held. At the height of the pandemic last year in May, announcing the financial package, the Finance Minister declared that all non-strategic PSUs will be privatized and strategic units like the defence will also be privatized with the exception of some four units. There are profit-making maharatna and navaratna companies in this list of PSUs going under the axe of privatization. Many of these PSUs pay huge amounts of money to the government in the form of taxes and dividends and yet the government intends to hand them over to private players at dirt cheap rates. The BJP led government has announced that two public sector banks would be privatized without naming them. The largest insurer in the world, the LIC, is sought to be gradually privatized through disinvestment and the 49% FDI cap in Insurance sector has been hiked to 74% thus facilitating domination of this sector by foreign capital.

Hundred percent FDI has been allowed in Railways and already the government has identified some twelve profit-making clusters to be handed over to private players. In a word, the government at the Centre is on a privatization-spree with public assets up for sale on a platter to the private capital, both domestic and foreign. Yet the government shamelessly talks of *atmanirbharta* while putting up the country for sale.

In this scenario, the resistance put up by the farmers against the three farm laws that serve the interests of the corporate is significant in the history of people's struggles in the country. This huge movement on the borders of Delhi, withstanding the biting winter and the hot summer now is one of biggest movements ever seen in this country. It has challenged the fascist, pro-corporate agenda of the BJP and demonstrated the inherent strength of the peasant masses. The working class should not only identify itself with this movement but should come out in thousands like the peasants to beat back the government's assaults on workers' rights. A significant struggle in this direction is the struggle of the workers and employees of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant in Andhra Pradesh against the privatization move by the Central government. The establishment of this PSU was the result of a long struggle of the people and the attempts to privatize it is being resisted not only by the employees of the plant but by the people at large.

On the occasion of 135<sup>th</sup> year of May Day we reiterate our belief and confidence in the strength of the working class in changing history to a better future. We remember the heroic struggle of the workers of Chicago in 1886 for an eight-hour working day and the martyrs who were hanged to death. We recall their court statements that call for a socialist society as the alternative to the exploitative capitalist system. We pledge to carry forward the struggle to realize this beautiful dream.

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# **Emergence of Brahmanical Fascism in West Bengal**

**Dr. Amitabha Chakrabarti**

The ensuing assembly election in West Bengal has aroused a jubilant mood among the RSS-BJP family. They are smelling victory in the upcoming assembly election in West Bengal. The glorious peasants' struggle of North India has exposed the real face of the Modi government's 'development' model. But since the last parliamentary election, the emergence of the BJP in Bengal is phenomenal. Since its inception, RSS has never dreamt of such growth. The 'Nagpur mandarins' have thrown their full weight to capture the provincial government of West Bengal. The RSS strategy of occupying eastern India has eyed on capturing West Bengal state government and controlling the life of Kolkata, the intellectual citadel of eastern India, as well as one of the bastions of left movement for almost over a century.

There is a misconception that this growth is solely attributable to the BJP government at the Centre. Some parliamentary left forces try to relate it only with the opportunist politics of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government. But if we want to understand the growth of BJP in West Bengal we should not only consider these points but must also try to trace the deep ideological & socio-political roots of Brahmanical fascism in West Bengal. This insight and appraisal of changes in the socio-economic scenario of West Bengal will help us to face the RSS-BJP fascists' onslaught.

## **The Ideological Basis of Brahmanism in West Bengal**

In ancient or medieval India, the term Hindu never implied any religious sect. Christian missionaries used the term to describe & oppose non-Muslim religious beliefs, rituals of the people of India. The educated indigenous people, mostly Brahmins, taught the missionaries about religious practice, which was essentially Brahmanical in nature. Therefore, the Europeans constructed this hierarchical Brahmanical belief system into the Hindu religion. In 1816 Raja Rammohan Roy first used the term in a religious perspective while criticizing 'idol worship'.

The Hindu upheaval we observe in the second half of the 19th century in Bengal was a colonial construct. Rajnarayan Basu was the pioneer of this upheaval. Mr. Basu and Nabagopal Mitra of Kolkata spread their idea of Hindu upheaval by starting a fair,

Hindu Mela, in 1867. In 1867, Rajnarayan, maternal grandfather of Aurobindo Ghose wrote a book – ‘Prospectus of a Society for the National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal’. Basu and Mitra organized a ‘National School’, established a gymnasium called ‘National Gymnasium’ and a ‘National Society’. Amar Dutta (2007) has quoted them, “We do not understand why our correspondent takes exception to the Hindoos who certainly form a nation by themselves, and as much a society established by them can very properly be called a national society.”

In Rajnarayan’s book, ‘Hope of an Old Hindu’, it is interesting to note that he was of the opinion that except Christians and Muslims, all other religions like Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism & Brahmoism belong to Hindu religion. He advised to form ‘Maha Hindu Samity’ and founded ‘Bharat Dharma Mahamandal’, the forerunner of Hindu Mahasabha. Rajnarayan believed that this organization will form a strong Hindu nation that will dominate the whole of India and the world. Rajnarayan in his book ‘Hope of an Old Hindu’ has praised the Varna system and considered Brahmins as ‘God on the earth’.

This Hindu upheaval & Brahmanical chauvinism was expressed in contemporary Bengali literature as well. Poets like Rangalal Bandopadhyay, Nabin Chandra Sen, etc. propagated this ideology in their literary works, Shasadhar Tarkachuramoni formed ‘Arya Dharma Pracharoni Sabha’ and ‘Hari Sabha’. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was the most important figure in this Hindu upheaval, whom Aurobindo depicted as his ‘inspirer and political Guru’. In most of Bankim’s novels, he defined Hindu as ‘self’ and Muslims as the ‘other’. In his famous novel Ananda Math, from which the national song of India ‘Vande Mataram’ has been taken, he changed the sentence ‘Kill British’ mentioned in the 1st edition as ‘Kill Nere’ (Muslim) in later editions.

If you look at the history of Bengal it was the Maratha invasion which has mostly ransacked & looted Bengal but Bankim’s Hindu bias overlooked this history. After Bankim it was Vivekananda who provided a Hindu foundation to understand the nationalism of India. In an interview in 1898, Vivekananda said that his function of movement in India is “to find the common basis of Hinduism and awaken the national consciousness to them.” Some of the liberal writings of Vivekananda do not negate his Hindutwavadi nationalist understanding. Aurobindo also wrote, “Our movement for the national resurgence is not political, it is spiritual and religious.” He said, “Let me reiterate openly: Sanatana Dharma is our nationhood”.

It is no wonder why Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, a student at Medical College, Kolkata in the early part of the 20th century Bengal, picked this up while studying in Kolkata and

became the ideological father of RSS. If we look at the theorization and organizational activities of these so-called colonialist 'nationalists' you will find surprising similarities between RSS and the historical figures mentioned above such as Rajnarayan, Nabagopal, Bankim, etc.

I want to emphasize that the intellectual tradition of Bengal had both – secular, democratic, radical traditions as well as communal Hindutva legacy. Brahmanical intellectual legacy has a deep root in West Bengal. Bengal has a rich heritage of tolerance, secularism, and rational understanding, but there is also a strong Brahmanical intellectual tradition as well; if we miss this, we will misunderstand this Brahmanical fascist emergence in Bengal.

### **Socioeconomic and Political Perspective of Brahminism in West Bengal**

Since the Sen dynasty (11th and 12th century AD), feudal landlords of Bengal mostly belonged to Brahmin castes. It did not change even in the Sultani rule in Bengal. Sens were Kannada Brahmins and they distributed land largely among Brahmins in Bengal as a result of which most of the land in Bengal, barring few exceptions, were owned by upper castes and mostly Brahmins. Bengal's caste system was somewhat different from north India. Moreover, the Sudras in Bengal were redistributed amongst untouchables, tribals and Muslims (via their Buddhist phase of conversion).

