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Farmers' Triumph over Pro-Corporate Agenda of the Fascist Rulers

# **Farmers Force the Govt. to Repeal Black Laws**

Peasants of India have decisively intervened to check the pro-corporate fascist agenda of the ruling RSS-BJP. It is a great historic moment, which is once again asserting that India is a country of peasants; India lives in its vast rural areas. It is the fabled moment of the peasant seizing the reins of the Emperor's horse.

When Modi announced on the morning of November 19 the decision of his Govt. to repeal those three laws relating to agriculture which were unleashed on the farmers through a rushed legislative process during Corona lockdown period, it was an admission of the limits of power of the fascist RSS-BJP Govt. It was also an example of Indian people's determination to beat back this offensive of ruling communal fascists. 720 peasants died at the borders to drive home their determination to a Govt. deaf and blind to people's concerns. The announcement was the admission of the failure of RSS-BJP and their Govts. to crush the peasants under the wheels as in Lakhimpur Kheri, UP or to break their heads as in Karnal, Haryana. It was also an admission of the failure of the hundreds of cases which were foisted against peasant activists by the Govts., in breaking their resolve. Rulers tried their utmost to keep the farmers away but they marched on to the Capital and kept their siege at the borders. Peasants' determination, called adamancy by corporate apologists, overcame the arrogance of power. Besides repression, the movement faced and overcame vile propaganda by RSS-BJP and media apologists of corporate. All sorts of dirt and invectives were hurled at the movement but the struggling peasantry just brushed these away.

Three black Acts that the farmers' movement has forced the Govt. to repeal were part of the economic agenda of fascist forces in the service of foreign and domestic corporate. The Acts were also a bid by the comprador rulers to fulfill the WTO conditions especially of Agreement on Agriculture. The Acts represented attempt to bring all aspects of Agriculture under corporate control and this attack has been beaten back. Foreign and domestic corporate supported the fascist rulers hoping that they would be able to crush the peasantry's resistance. This hope of the corporate was shattered delivering a serious setback to the attacks by fascist rulers. The movement has opened a democratic space for the people's movements. In fact this movement has so far succeeded in its politically offensive and economically defensive aspects. It has pushed back the attacks of the fascist rulers against right to protest and it has successfully beaten back the offensive in the form of three Agricultural Acts and Electricity Bill. It has demonstrated the potential

of peasantry in beating back the offensive of fascist rulers and hence should be eye-opener to all who doubted the strength of the resolve and strength of peasantry and their struggle.

The 19<sup>th</sup> November announcement was not enough. This stupendous victory had to be cemented by concrete results on other demands of farmers' organizations. These related to the issues arising out of the movement as well as other issues of the movement. Of the former, the Govt. was forced to announce withdrawal of all criminal cases filed against the farmers in the course of this movement. Govt. was also forced to announce that the farmers who became martyrs at the borders in the course of this movement will be compensated, with announcement of Punjab Govt. serving as the bench mark. On the demands of the movement the Govt. announced formation of a Committee on MSP consisting of representatives of Central Govt., State Govts., farmers' representatives including representatives of SKM and agricultural scientists. The *mandate* of this Committee will be "how to ensure MSP to peasants of the country". Electricity Bill will be tabled in the Parliament only after discussion with all stakeholders/ SKM. On the issue of stubble burning, peasants have been exempted from criminal liability under Sections 14 & 15 of the concerned Act.

With these commitments in writing from the Central Govt. on December 9, peasant organizations announced the historic victory and change in the form of the movement whose demands were initially focused on withdrawal of 3 Farm Acts and Electricity Bill, 2020. SKM announced lifting of sit-ins from Delhi borders - Singhu, Tikri and Gazipur – from 11<sup>th</sup> December onwards. Nearly one and a half years' of struggle culminated in a historic victory and importantly, putting the farmers' issues on the national agenda and in the national consciousness. Victorious end of this movement has pushed the ruling fascists on the defensive and emboldened the people reeling under their attacks.