Both undivided Bengal and present West Bengal has a significant Muslim population. It must be remembered that Bengali as a nationality has a majority of Muslims according to religious faith. Dalits and Muslims are mostly poor and landless peasants. Apart from some specific districts in Bengal, this is the usual map of land & property distribution. Industrialization and partial land reform has also failed to change this scenario.

If we review the first attempt at the partition of Bengal in 1905, we shall find a strong undercurrent of this socioeconomic contradiction. The British colonialists tried their level best to create rift along communal religious lines. In 1904, before the partition of Bengal was announced Lord Curzon wrote a letter to the Secretary of State, "The Bengalis who like to think themselves a nation, and who dream of a future when the English will have been turned out, and a Bengali Babu will be installed in Government House, Calcutta, of course, bitterly resent any disruption that will be likely to interfere with the realization of this dream. If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying, on the eastern flank of India, a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future." With this ulterior motive, the British

tried to create a communal division in Bengal. They took the help of Nawab Sir Khwaja Salimulla of Dhaka who demanded education & job opportunities for Muslims and formed the All India Muslim League in 1906.

## **Partition of Bengal**

He strongly advocated the division of Bengal. The pathetic condition of economy, education, and job among Bengali Muslims was so important at that time that Chittaranjan Das, the famous leader of Bengal during that period, also demanded proportional representation of Muslims in job and education in Bengal. The Hindu religious communal flavor of Swadeshi movements in Bengal led by Aurobindo Ghose and others also gradually created a distance among Muslims and thwarted participation in Swadeshi movement.

Swarajya Party, political influence of Subhas Chandra Bose, development of communist and left movements in Bengal and the influence of Soviets had a secular and democratic content which influenced the students, youth and intellectuals of Bengal. The workers and peasants were also mostly under their leadership.

Anti-imperialist movement in Bengal was also under the influence of this secular understanding. Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim league also had their pockets of influence. The communalists of Hindu Mahasabha had cordial relationship with many Congress leaders and at some places led the Congress. Still the poor Muslim peasants and educated intellectuals of East Bengal denounced the Muslim league leadership and Fazlul Haque's Praja Krisak Party had overwhelming control. Praja Krisak Party fought for poor ryots of Bengal. Flood Commission, which recommended land reform for sharecropper peasants of Bengal was in this period. This annoyed the landlords, who were mostly from upper caste Hindu backgrounds. These class forces during this period aligned with Hindu Mahasabha and Congress. The poor and landless peasants from Muslim and lower caste Hindu felt betrayed. Interestingly in this period the provincial government in Bengal was supported both by Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League.

## **Bengal famine**

The decade of forties in Bengal was full of contradictions. It saw the Bengal famine, great anti-imperialist movements in support of Azad Hind Fauj, emergence of worker-peasant-student movements under the leadership of communist party. It also witnessed Great Calcutta riots, the communalization of Bengal politics and the betrayal by the Congress Party. Riots of Calcutta, Bihar & Noakhali vitiated the atmosphere of communal harmony. Even in this period, in Assembly elections, Hindu Mahasabha did not fare well. The so called 'Hindus' friend' Shyamaprasad Mukherjee was defeated by a

little-known candidate in his constituency and finally got a berth in assembly at the mercy of Congress Party from University quota.

Finally, the transfer of power in India in 1947 led to the partition of Bengal. This communal religious division of Bengal had an everlasting impact among the people and their family members who had either to leave or get evicted from their ancestral places. In West Bengal it was the Bengali Hindu refugees who were rehabilitated but with a bitter experience – no shelter, no food, no job, no land, no compassion from the rulers. Only the communists & left forces fought for their rights. It is, for this reason, the socio-political events in Bengal during fifties and sixties were along the democratic class aspirations. Credit goes to the communists who took up the demands of toiling masses, students, youths, unemployed and middle class of Bengal and combated the division along communal identity. But the communal politics of the subcontinent rotating around partition had a strong undercurrent in the socio-political understanding of the people of Bengal.

Till seventies the socio-political movements were mostly democratic & revolutionary. Only during Indo-China war, Indo-Pak war or Bangladesh war the chauvinistic nationalist atmosphere came to the forefront.

### **Rise of Hindutva Organizations during Left Front Govt. Rule**

After the defeat of Indira Gandhi in 1977, the Left Front government came to power. They declared to give relief to people of Bengal and claimed that their government will become a weapon of mass movement. Over the decades it has been proved to be a false claim. In the initial years there were some reforms in rural sector and government sector, but gradually it followed the footsteps of neoliberal economy since 1990. West Bengal was the first state to approve SEZ in the name of ‘development’ and land reforms were stopped. They started occupying lands for multi-national corporations and started contractual employee recruitment in government sectors. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal from CPI(M), in an interview said, “I am clear in my mind. This is capitalism.....I have to follow capitalism.” (Hindustan Times, July 20, 2007)

Corruption and nepotism went hand in hand, agriculture was in crisis and manufacturing sectors were destroyed. Non-farm sector flourished in rural Bengal with development of a ‘new rich’ community of real estate businessman, contractors and suppliers in different government and non-government sectors. This new social force was recruited from CPI(M) party cadres or inducted inside the organization. They were the resource for CPI(M)’s fund, muscle power and mass mobilization. Buddhadeb

Bhattacharya, on numerous occasions demonized workers' rights including referring to bandhs as 'bad' and gherao as 'illegal'. (The Economic Times, August 27, 2008) He also expressed his concerns over trans-border migration from Bangladesh without any statistics and once stated that "Madrasas are cradle of terrorist activities." (The Economic Times, October 21, 2014) Believe it or not!

Therefore, even in the period of Left Front rule in West Bengal there was no significant difference from other states in terms of economics and politics.

### **What was the position of RSS & BJP during Left Front rule?**

Till 1989-90, RSS-BJP was very weak in the political life of West Bengal. RSS membership was less than 5000 till then, but by 1997 it went up to 400,000. The number of Purna Swayamsevaks rose from 2227 to 50,000 while the number of branches went up from 2500 to more than 12000 and organizational districts from 14 to 28. During this period Ex-DG & IG of West Bengal Police joined BJP. During this period West Bengal Police had 3000 RSS cadres. In 1996 BJP's share of vote was around 6% in both Parliamentary & Assembly election but in 1998 it was around 10% in Parliament and Panchayat elections. The RSS led schools had 160 full time teachers in 21 schools with 4282 students.

Moreover, different political parties starting from CPI(M) to TMC aligned with RSS led BJP in different phases of their electoral politics in West Bengal.

### **Present Scenario and Our Task**

The emergence of BJP should be related with the gradual strengthening of contractor, promoter and supplier in the economic life of West Bengal. It started from Left Front regime and became stronger during TMC rule. The TMC leaders, including their family members starting from top to bottom, have been involved in Ponzi schemes, grabbing money from government projects, illegal sand and coal mining and real estate investments. They have developed their down-the-line chain from city to village. The landowner, land mafia, money lender, trader nexus are the controllers of the socio-political life of West Bengal. These social forces introduced Ganesh Chaturthi, Hanuman puja, Tara Ma worship etc. and has strengthened the Brahmanical milieu in West Bengal. Organization of these festivals is part and parcel of this local crony capital. They have founded temples in their locality to create their social base. Many TMC leaders, including recent TMC deserter Subhendu Adhikari, has been reported to form huge numbers of Hanuman temples in their constituencies.

### **Those affected by Ponzi schemes in Bengal**

The erstwhile BJP had a basis among traders or Baniyas. This newly risen social force also has similar class character to the Baniyas. They are not related to production and that may be a reason to find a pull towards BJP. The corrupt businessmen and TMC leaders when faced with the carrot and stick policy by BJP through CBI-ED and Amit Shah – JP Nadda concert are opting for BJP. In last Panchayat election people had seen that TMC did not allow any opposition member to fight freely in their election. It is true that same thing happened in BJP ruled Tripura but people are aggrieved at this undemocratic activity.

The erstwhile ruling CPI(M) and Left Front partners, though talking loud in all-India forums, are essentially tailing behind Congress. In the name of fighting TMC and BJP, their middle and lower rank cadres in connivance with BJP have voted for BJP in the last Parliamentary election in 2019. They coined the slogan of 'Ekushe Ram Chhabbishe Bam' meaning Ram or BJP in 2021 election and Left Front in 2026. This has proved that the social base of the leadership of CPI(M) over thirty four years of their rule has been transformed into a reactionary character.

The socio-economic situation and the reason for the emergence of Brahmanical fascists in our country have been dealt by many scholars. They have shown their relationship with crisis of imperialism & Indian state. The same reasoning is true for West Bengal, but West Bengal also has some special reasoning: with a sizeable Muslim population in the state, with a Muslim dominated neighbouring country and having a riot ridden history of partition, RSS has been successful in developing a campaign against Muslim 'other'. They have made false propaganda about the population growth of Muslims in Census, their trans-border migration to India, their terrorist activities etc. among common people of West Bengal.

The political forces starting from Congress, CPI(M) to TMC did not fight against this false propaganda. They were afraid of losing Hindu votes. The Brahmanical fascists' campaign reached its height during Shila Pujan, Rath Yatra and demolition of Babri Masjid. No political force starting from CPI(M) to TMC had any alternative socio-economic agenda to fight them. That is the reason why we are here today.

There are few left organizations and liberal intellectuals who are propagating the 'No Vote to BJP' as the prime slogan to combat the BJP fascists. For the last few years, they were not involved in building any serious united programme against BJP. They were busy in discussing how to fight fascism – from below or above? Unfortunately, this call is being welcomed by TMC. The misrule of TMC has created this favourable situation for BJP. Until and unless a united movement is built against BJP's anti-people policies this

type of call for vote will not succeed in mobilizing common people in struggle against Brahmanical fascism. The parliamentary way is not the main form to defeat fascism even if BJP may be defeated in an election as the base of rise of such fascism will not be undermined. Anti-fascists have to take control of the streets. The farmers of north India have shown the way. This is the lesson from history as well. It is up to the revolutionary democratic forces to decide which path they are willing to follow.

# **Military Coup in Myanmar**

**Nabin Karmakar**

## **Introduction**

Myanmar has been ruled by a military junta for many of the years since British colonial rule ended there in 1948. The Union of Burma began as a parliamentary democracy, like most of its newly independent neighbours on the Indian subcontinent. But representative democracy only lasted until 1962, when General U Ne Win led a military coup and military held power for the next twenty-six years.

Ne Win instituted a new constitution in 1974 based on an isolationist policy and a socialist economic program that nationalized Burma's major enterprises. The economic situation deteriorated rapidly, and a black-market economy took hold. By 1988, widespread corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar's currency, and food shortages led to massive student-led protests. In August 1988, the army cracked down on protesters, killing at least three thousand and displacing thousands more.

In the aftermath of the 1988 crackdown, Ne Win resigned as chairman of his party, although he remained active behind the scenes as another military junta took power. In 1989, the new military regime changed the country's name from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar, and the capital, Rangoon, was renamed Yangon. In 2005, the military government moved the administrative capital to Nay Pyi Taw, a city it built in central Myanmar. The junta argued that the name "Burma" was a vestige of the colonial era that favored the Burman ethnic majority, and that "Myanmar" was more inclusive. Official U.S. policy still refers to the country as Burma, though most nations call it Myanmar.

In 2007, the so-called 'Saffron Revolution'—widespread anti-government protests that were sparked by fuel price hikes and named after the saffron-coloured robes worn by

participating Buddhist monks—and international pressure prompted shifts in Myanmar. In addition, the military government wanted to attract investment, reduce its reliance on China, and build relations with more countries. The junta pushed forward a new constitution in 2008, which is still in place today, which gave the military widespread powers even under civilian rule. The military junta unexpectedly officially dissolved in 2011 and established a civilian parliament for a transitional period, during which former army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed president.

## Building a military state

After end of colonial rule in 1948 the new government embarked on the building of a new Union of Burma comprising the central heartland predominantly inhabited by ethnic Burmans and the surrounding hills and mountains inhabited by a wide range of ethnic minorities. During the negotiations for independence from Britain, Burman nationalists advocated independence as soon as possible. For ethnic minority leaders, however, the key issues were self-determination and autonomy to safeguard their position in a future Union of Burma. The Panglong Agreement of 1947, intended as a basis for the new union of Burma, was signed between Burman politicians and ethnic minority representatives. However, the agreement did not give the same rights to the various ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, not all of the major ethnic groups were represented in Panglong. As a result, many issues were deferred for future resolution. The civil war started shortly after independence in January 1948, with the Communist Party of Burma going underground to fight the central government, which also suffered mutinies in the army. Several newly formed ethnic minority nationalist movements, spearheaded by the Karen National Union (KNU, formed in 1947), took up arms to press their demands for more autonomy and equal rights in the union. They were followed by other ethnic nationalist movements, including the New Mon State Party and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Within a year the entire country was in turmoil.

By the early 1950s the war had spread to many parts of the country. The situation was further complicated by the invasion of northeast Shan State by Kuomintang remnants from China following their defeat by communists in China. By the time of the coup of 1962 the civil war had spread to Kachin and Shan States, where the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Shan State Army (SSA) led armed revolts. State institutions also started to emerge, but post-independence state-building in the country was dominated by the army. For 50 years Burma has been ruled by military dictators practicing a very centralized and top-down style of governance. These were General Ne Win (1962-88), General Saw Maung (1988-93) and General Than Shwe (1993-2010). The army led by these generals has tried to build a unitary Burman state promoting Burman culture and Buddhism as the state religion. Within this framework, regional military commanders were able to exercise great power over territories under their control.

However, military rule greatly contributed to Burma's transformation into a weak state. Officially the military claims it is the founder of the Union of Burma, referring to its role in the struggle for independence against Britain. The military also claims it is the main force that has held the country together during the civil war that has plagued the country since independence, and that it has prevented the country from disintegrating. However, since the military came to power in 1962, armed resistance against the central government has only increased. In many ethnic areas the main or even sole government presence was the army, which consisted mainly of ethnic Burmans. These troops were often seen as an invasion force in ethnic areas. Military campaigns also led to serious human rights abuses, fueling further anti-Burman grievances among the local population.

Furthermore, the military's ability to deliver services to the population and bring about economic development has proved very weak. The large majority of ministers under military rule were serving or ex-army generals with little non-military technical expertise. Ministries and other state institutions also had little capacity and few resources. Most of the state budget went to the military, while the isolationist policies of the military government contributed to the collapse of the public sector, including health and education services.

The Burman population has also rejected the military's state-building project. Since the 1962 coup several urban protests have broken out against military rule. The largest demonstrations took place in August 1988, following months of unrest, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets demanding an end to military rule, the restoration of democracy and multiparty elections. In the following month the military government crushed the movement, killing or arresting many protesters. The protests were also driven by the deteriorating economic situation, mainly caused by decades of political repression, civil war and the government's mismanagement of the country, especially the economy. The Burma Socialist Programme Party was also abolished and socialism disappeared as the official state ideology.

Following the crackdown, thousands of Burman activists fled the cities to the jungle camps of the armed groups in the border regions. The new regime, called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), organized general elections in 1990 in which the opposition NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory. Rather than accept the election results, the military established a National Convention to draft a new constitution. Aung San Suu Kyi was held under house arrest for long periods of time since 1989. The SLORC and its successor, the SPDC, refused to enter into a real political dialogue with her party.

Since 1994 the democratic opposition, led by Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic opposition groups, has called for a tripartite dialogue to find a political solution to the crisis. The military refused, and instead responded with political repression and military

offensives. It also embarked on a strategy to conduct ceasefire agreements with armed opposition groups as a strategy to “manage” the conflict.