This movement has been an exemplary extra-parliamentary militant mass movement. It was peaceful while challenging the rulers; it was disciplined while breaking the shackles of rulers' arrogance. The movement has been a great people's mobilization and forms of mass protests conducive to mass participation of peasantry were adopted. It was a movement epitomized by peaceful defiance; non-violent violation of restrictions imposed on the movement. It has been an exposition of militant mass line, masses driving up in pursuit of their goals with determination and militancy of the movement based on people's participation. Nothing that rulers threw up deterred the farmers and farmers cared for the people. In the course of the movement they braved big blocks of bureaucratic-security apparatus marshaled by the ruling classes including the conspiracy of January 26. A movement which had the depth and tenacity to overcome and defeat that conspiracy was bound to succeed. A movement which braved the disastrous second wave of the pandemic when streets were deserted and graveyards, even rivers, overflowed with dead, could not be denied. This movement has already

inspired and will continue to further inspire thousands of studies and hundreds of features. It has inspired people the world over in their struggle against corporate and reaction. It is the kind of movement from which folklores are woven. It has once again proved the historic truth that people united in their determination cannot be defeated.

There have been and will continue to be various theories of why the Govt. conceded at a time that it did. This is like the iron rod breaking after a certain number of blows. Obviously the continuous determined struggle of farmers has been the most important and decisive factor. The struggle continued to be strong in its epicentre and continued to spread in its reach and depth to various parts of the country; the movement has essentially been all India in character. All attempts at repression, coercion and subversion were foiled in the course of this struggle by the farmers who were not willing to accept anything short of repeal of these black Acts. They had declined to take this corporate poison in divided doses of amendments. They had rebuffed the attempts of suspended capital punishment through deferring the implementation of the Acts. So strong was the determination of peasants that forces who favoured compromise were silenced and dared not speak it before peasants for the fear of isolation among farmers. In fact, while peasants struggled against the Govt., another struggle continued- and it could not have been otherwise- within this struggle, against attempts to compromise and settle at short of repeal of three black laws.

The movement was strong enough to rouse the people at large so that this extra-parliamentary struggle had had its impact on the electoral scene as well. The failure of RSS-BJP to storm West Bengal was one such event. Defeat of RSS-BJP in recent by-elections once again brought the focus on the impact of farmers' movement. It has broken the spell of Hindutva fascism and created a breach in the ruling class apparatus through which the lava of people's disillusionment started flowing. Fascism feeds on the defeatism that it breeds; farmers' movement defeated this despondency of defeatism. Cleared of this mist, the whole gamut of attacks could be seen by the people, leading them to rise in struggle. Coming elections to five state assemblies especially to the most populous province of UP, obviously unnerved the ruling fascists and also their corporate backers. While ruling Fascists feared impending loss of power, their Corporate backers feared that electoral loss for the ruling group will deter even their other representatives, were they to come to power, to undertake the kind of reforms Corporate want and this hesitation may last for some time. Farmers' movement in UP reduced the ability of ruling RSS-BJP to communally polarize the state especially its communally sensitive western part, though try they will. But equally important has been that with the break of the spell of Hindutva other sections of people will also see through the design of divide and rule. However, the movement itself has been an extra-parliamentary one; even forcing the parties not to campaign at least in the areas where movement has been strong. It has also broken the myth that is manufactured by the ruling class parties and consumed by some struggling forces as well, that elections alone can defeat fascist

rulers. This movement has shown the power of struggling people, where struggle plays the main role in beating back the offensive of fascist rulers, ruling class parties at best following or pretending to follow in its wake; extra-parliamentary struggle playing the leading role while effect on electoral outcome has been at best a by-product.

Added to these factors, was a recent event of global significance with its epicentre in this part of the world and that was US withdrawal from Afghanistan in defeat. On August 15, 2021, US funded, armed and trained Afghanistan Army collapsed and Taliban swept to power. RSS-BJP rulers, who had put all their eggs in the US basket, were left stunned. So blinded, and willingly so, had the Hindutva rulers been to further their fascist takeover of the Indian state that they even alienated Russian rulers who had been since long trusted allies of Indian rulers. RSS-BJP Govt.'s belated attempts to carve out a place in post-US Afghanistan by rallying countries neighbouring Afghanistan did not yield desired result. Pakistan refused and China excused. Iran blasted the US occupation and Russia issued a separate statement contradicting the one issued by India after NSAs' conclave. The new emerging situation woke the RSS-BJP rulers from their cozy dreams of becoming a super-power under the umbrella of US hegemony. The emerging situation has made Indian rulers cautious of the new reality in this part of the world and increased dependence of US imperialism on Pakistan for influence in the region; made them cautious of the borders with Pakistan and China. They had already disturbed J&K and now did not want to further anger people of another border state i.e. Punjab. It also diluted the jingoist edge of their weapon of communalism.