## Present Economic Scenarios

Myanmar has one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia, with average economic growth of 7.5% during the period 2012–2016, and this is expected to continue for several years. One explanation of the rapid economic growth is the country’s young population, which helps ensure high growth in consumption and incomes during the period 2015–2025. Members of the urban middle class in areas dominated by the majority Bamar ethnic group have been the major beneficiaries of the new reforms, whereas the economic benefits for rural constituencies have been less noticeable, especially in conflict-affected ethnic states where land-grabbing has been widespread.

Myanmar has long been poorer than most of its neighbours due to economic policies once favored by the military junta, economic mismanagement, and ongoing conflict. But economic reforms, including opening up to trade and investment in 2011, led to some economic growth.

Myanmar’s gross domestic product (GDP) has grown more than 7% per year since 2011, according to the World Bank. By 2019, GDP per capita reached around \$1,400, nearly double what it was in 2008. The country’s poverty rate has declined, falling from 48 % in 2005 to 25% in 2017. However, poverty remains high in rural areas, where much of the population lives, and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 has likely made poverty far worse.

Much of the population relies on agriculture and industrial work to make a living. The country’s significant mineral deposits, particularly of jade and rubies, and natural gas reserves have drawn international attention.

Following the 2011 reforms, foreign investment skyrocketed from \$900 million in 2010 to \$4 billion in 2017. Donors, such as the European Union, Japan, and the United States, dramatically increased their aid to Myanmar. Now it is one of the world’s largest recipients of foreign aid. The World Bank also committed millions of dollars in credit and grant funding.

In recent years, foreign investment has fallen and economic growth has slowed, as Suu Kyi’s government struggled to implement further reforms and the military’s suspected genocide of Rohingya drew international backlash. The COVID-19 pandemic has also caused a sharp decline in exports, remittances, and tourist spending. Experts say that the 2021 coup will likely further damage the economy.

## Ethnic diversity & conflicts

Myanmar is a diverse country, with the state recognizing more than one hundred ethnic groups. Forming roughly two-thirds of the population, ethnic Burmians, known as the Bamar, have enjoyed a privileged position in society and hold a majority of government

and military positions. Many ethnic minority groups, on the other hand, have faced systemic discrimination, a lack of economic opportunities and development in their regions, minimal representation in government, and abuses at the hands of military.

Since independence, discrimination has been ingrained in Myanmar's laws and political system. For example, citizenship is largely based on ethnicity. The 1982 Citizenship Law states that only members of ethnic groups that lived in Myanmar before 1823, when the British first occupied parts of the country, are full citizens. This has rendered hundreds of thousands of lifelong Myanmar residents and members of entire minority groups, particularly the Rohingya effectively stateless. Under the 2008 constitution, only full citizens are entitled to most rights, such as nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, and freedom of expression. The constitution also prevents those not considered to be full citizens from participating in political processes such as voting and running for office. Anti-Muslim sentiment has also been on the rise in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar. Buddhist extremists, who promote the supremacy of Buddhism, have attacked Muslims and spread hate speech.

Divisions purposely created under British colonial rule and ongoing discrimination have fueled lengthy armed conflicts between the military and more than twenty ethnic armed organizations, as well as dozens of smaller militia groups, producing what some analysts have described as the world's longest continuing civil war. Following the country's independence, several ethnic armed organizations fought for greater autonomy. Tensions were exacerbated when the military junta took over in 1962 and curtailed ethnic minorities' rights.

Fighting has primarily occurred in Myanmar's border areas, with the Buddhist and pro-Rakhine (not Rohingya) Arakan Army in Rakhine State; the Karen National Liberation Army in Kayah State; the Kachin Independence Army in Kachin State; and the Shan State Army and the United Wa State Army in Shan State; among other groups. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the conflicts. In recent years, human rights monitors have documented the Tatmadaw's abuses against civilians, particularly in the states of Chin and Rakhine; these include extrajudicial killings, forced labor, rape, torture, and the use of child soldiers. The instability has also allowed Myanmar to become a global center for illicit drug production and transshipment, particularly in areas of Shan State.

Nearly one million people are believed to have fled abroad and hundreds of thousands are displaced internally. Most of these refugees in recent years have been Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority that has faced decades of repression. In 2016 and 2017, the military and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya, killing thousands of people and razing hundreds of villages. Rights groups and UN officials suspect that the military committed genocide against the Rohingya. In 2019, Gambia filed the first international lawsuit against Myanmar at the International Court

of Justice, accusing the country of violating the UN Genocide Convention. Suu Kyi has denied that ethnic cleansing is taking place, and a final ruling could take years. Most Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh, where resources and land to protect refugees are limited. Bangladesh has been in discussions with Myanmar about repatriating Rohingya refugees.

The governments of Thein Sein and Suu Kyi attempted to negotiate a nationwide cease-fire with several ethnic armed organizations, but efforts largely failed. In 2015, only eight such groups signed a cease-fire agreement with the government and the Tatmadaw, and violence continues in many communities.

### What is happening now, and why?

The National army (Tatmadaw) is now back in charge and has declared a year-long state of emergency. It seized control on 1 February following a general election which Ms Suu Kyi's NLD party won by a landslide. The armed forces had backed the opposition, who were demanding a rerun of the vote, claiming widespread fraud. The election commission said there was no evidence to support these claims. The coup took place as a new session of parliament was set to open.

Ms Suu Kyi has been held at an unknown location since the coup. She is facing various charges, including violating the country's official secrets act, possessing illegal walkie-talkies and publishing information that may "cause fear or alarm".

NLD MPs who managed to escape arrest formed a new group in hiding. Their leader has urged protesters to defend themselves against the crackdown.

### How have people reacted?

The protests over the coup have been the largest since the so-called Saffron Revolution in 2007, when thousands of monks rose up against the military regime. Protesters include teachers, lawyers, students, bank officers and government workers. The military has imposed restrictions, including curfews and limits to gatherings. Security forces have used water cannon, rubber bullets and live ammunition to try to disperse protesters. The UN said that the situation in Myanmar has "deteriorated rapidly" since the military coup on February 1. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at least 510 peaceful protesters have been killed by the security forces and more than 2,600 have been detained or have been forcibly disappeared.

### What tactics protesters are using?

Protesters have engaged in various forms of civil disobedience, including banging on pots from balconies, singing, dancing, driving slowly, marching in streets, blocking military vehicles, constructing barriers, and directly confronting troops using wielding shields.

## Human rights challenges and women's rights

During military rule, Myanmar was regarded as one of the most oppressive countries in the world. International human rights organizations confirm improvements since 2011, but also find that there has been little change in some important areas. The 2016/2017 annual reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International highlight human rights abuses in the context of ethnic armed conflicts; discrimination and violence against the Rohingya minority; restrictions on freedom of expression; abuses of women's rights and reduced international scrutiny.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been criticized by the international community for inaction and silence on the Rohingya crisis and for doing little to prevent grave human rights abuses by the military, against a stateless community that is recognized by neither Myanmar nor Bangladesh.

Regarding gender rights and women's participation in the economy, the period 2006–2016 has seen some improvements. However, many challenges remain, such as 30% wage disparity between men and women and low rate of female participation in the national economy. The civil rights and liberties of women are largely restricted; their freedom of movement is limited and there are no special legal provisions for female participation in political processes, at the local or national levels.

### What has the international reaction been to the coup?

Numerous countries have condemned the military takeover and subsequent crackdown. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has accused the security forces of a "reign of terror".

The US, UK and European Union have all responded with sanctions on military officials. China blocked a UN Security Council statement condemning the coup, but has backed calls for the release of Ms Suu Kyi and a return to democratic norms. The country has previously opposed international intervention in Myanmar.

### Conclusion

First of all, it is important for the national army (Tatmadaw) to end all its current operations against the protesting people and ethnic groups in the country and restore democracy.

Solving ethnic conflict remains the key issue for the country. Ceasefire agreements negotiated at the local level between different armed ethnic opposition groups and the government are a first important step. However, in order to end the conflict in Myanmar and achieve true ethnic peace, the current talks must move at the national level between all ethnic armed opposition groups and the government to agree on a permanent peace settlement.

Furthermore, the institutional capacity of political parties, as well as their ability to formulate alternative policies on crucial political and socio-economic issues, is weak. Many parties currently do not operate in a democratic way, and lack links with and accountability to the local communities they claim to represent. Political parties, including the military backed USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party) and the main opposition party, the NLD (National League for Democracy), have yet to reach out to other parties with the aim of co-operating and formulating joint policy proposals. Democratic parties have also failed to develop sound policies on ethnic issues. The dialogue should start immediately.

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# **Oppose Attempts to Denigrate Glorious Struggle of Nandigram**

A.C.

Nandigram has again occupied central stage in the political discourse of West Bengal election. Bengal CM Ms. Mamata Banerjee and her erstwhile lieutenant turned saffron brigadier Mr. Subhendu Adhikary are fighting head-on in this constituency. People all over Bengal are eagerly waiting to see the outcome of this electoral battle. But outside this ambit Nandigram has been again resurrected by CPM and its cheerleaders.

In the midst of electoral campaign Ms Mamata Banerjee complained that Subhendu Adhikary was responsible for allowing police atrocities in Nandigram. It is ridiculous that Ms. Mamata Banerjee came out with this type of serious allegation against one of her closest associates during Nandigram movement after 14 years. It only shows opportunist and anti-people character of Mamata Banerjee. This statement gave CPM a loose ball to hit a six. All over Bengal CPM and its cheerleaders started campaigning in social media "Look truth is exposed. We said Nandigram was a conspiracy. CM Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was an honest man who wanted to develop industry in West Bengal. Police firing and atrocities in Nandigram was a TMC conspiracy". With this type of statement they are trying to defame the glorious Nandigram movement and uphold the Neo-liberal industrial policy of the Left front government.

But is this claim of CPM true? The answer is a big NO.

Nandigram struggle is a part of Bengal's glorious mass struggles. No amount of malicious campaign can take away its glory. The struggle of Nandigram was developed by the people of Nandigram, they built 'Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee'. The leaders and most of the supporters were from different parties including CPI, CPM, SUCI, Congress and TMC. It should be remembered that initially it was a spontaneous protest by the villagers against forceful occupation of agricultural land in Nandigram. In the name of setting up of industry, CPM led government planned to hand over this huge area of fertile agricultural land to infamous Salim group of Indonesia, owned by the family of Suharto who was the murderer of thousands of Communists there. The plan was to evict lakhs of villagers by virtue of colonial Land Acquisition Act 1894. They planned to form a chemical hub which would cause immense ecological damage. The peasants, sharecroppers, fisherfolk were threatened about their livelihood and started agitation against this project.

The CPM MP Mr. Lakshman Seth organized musclemen and goons to break the resistance of villagers. The resistance of the people broke into armed clashes against them. Police and local administration harassed the agitators. Armed goons led by MP

Lakshman Seth and other local leaders regularly attacked the barricade of villagers of Nandigram against this forceful acquisition of agricultural land.

Initially Ms Mamata Banerjee was critical of this movement, which can be confirmed by her newspaper statements during that period. During that period activists of PCC, CPI(ML) and Maoists also participated in that movement. The police firing and atrocities in Nandigram, killing villagers and assaulting women, had a severe repercussion among citizens of Bengal. All peaceloving democratic people of Bengal, including our organization, protested and came on the streets against these atrocities. CPM government was cornered. The audacity of Buddha & Nirupam (the CM & Industry Minister) duo went to such an extent during that period, that in the name of industrialization of Bengal, they were continuously handing over the agricultural lands to Tatas in Singur, to Jindals in Salbani, to Salem in Nandigram etc. CPM adopted an industrial policy supporting Neoliberal economy. They were the first state government who accepted Special economic zone (SEZ). The shameless revisionists talk against forceful occupation of agricultural lands in other states, they talk about workers' rights but suppress the fact that they were one of the pioneers of these misdeeds during Left front rule in West Bengal. They talk about Singur Nano project and shed crocodile tears for industrialization but suppress the fact that once ousted from Singur, Tata Nano project in Sanand Gujarat is a big failure; they suppress the huge amount of state subsidies provided by them to companies at the expense of citizens' taxes. They suppress the conspiracy of Tatas to acquire this huge amount of land close to Kolkata to build a huge real estate project in future.

It is unfortunate that the people's movement against Left front government's anti people activities could not be led by progressive democratic forces, but was utilized by Mamata led TMC because of their strong organizational presence against CPM. But this cannot justify the defaming of the glorious struggle of Nandigram or Singur or Lalgarh against CPM misrule.

CPM is now trying to convince people that their left front rule was a golden era for the people of Bengal. Was it so? Renowned economist Mr. Moitrish Ghatak, in a post ed. article published in Bengali daily Ananda Bazar, has shown that per capita income and expenditure of rural Bengal during last decades of left front rule and last decade of TMC rule were more or less same. Therefore, facts do not corroborate CPM fantasy.

It must be unequivocally understood that the politics and economic policies pursued by CPM brand of revisionists is no alternative. CPM is still not ready to accept their blunder in surrendering to neoliberal world order. Until & unless this brand of parliamentary lefts give up this policy they will continuously defame & vilify glorious struggles of people against implementation of neo liberal policies. Their stand on these struggles shall remain as litmus test.

# **IFTU Homage to Democratic Rights Fighter Dr N K Bhattacharya!**

Dr. N.K. Bhattacharya has gone from amongst us. Pushed to his death, literally, by these vicious uncaring governments who have left the people to the mercies of the pandemic and neither worked to stop spread nor to ensure oxygen, beds and treatment to the ill in the city. It is learnt that his daughter died of covid as she could not be admitted to a hospital with proper facilities. She died three days ago and Dr Bhattacharya died of shock yesterday i.e.26th April 2021. His cremation has taken place today.

Inveterate fighter for human rights, Dr Bhattacharya or "Dada" as he was affectionately called, was the Founder Convenor of Janhastakshep in Delhi. He had retired from Delhi University as Principal of Moti Lal Nehru College. He also contributed often to New Democracy magazine.

As the Convenor of Janhastakshep he led investigative teams to several parts of the country where there were state atrocities on movements. In this way he went to Kalingnagar and to the site of the Anti Posco movement and to Niyngiri movement in Odisha, to Kerala, to Andhra, Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and other areas. In Delhi he remained active and concerned with the issues of the working class and the denial of rights to them.

But this cruel, anti people system finally broke this gentle person and valiant fighter for democratic rights. IFTU expresses condolences to the family and dips its flag in homage.

Aparna

President

Indian Federation of Trade Unions

Dated 27th April 2021

*Jan Hastakshep Delhi and also its C R Park branch paid their homage to Founder Convenor of Jan Hastakshep. In a statement Jan Hastashep has remarked that "We lost a great human rights activist and a good human being. Dada we will remember you."*

# Who was Comrade Baldev Singh Mann?

Sardara Singh Mahil

Sonia Mann, the daughter of Shaheed Baldev Singh Mann, is active in the Farmers' Movement being staged at Delhi and has pitched her tent at Tikri border. She is an ardent support of the leadership of 'Samyukt Kisan Morcha' (United Farmer's Struggle). Even though the RSS, Government agencies, the IT cells of Modi and supporters of Khalistan are trying to silence her by issuing death threats but they have failed in their attempts till now. Sonia Mann is steadfast in her attitude. On 19th April 2021 she organized a farmers' convention in Com Baldev Singh Mann's area of struggle and her paternal place of Kukranwala in Ajnala District of Punjab state in order to strengthen the farmers' struggle in the area. Around 20,000 farmers took part in the convention to remember martyr Baldev Singh Mann and his contribution to the farmers' movement.