Farmers' struggle has achieved its repeal of three laws and has dealt a blow to fascist rule. It has also brought to the people's consciousness the sinister nature of corporate control over different aspects of economy. And it has brought the question of addressing agrarian distress on the agenda and kept it in the consciousness of the people throughout the period of struggle.

However, despite the humongous scale of victory of the present struggle, it is only a partial victory as the causes of agrarian distress, manifesting in worsening conditions of life of peasantry, their increasing indebtedness, continuing peasant suicides etc., remain unaddressed. Peasants have broken the fangs of the serpent which had come to bite them but have yet to throw away leeches which suck the blood of their labour and rob them of their rightful dues. Farmers have defeated the conspiracy of rulers who, in the name of addressing agrarian distress, wished to 'free' them of their land. Yet the causes which are at the root of agrarian distress are still to be addressed. This movement has created the ground for the peasant movement to take further stride i.e. a giant stride in addressing agrarian distress which is linked to the overall economic structure of the existing Indian society.

Let us be clear – on MSP an important advance is made but the issue has not been solved. It will certainly need a great push of peasant movement to achieve this. This struggle could ensure the *Mandate* given to the Committee to be formed by the Govt. is to ensure MSP to peasants of India. Question of MSP involves three aspects. Firstly, its broadening i.e. it should be available to all peasants which inter alia includes all crops and also peasants of all states and regions; should encompass crops produced in all regions including in tribal areas. All prices including SAP and co-operative prices must conform to the MSP formula.

Secondly calculation of MSP should be to provide remunerative prices. Peasant organizations and SKM have been demanding implementation of Swaminathan formula of  $C_2+50\%$  i.e. 50% above the cost of production covering all costs as included in  $C_2$ . Swaminathan Formula however does not take into account some heads of expenses and this was pointed out by a subsequent committee appointed by the Govt. Hence some experts have calculated that Ramesh Chandra recommendations i.e. all other heads included but less percentage to be added over it would work out to be the same. Successive govts. have refused to implement remunerative prices. For example, Swaminathan recommendation on MSP was given by a panel constituted by the Govt. (then UPA I Govt.) and later endorsed by RSS-BJP including then PM designate Modi but the successive Govts. have refused to implement it.

Thirdly, MSP coverage should be made effective. MSP should definitely be made a legal right and for this right to be exercised the machinery of procurement should be effective. It includes making it efficient i.e. peasants do not need endure long wait in selling their produce or delays in payment. Without govt. readiness to procure at MSP, legal guarantee will not be effective as we also see in right to minimum wages. Peasants will be forced to sell at lower prices. Similarly, schemes like *bhavantar* too have been ineffective. A legal right backed by Govt. intervention can provide the requisite guarantee.

Bringing the peasant organizations throughout India on one platform i.e. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), has been a singular achievement of this struggle and must be valued like the apple of the eye. SKM gave voice to and became a vehicle of the aspirations of peasant masses. SKM became the platform where representatives of all peasant organizations discussed and took decisions on all important aspects of the movement. To realize MSP as a legal right and address causes of agrarian distress, a new push to the movement will be necessary. This must include greater cohesion and unity among the pro-struggle organizations of peasants. These organizations, including organizations led by communist revolutionary forces, have played an important role in building the movement, its conduct and steadfastness, as well as in changing the form of the movement as demanded by the conditions. They must take up the new challenges before the movement with even greater determination, initiative and cohesiveness.

Besides defeating the offensive of fascist rulers, the long term significance of the peasant movement also lies in the fact that it can contribute to the change that can move ahead towards the new democratic transformation of India. Ruling classes have long traversed the path of development dependent on investments especially from imperialist countries. Indian ruling classes have never taken the path of development depending on improving the conditions of Indian people. For them this was sought to be the result of enrichment of a few while the overwhelming majority of people have to wait for the trickledown effect. The peasant movement for MSP can be part of a larger movement of the Indian people to improve the lot of workers and peasants. It can challenge the present course of suppressing workers and peasants for corporate interests and put the question of increasing the demand i.e. improving conditions of overwhelming majority of Indian people i.e. peasants and workers, at the centre of the course of development. Securing remunerative prices for the peasantry would be important part of that movement which will include ensuring better living and working conditions of working class, providing cheaper prices of agricultural inputs, as well as Govt. support to small and marginal farmers through providing free machinery service and generally increasing employment in the vast rural areas by increasing industrial production to augment income from expenditure besides focusing on the expenditure on the well being of the vast population living in the rural areas of the country. It was the colonial rulers who tore asunder the bond between agriculture and industry in India. The present anti-corporate movement, which is part of anti-imperialist movement of the people of India, should target to repair that bond and make development in the country stand on two legs.