The success of this convention, which has set an example for peasants in other areas, has rattled the pawns of the Modi government. Not only did they cross all limits of decency in abusing Sonia Mann, but they also started spreading canards against Com. Baldev Singh Mann. Our organization and Com Mann were closely associated, hence we are duty bound to raise our voice on this issue. Despite a decision to maintain a distance from Facebook platform, it has become necessary to tell the people as to who was Comrade Baldev Singh Mann?

Among these RSS and the Khalistani agents are many youth who were not even born in those dark times. They have not seen the reality of that period. They have chosen to run away from here and use Khalistan as a means to enhance their business from their bases in foreign lands. They have been victims of false propaganda. This article is for the benefit of these youth.

Khalistanis who have escaped to foreign countries, speak falsehood and use the same to expand their business. Whenever the Khalistanis talk of killing the Communists, their only ruse is – 'they were police informers.' I had a debate with two Khalistani journalists Baghel Singh Dhaliwal and Surinder Singh Talking Punjab, in recent past over Facebook. I challenged them to furnish proof of a single instance where in Baldev Singh Mann, Jaimal Singh Padda, and Gyan Singh Sangha had acted as touts of the police. They had no answer to this and hence they recused themselves from the debate. However, the Khalistanis have not rescinded their rubbish propaganda. In order to oppose Sonia Mann, these elements are continuing to indulge in such baseless propaganda against Baldev Singh Mann. I openly challenge them to tender unqualified apology if they fail to provide any proof for their allegations. The truth however is that

Baldev Singh Mann had emerged as a pillar of strength against police repression in the area.

During his student days Baldev Singh Mann wrote literary articles. Since revolutionary literature constituted the mainstream of literature in those days, hence he got inspired to join revolutionary movement / Naxalite movement, and became active in public struggles under the leadership of Punjab-Himachal Pradesh Committee. He started building 'Naujawan Bharat Sabha' in his district. Mann set up a theatre team and himself wrote plays. There was a tonga in his village Bagga Kalan, whose owner's name was Mauju. Mauju was a friend of Mann, and was a character in Mann's story 'Zara di Puri.' Mauju's tonga served as the theatre team's vehicle. They performed plays in each and every village which served to build 'Naujawan Bharat Sabha' organizationally. The organization was formed in most of the villages of Ajnala Tehsil. Many struggles were launched in the district against police repression, black-marketing of fertilizers and diesel, and against corruption. These struggles gained ascendancy in 1974-75 under the leadership of Baldev Singh Mann.

In between, Indira Gandhi imposed 'Emergency' on the night of 25 June, 1975. Naxalite Party was banned. All opposition leaders were arrested and put behind bars. Mann's party decided to bring together all opposition forces and uproot the 'Emergency' imposed by Indira Gandhi. Mann had been busy in this work until he was finally arrested in a secret operation. Due to inhuman treatment meted out to Mann during police interrogation in Amritsar and later in the jail, his eyesight was severely affected. He was later released after the Emergency ended.

Immediately after being released from jail, he started working among the youth for 'Naujawan Bharat Sabha.' In the state delegate conference of the organization he was chosen as its provincial president. In the panchayat elections he was unanimously chosen as the Sarpanch of his village.

Com Baldev launched a monthly revolutionary pamphlet, which was later renamed as 'Hirawal Dasta' at the time of its registration. Overcoming various challenges 'Hirawal Dasta' was published until 2003, and Com. Baldev Mann remained its editor until he was martyred. He contested assembly elections in which he got more than 10,000 votes. In 1983, under the leadership of the 'Kirti Kisan Union', Bijli bill was opposed and the struggle spread in almost entire border areas from Ramdas till Khem Karan. Over a hundred trucks from the area took part in a demonstration in Chandigarh. This protest took place in 1984.

Baldev Singh Mann had been targeted by the army in Punjab during 'Operation Bluestar.' Army raided his house; however, they had to return empty handed. Com Baldev went into hiding. When the house of the sarpanch Com Iqbal Singh was raided at mid-night, Baldev made good his escape by jumping the wall.

During Operation Blue Star the army virtually destroyed Akal Takht Sahib in tank firing. Darbar Sahib was also badly damaged. Mann was among the first pilgrims to enter the Golden temple when it was reopened. He wrote a detailed report – ‘The Land of Punjab was Trampled Under the Army Boots’ on the repression unleashed inside the Golden Temple, and at other places. It was published in ‘HirawalDasta.’ This was the first act of defiance of its kind.

In 1986, there had been a big struggle of farmers in Nawashahar Sugar Mill. At that time Punjab had a government led by Surjit Singh Barnala, and Chandu Singh Majra was the ‘Cooperatives’ minister. They were supposed to come to the mill for attending a function, but the farmers did not allow them to enter the mill. Along with our leadership around 350 farmers went to jail in this struggle. In the absence of leadership, Mann and Padda came over to Nawashahar to continue the struggle. It is here that he wrote his now famous letter to his newborn daughter Sonia. He had to go to his village for two days for some necessary work. On way to the village, on 26 September 1986 he was martyred by Khalistani terrorists Karjinder Thande and Malkeet Ajnala of the Khalistani Commando Force. We received the news of his martyrdom in Ludhiana jail. At that time I had a small red colored transistor in my hand which Mann had given me during a visit to see me in the jail in order to be able to listen to the news.

## **Govts are Imposing Curfews and Lockdowns to Cover up Their Total Failure to Address Corona Situation!**

**Public Health Care, Social Support and Not Curfew/Lockdown Is Way to Fight Corona!**

**Demand Full Operationalization of Govt. Health Care Facilities, Take Over of Corporate Health Facilities, Industrial Oxygen Sources At Once!**

**Demand Immediate Provision for Free hospital beds, free Treatment, Oxygen and Free Vaccine For All!**

**Fully functional Public Transport and Public Utility Services is our Need!**

**Take precautions and fight to make Govts' accountable to People!**

As people are dying all over the country due to lack of hospital care, oxygen, medicines, one after another Govts. of states are forced to show 'action'. Conjuring up 'public pressure', many states are sweeping the total exposure of their callousness out of sight by imposing curfews in the name of lockdowns. Central Govt is also making a show of

being under pressure for another total lockdown. People are going through the hell created by total collapse of the weak public health care system countrywide.

In the Capital city, people are facing loss and horror which should have been unimaginable 74 years after 1947. Our city's skyline glows in the dark of night from the flames of pyres. Government is absent. Whole families are confined to one or two room shanties or houses by curfew. Thus, whole families are falling ill and half dead are trying to care for severely affected. Curfew is locking down public transport; patients are dying outside hospitals as people can't pay the huge amounts being demanded to transport patients and also no one has any idea where to go as all hospitals say no beds are empty. Huge amounts are being spent by people to use transport for refilling oxygen, even for looking for simple crocin tablets.

Curfew is another name for closed OPDs, closed mohalla clinics, closed anganwadis and missing midday meals. Curfew means Scarcity- People being looted by thugs claiming to supply oxygen cylinders and police refusal to act against fraudsters; People gasping for Oxygen and dying too. Spending thousands on common medicines; even crocin is being bought from black market! Small grocery items are sold at sky rocketing prices. Small shops are closed alongside flourishing e-commerce by corporate.

Black-marketing and profiteering is not facing curfew in Delhi- it is people who need e-passes. And politicking and masterful inactivity is the response of both concerned Govts to the tragedy the people are undergoing. The Delhi Govt. had systematically taken down all emergency bed facilities put up last year. And now it has neither urgently rebuilt them, nor is trying to help. In the period of a year and a half, no new public health facilities were set up, posts in hospitals not filled, new recruitments to cover sick personnel not done. Now corporate hospital beds have not been taken over, doctors in the city not been called up. 'Free' rations are touted, but their distribution is very sketchy. In the name of 'financial support', only a fraction of the 25 lakh unorganized workforce is covered. Domestic workers, mainly women, are out of work and wages, as RWAs impose 'curfew' and block their entry. Delhi Govt is not even thinking of them.

**It is time the myth of 'lockdowns' i.e. curfew for common people as a step to control pandemic, is coherently exposed and opposed.** The first all India lockdown was imposed despite 2 months of time to keep the virus out by surveillance at airports. This was not done and the virus was allowed to spread in the country. A Trump welcome with mammoth crowds was organized by the Central Govt. So were Delhi elections. The lockdown imposed in March end was lifted in May. The cases got contained only in the last quarter of the year, in keeping with the known nature of viral pandemics. **This clearly proves that there is no relation between lockdown and control of Corona.** All that the lockdown achieved was throttling of anti CAA-NRC-NPR women protest sites, marching of millions of migrants across the country fleeing hunger and homelessness, deaths of those walking, deaths of people due to lack of health care, lack of wages, food... the list goes on.

This time round, Delhi has been under curfew for two weeks; the virus rampages on. But once again workers are leaving Delhi. Fleeing from sure sickness due to being shut into one room, from lack of food, wages and due to lack of money to pay rent for housing. So many deaths are again taking place due to other illnesses with shutting down of hospitals and routine surgeries.

A 'second wave' of the virus has been proclaimed and what has the Central Govt. done till now? Organized super-spreader events like the Kumbh Mela, unregulated huge election rallies in elections to five state assemblies. No Govt. backed religious gathering of majority religion has been stopped in the course of the corona illness.

Courts have not taken adequate decisive action to ensure that Govts stop super-spreader events or even that they fulfill responsibility of free and adequate public health care facilities. People are dying of lack of the natural gas oxygen. They are dying while the tankers of pure concentrated oxygen of corporate magnates stand full all over the country. Oxygen tankers exist aplenty all over the country but are not being called in. DRDO has now made oxygen generators in hospitals in Delhi in one week; why were these not built up all over the country weeks ago? The scientific group set up by the Central Govt. has spoken out and said they had told the Govt. that the natural second wave of the virus, though with a deadlier mutant, was impending. The fact of waves is anyway known since the time of the Spanish Flu and has been on display in other countries, where it is being met by prepared govts and vaccinated people in several countries. A parliamentary committee had pointed out inadequate public health infrastructure. What was done? In the name of vaccination, vaccine profiteering was nurtured, no attention being given to protecting people. Lack of transparency, fudging of information was used to deflate people from energetically demanding it. A small fraction of people were vaccinated. Clarion calls of *Atmanirbhar* covered the begging bowl extended to America for raw materials. Temporary public health infrastructure put up last year was systematically demolished; not a single new hospital built, no expansion of public health facilities took place. Not a single new tax has been imposed on the rich, no wealth tax has been imposed to give universal free medical care for covid. And the corporate hospitals' beds are not taken over for people but left for those who can pay to access. But to the people these Govts say - you must be locked in to keep you safe!

Lockdowns are not for combating corona. They are for shutting up people. It is impossible to protest outside defunct govt depts, to access govt. functionaries because of curfew. This time lockdowns in Delhi, UP, Haryana and Punjab target the farmers' open air movement.

Lockdowns are not for fighting the corona illness, but for increasing our miseries. They help govts to pretend that 'action' is being taken, and divide and isolate people who are going through great misery due to failure of govts, not just due to the illness itself.

Oppose curfew extension in Delhi.

Oppose all India lockdown

People of Delhi need to fight to survive this crisis.

Struggle together, let us fight this crisis together!

**(Issued jointly by Delhi Committees of IFTU, PDSU & PMS)**

## **IFTU NC Condemns Assam Govt's Deception of Tea Workers!**

IFTU NC condemns the Assam Govt for deceiving the tea workers by getting an order announcing wage hike issued by the Labour Dept without following procedure laid down for hike in minimum wage. Thus, on 23rd Feb it was announced that monthly wage is raised to Rs217 from Rs 167. However, tea garden owners challenged the order in the High Court as it was issued without the stipulated procedure. The High Court has accepted this contention and given relief to owners by allowing them to raise wage by any amount they choose. It has also declared the order non enforceable.

The fiasco exposes how the BJP has tried to deceive the tea garden workers for electoral ends as Assam is one of the states going to polls this April. IFTU condemns this deception and calls on workers to intensify struggle for their rights. The BJP Govt at Centre has anyway replaced labour laws with 4 Codes to facilitate exploitation of India's working class. It is on a spree to sell public sector built on public money to Corporate, mostly foreign, at throwaway prices. India's agriculture is also being handed over for Corporate loot. Working class must intensify struggles to defend jobs, rights and against sale of India.

*(This statement was issued by President Com. Aparna & GeneralSecretary B. Pradeep on behalf of IFTU National Committee on 18th march 2021)*

### **AIKMS Founding Conference in Lower Assam**

First conference of AIKMS of Barak Valley comprising of three districts of Assam, was held in March, 2021. 450 delegates from various localities even from remotest part of all three districts participated in the conference.

The conference was addressed by AIKMS General Secretary Com. Asish Mital through virtual platform from New Delhi.

The conference unanimously passed resolutions against farm laws and on various workers'-peasants issues along with a resolution on defeat BJP in forthcoming Assam election.

A committee comprising of 30 members with Jagat Sinha as president, Faruk Laskar as working president and Nilkantha (Nilu) Das as Secretary has been unanimously elected by the conference. The committee will sit soon and announce a program for agitation and propaganda on diverse issue and against corporate domination.

It is worth-mentioning here that Comrade Jagat Sinha is an aged peasant who first hoisted the flag of Naxalbari peasant uprising in 1967 at his village at Patherkandi, the remotest corner of Assam, based on the information received by him from radio news.

**CALL on 8th March 2021**

**Women of India, Strengthen Struggle**

**\*Against Modi Govt's Handover of Land and Agriculture to Corporate!**

**\*For Right to Health, Livelihood, Equal Access to and Free Education for All Women and against ongoing Corporatization of Essential services.**

**\*To Uphold Right to Dissent against anti people pro corporate and divisive policies!**

**\* To Uphold Right to Choice!**

**\*Against Labour Codes which Strengthen Corporate's Exploitation of Working Women!**

Women are immersed in struggles in various parts of India as 8th March 2021 arrives. On International Working Women's Day we merge the voices of our struggles to Assert-Struggling Women Say NO to Modi Govt's Increasing the Stranglehold of Corporate on our country and people; Say NO to Manuwaadi patriarchal policies.

Women of India engaged in agriculture - and that is over 60% of us- are in movement for repeal of three pro corporate laws enacted by Modi Govt. under cover of Corona lockdown and for enacting a law on MSP. Women in agriculture and also women from all sections in solidarity with them, have been sitting for over three months at the borders of the national capital and also in thousands of sit ins at toll plazas, outside corporate outlets, other continual dharnas in India, etc. Women have been participating all over the country in marches, protests, solidarity actions with this struggle. These laws will also strike a lethal blow at the public distribution system even as thousands of women countrywide fight for efficient PDS system. The Electricity Bill brought by the Modi Govt. will cripple agriculture besides causing a backbreaking hike in cost of electricity for every section.

Fisherwomen, sand miners are fighting to protect livelihoods against Govt's pro-corporate assaults on traditional occupations.

Not only has Agriculture been handed over, the New Education Policy enacted in the same period of Corona lockdown, will also Corporatize and commercialize Education, severely further contracting its access. The Corona pandemic has anyway exposed the inadequate and horrible state of the govt. hospitals. Health care delivery has for long been stealthily commercialized and corporatized which makes it more difficult for women to access medical services. Also, along with 4 Labour Codes effectively further finishing job security, right to unionization or struggle and also protection for minimum wage, PSUs are being sold off, railways privatized and even jobs of permanent govts

employees are on target. Casualization and contractualization especially hurts women's wage and conditions of work.