This movement was of broad peasant masses especially in the areas which served as its epicentre. Agrarian conditions are diverse in the country. But the peasant masses are oppressed everywhere. Their oppressors include landlords, moneylenders, merchants and officials. Issues also vary depending on the regions and the sections, including radical land reforms and demanding stopping the squeeze of the peasant masses. The present movement, if its energies are harnessed correctly and vigorously, can lead to more all round movement of peasantry which along with working class and patriotic sections can develop in the direction of strengthening new democratic revolutionary movement in the country.

December 9, 2021

## **Withdraw Increase in BSF Jurisdiction in Border States**

The Ministry of Home Affairs has on October 15, 2021 amended the schedule of an earlier notification of 2014 to increase jurisdiction of Border Security Force (BSF) a Central Paramilitary Force from 15 kms to 50 kms along the international borders. While the entire areas of Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh are already under jurisdiction of BSF, it vastly increases the areas under BSF jurisdiction in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam, as such areas in Rajasthan and Gujarat were already under BSF jurisdiction. It brings almost half of Punjab and about more than half of West Bengal under BSF jurisdiction.

This decision of the Central Govt. is a crude attack on the rights of states. This reduces the rights of the states even under a quasi federal Constitution of the country. It is an attempt by ruling fascist forces to further centralize power in the hands of Union Govt. It is part of their fascist design to increase the reach of Central forces in a situation where large parts of the country are not under their rule. It is also an attempt to increase militarization of the state under the conditions where Central Govt. is making laws more draconian and further sharpening the weapons of repression.

It is also an attempt by the fascist rulers to bring the issues of national security to the centre stage for their attack on federalism besides attempting to divert the people from struggles which they are waging in defense of their rights against the Govt. onslaught in service of foreign and domestic corporate. Besides diverting attention, it is also an attempt to further arm the Central Govt. to suppress the ongoing peasant struggle in which Punjab peasants are playing a very important role. The Central Govt. is resorting to tactics of “divert and suppress.”

This move has come at a time when crisis in J&K has further deepened. Fascist measures like virtual abrogation of Article 370, annulment of Article 35A and dissolution of the state of J&K into two union territories has worsened the already crisis-ridden situation in that state. This move is to cover up Govt. failures including in J&K and Govt.’s service of the corporate like three black Acts and four Labour Codes besides changes in environmental regulations and forest conservation law.

This move deals yet another blow to federalism even to the extent enshrined in the Constitution. It is part of the fascist rulers’ attack on the people. This attack must be resisted.

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy strongly condemns extension of BSF jurisdiction and demands that it must be immediately and totally withdrawn.

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## **March and Mass Meeting Against Privatization of Vishakha Steel**

(There is a growing movement against privatization of Vishakhapatnam Steel Plant situated at Vishakhapatnam. The movement consists of struggle by VSP workers who are threatened by this privatization. There are both regular and contract workers working the Plant. Another important component of this struggle is the struggle by the people who were ousted from their land when the Plant was built. Some of them are workers in the plant, especially contract workers. Their families have suffered in the past and now the cause for which these sufferings were heaped on them is also being lost. Besides, there is widespread anger among the people of Andhra Pradesh who feel betrayed by the decision of the Central Govt. Youth and students are seeing even the existing prospects of employment disappear even as they suffer from rising unemployment. There is a need for unleashing a mass movement combining different streams and sections into a powerful challenge to the Govt. We are publishing here a report of a Rally and Mass Meeting in Vishakhapatnam organized by some mass organizations towards this end.)

On the 31st of October 2021, IFTU, POW, AIKMS, MNSS and PDSU in Andhra Pradesh held a march and a public meeting in Vishakhapatnam against the decision of the Central Govt. to privatize the Vishakha Steel Plant.

A Cabinet decision of the Modi Govt. in the course of the corona pandemic doomed the Vishakha Steel Plant of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited to Privatization. "Strategic Sale" is the way it is politely termed. Sale of the thousands of acres of land acquired in the name of the plant. Sale of the plant built and equipped by public money as are all public sector units. And a big question mark over all livelihoods associated with the plant.

Of the total area of 33,000 acres, 23,000 acres are agricultural land acquired half a century ago from 64 villages at Rs 12,000 an acre without bothering about niceties like "consent"; all in the name of setting up "Andhra Hakku". Taking away ancestral homes for a 107 sq. yards of land and a precious "R" card which was to be the passport to permanent employment and prosperity after being displaced from all that ancestry had given. Of 16000 odd R cards, second and even third generations of 8500 families still await a job against the old, stained R card which is the family's most precious possession.

Across Vishakhapatnam and Andhra Pradesh, protests began against the announced sale and are on. The plant was built in AP as the result of a big agitation in the 1960s in the state. Unions inside the plant have started an indefinite dharna on one side of the main gate of the plant and the displaced people have set up one on the other. By 31st Oct 2021, this dharna was in its 261st day i.e. over 6 months. In the meantime, the

Gangavaram port (It was built to run as private public partnership- PPP) which is linked to the plant and also situated on its land, has been handed over to Adani by the AP Govt. selling its 10% shares.

On 31st Oct 2021, IFTU, POW, PDSU, MNSS, AIKMS and Arunodaya jointly organized a protest march and mass meeting in Vishakhapatnam against the projected privatization of Vishakha Steel. A rally ablaze with red flags started from Gujwaka junction at 4 pm and walked the 2.5kms to the meeting ground. It was preceded by a team of Arunodaya saritsists whose feet never missed the beat of the dappos. Behind the lead banner walked leaders of the mass organizations along with Guest Speaker Ms. Medha Patkar (leader of NAPM) and President of IFTU National Committee, Com. Aparna.

The mass meeting commenced at 5 pm with songs and dances by Arunodaya troupes. Com. J Venkateshwarlu, member of State Committee of IFTU then called the speakers of the evening's meeting onto the dias. He also announced that Com P. Prasad, National IFTU Committee Secretary and President of AP IFTU Committee would preside over the meeting. Speakers included Ms. Medha Patkar, Com. Aparna, POW state General Secretary Com Laxmi, AIKMS State President Com. I. Prabhakar, Com M. Venkateshwarlu, Vice President of Andhra Pradesh State Committee IFTU, Gujawak MLA Shri Tippala Nagi Reddy, D. Adinarayana (AITUC National Vice-president), K. Srinivas (District CITU leader), Manthri Rajshekhar (INTUC District President), Y. Mastanappa (YSRTUC Vice-president and Rural District President) and Villa Rammohan Kumar (TNTUC District President), Unmidi Appa Rao (Steel Plant oustee and Contract Workers' Union), Shri Ramana Murthy, Chairman of the Writers' Academy, Com. K. Ravi, City President of MNSS, Dr. Krishnamurthy of Sompeta ParyavanraParirakshana Committee, Com. Kanak Reddy and Com. Achchi Babu (both Steel Plant oustees and both young labour leaders), Com. S. Rammohan (General Secretary A.P. PDSU and Com. Sannashetty Rajshekhar (Arunodaya State leader).

The meeting began with Com. P. Prasad detailing the history of the steel plant including the 32 martyrdoms given by the people in that struggle.

Speaking before the big gathering, Ms. Medha Patkar (leader of NAPM), the first speaker, denounced the selling of India's assets to companies by the Modi Govt. She said that sale of India would snatch away the sources of livelihood, including land, water, forests and also employment, apart from reservation for SC/ST communities. Calling for people to come out in mass protests on the streets, she also called upon the plant's unions and the Displaced persons to merge their separate dharnas at the gate into one big fightback.

IFTU National Committee President Com. Aparna said that the struggle to save Vishakha is a patriotic struggle as is the struggle of the farmers of India against the three black Agri Acts. The real face of the Modi Govt, which is dividing the people on casteist and communal lines, is this- that it is handing over India for corporate loot in all aspects. Public Sector across the country was built by public money and on land taken away from farmers in the name of building the country. Corporate worldwide wants to grab land as it is an evergreen asset. Reiterating the full participation of IFTU in the Save Vishakha struggle, she said the need was for all forces and all trade unions to jointly push back the attempt to sell Vishakha steel. This would also show the way to other PSUs, all of whom are doomed for sale.