While Modi Govt. steamrolls sale of country by combining policies of corporatization and Hindutva, all dissent is labelled anti national and muzzled or some diversionary incidents are staged to defocus the issues. This happened to the massive countrywide anti CAA-NPR-NRC protests by women in which Muslim women played a leading role. This is happening to the current protest against 3 Agri Laws, where those covering the protests or supporting it are being targeted along with piling cases on farmers' leaders and arresting ordinary peasants under various charges. Cases of sedition are freely plastered and labels are pasted on people's movements, projecting them as terroristic, both to frighten popular support and to justify repression. So many young women are in jails in this country for speaking up for constitutional rights or for movements.

Along with steamrolling its pro corporate agenda, the Modi Govt is unwavering on its divisive and Manuwadi Hindutva project. Along with being adamant on its CAA-NRC-NPR project which is an anti woman project too, it has brought a law against so called 'Love Jihad' in UP and MP and is going to do the same in other BJP-RSS ruled states. This is merely a law to curb right of choice of youth. Criminalizing freedom of choice both defends Patriarchy and guards Manuwadi caste system. Girls and boys are being hounded, prosecuted, killed for breaching these diktats. Caste Violence against Dalit girls continues in UP. Unnao and Hathras come easily to mind including the role of the state in the latter. Violence against women continues unabated in cities. Corporate culture is fully encouraged while patriarchal values are upheld, leading to distorted notions on women's issues.

On 8th March 2021, let us resolve to resolutely strengthen the struggle against the fascist, divisive and pro-corporate BJP-RSS Central Govt. Intensify struggle against Patriarchy and its strengthening by Manuwadi policies. Intensify struggle against the increasing stranglehold of Corporate, chiefly foreign, over our country, our resources and our people.

Currently a momentous struggle by farmers of India is ongoing against pro corporate policies of the Hindutva regime. A massive united struggle of Farmers has challenged the sale of India's Agriculture and land. This 8th March, women organizations must come forward and lend all strength to this struggle. It is imperative to do so if women of India, along with the people, are to fight back fascist forces and the tightening tentacles of Corporate.

(This Call was issued by POW (AP), POW (Telengana), PMS (Delhi) & IJM (Punjab))

## **Union Budget 2021-'22: Crisis ridden Economy and Corporate committed government**

From a cursory glance at the Union Budget presented by the Union Finance Minister today on February 1, two features stand out i.e. that the economy is in deep crisis and that the government is committed to serve foreign and domestic corporate, a direction that is responsible for the worsening conditions. It is also marked by callous and criminal disregard for the concerns of the people, rather squeezing them even tighter.

Union Budget marks continuation of intensification of attacks on the people by RSS-BJP Govt. at the Centre. Not only attacks on the people launched over the period have been continued but even new attacks have been launched. Corona pandemic has not cured the Govt. either of statistical jugglery or of misleading claims. One such new addition of RSS-BJP Govt. has been of announcing big allocations applicable over several years or a decade. This allows them to make big claims but small allocations.

This Budget was being awaited for the steps to address the deepening agrarian crisis and worsening conditions of peasantry which has led peasants to camp on the borders of Delhi (as they are not permitted inside) and several sites in many places. But the Govt. while being rigid on handing control over agricultural production and trade in agricultural produce to foreign and domestic corporate has, in this Budget, shown utmost insincerity towards this largest section of Indian people i.e. those engaged in agriculture. Outlay on Agriculture and allied sectors has been rather reduced by six thousand four hundred and seventy four crore rupees. This reduction further reinforces the anti-peasant character of Modi led RSS-BJP Govt. Modi Govt. has introduced Agriculture cess in the name of Agriculture but this cess will be levied on diesel, petrol, urea utilized in agricultural and on some agricultural produce which will render them costlier. Only increase is in Agricultural credit in already debt ridden peasant economy.

Union Budget also marks nearly 35% reduction in allocation for MNREGA. Rs. 73,000 crores have been allocated for MNREGA which is 34.5% (Rs, 38,500 crore) less than the Revised Estimate of Rs. 111,500 crore. With increasing rural unemployment and more labourers staying in the villages due to decline in industrial employment, this decrease stands out in its effrontery. Budget proposals show insane insensitivity towards different sections of the agrarian populace and people at large. This despite the fact that agriculture helped mitigate the shocks of explosion of world financial-economic crisis and insane lockdown from March 25, 2020.

Budget proposals also do not reveal any concrete steps to revive industrial production nor address the declining employment in industries. The Budget is uniquely bereft of measures to stimulate demand or to redress the abysmal conditions of industrial workers, a large part of them employed in unorganized sectors which have seen large-scale unemployment and reduction in wages though these aspects are not limited to them. There are no reliefs given to unemployed workers nor any scheme announced for them to tide over this period of hardship.

There are no measures to spur production. All talk of Atmnirbhar (Self-reliant) Bharat is limited to serving the foreign and domestic corporate and has no relation with any domestic development. This talk of self-reliance is actually increasing reliance on the

foreign corporate. With scramble for market among leading imperialist powers and rise of protectionism there is little of kind of self-reliance of the kind RSS-BJP is peddling and is only meant to camouflage surrender before imperialism. Corona also only increased subservience of our rulers. Their '*Atmnirbharta*' has come to symbolize RSS-BJP and Modi's independence from the people's concerns and problems.

On the other hand, Union Govt. has announced further control of foreign capital on different sectors of economy. Govt. has announced increase of permissible limit on FDI in insurance sector to 74% from 49% thus giving controlling stake to foreign capital on a sector they long eyed and which gives them opportunity to control Indian money for increasing their control over economy. Govt. has also announced that it would complete planned disinvestment of different industries.

Allowing control of insurance and control over agricultural production and trade of agricultural produce are in fact implementation of WTO stipulations.

An important aspect people looked for in the Budget relates to measures on Health services whose importance was brought into focus during Corona pandemic. Here again there is no attempt to address the glaring gaps and short comings in Health care delivery system. Talk about 137% increase in the outlay on Health is misleading. PM Atmnirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana allocation of 46,180 crores is spread over six years. More over allocation of Rs. 35 thousand crores for development of Corona vaccine is to benefit their corporate friends. If these two heads are discounted there is no major increase in the outlay. In fact the focus has not been on improving public health services.

Education has fared rather poorly in Budget allocations. Particularly alarming is the cut in allocation for school education.

Despite all bravado, there is dismal picture of economy. Economy has shrunk by nearly tenth in the past year having slowed down over pre-pandemic time. RBI has estimate that NPAs will nearly double in the coming year and status of Indian banks has been judged to be Junk. And yet only a pittance i.e. 20,000 crores has been allocated for bank recapitalization. There is no stopping of loot and plunder of public money by Corporate especially RSS and Modi's friends including Ambani and Adani. In fact during the pandemic year when hundreds of millions of workers lost their employment and were reduced to destitution and penury, Indian billionaires have added a whopping sum of Rs. 1,97,822 crores to their kitty. Over the years there has been annual increase of 13.5% in the wealth of the billionaires. Contrast this to rise in poverty, hunger and penury of vast multitude.

Growing inequality and poverty, increasing unemployment and rising prices of essential commodities have remained unaddressed. On the other hand attacks on the people have increased. These are being resisted by the people; peasants' struggle epitomizes this resistance to a regime run by fascist ruling group. Strengthen this resistance. Develop workers' resistance to anti-worker four labour codes. Build a powerful movement against unemployment. Fight for quality universal public health system and for scientific and free quality education for all. These struggles will only galvanize the people against anti-people policies of the Govt. which this Budget furthers.

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