The Writers Academy Chairman and Editor of Leaders newspaper, Shri Ramana Murthy said that with this event, from this moment onwards, this struggle had turned into a mass movement.

All other speakers also detailed the need for a joint fightback to save the steel plant.

The meeting was punctuated by rousing songs by the Arunodaya performers, especially the young girls who infused fresh energy into the untiring performances of the senior performers. The songs they sang included compositions against the sale of the steel plant.

Earlier, from September 16th onwards, a door to door campaign started for this programme. On 24-10-2021 a bike rally conducted with nearly 80 bikes, started at the steel plant's martyrs memorial Smrutyanjali park which is also called as candle light junction. On 29th October, Com Aparna, Com P. Prasad and a team visited two oustee villages and recorded their experiences. Ms. Medha Patkar, Com. Aparna, Com. P. Prasad with Com. Lakshmi POW, Com. MV IFTU, Com T. Prakash (AIKMS), Com. Nirmala of Arunodaya, Coms. Ravichandra & Com. Ramamohan AP State President and General Secretary of PDSU all visited Ukku Parirakshana Porata Committee's and Oustees' Committee's 261st day's relay hunger strike tents on the 30th morning. A special visit was conducted to Karnavanipalem oustee village on the same day. In each place, the team addressed the people and press. This program drew good attention of the people.



## **Intellectuals' Team Demands Immediate Relief to Evicted and Change in Land Policy of Assam Govt.**

(A team of intellectuals constituted by *Janhastakshep* consisting of Dr. Vikas Bajpai, faculty at JNU, Biswajeet Mohanty, Deshbandhu College Delhi University and Sudhir Pattnaik, Editor Samdrushti and anti-displacement activist from Bhubaneshwar, Odisha went to the area in Assam where state violence was unleashed on the people to evict them from the land they have been inhabiting and cultivating since long. A press statement was issued by this team on November 2, 2021 at Guwahati and later from Delhi. We are here publishing this press release issued from Delhi titled “An Inquiry into forced eviction of and state violence inflicted on people of Dhalpur village in Char area of the Sipajhar revenue circle of Darrang district of Assam.” - **Editor**)

An inquiry team constituted on the initiative of Janhastakshep visited the violence affected villages of Dhalpur one, two, and three villages in Gorukhuti, in the Sipajhar revenue circle of Darrang district on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2021. The team consisted of Dr. Vikas Bajpai, faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Prof. Biswajeet Mohanty, Deshbandhu College, University of Delhi, and Shri Sudhir Pattnaik, independent journalist and anti-displacement activist from Bhubaneshwar, Odisha.

It needs be stated categorically here that the purpose of our visit was not to do fact finding per se as detailed facts regarding the sequence of events have already appeared in the public sphere. These facts, including video evidence, attest to the grotesque injustice and brutality that has been inflicted upon the people in Sipajhar char area. As citizens concerned for the wellbeing of the people of India our intent was to get a first person account of the suffering being entailed by the people of Dhalpur and explore the underlying causes of the entire sequence of events.

### **Eviction: a deceptive ploy of the Himanta Biswa Sarma government**

Without entailing a repetition of already well known facts of the forceful eviction, it need be stated that *the most brutalizing aspect of the events that happened on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2021 has been sheer contempt on part of the government for the safety of the lives and livelihoods of the people.* Though over the past few years, Muslim minority, and especially the Bangla speaking Muslims, in the state have been afflicted by a sense of insecurity, but as reported by the people, they were surprised by the sudden brazenness with which the police evicted them from their homes. In the run up to the eviction, *no government*

*officer or government agency made any attempt to speak with the people for explaining the reasons for which their land was required, even less to discuss any form of rehabilitation or compensation.*

That the district *police administration deliberately exercised deception to catch the people unawares* becomes evident by way of an eviction notice dated 10 September 2021 in Miscellaneous case no. 20/2021, served upon Zaheerul Islam (Annexures 1a & 1b). The notice was served upon him at 12 pm on the night of 19 September, and the next morning the police and administration descended upon his house to demolish it. *The words stating that he needed to evict from his place within three months of receiving the notice had been erased with white ink (Annexure 1b). This clearly illustrates that the intent of the administration clearly was to catch the people unawares such that they can offer least resistance.* Such an attitude on part of the administration and the police is clearly reflective of the *criminal mindset that has beset the State machinery.* It is then least surprising that the police were caught firing upon the corpse of Moinul who died because of police brutality while resisting their assault on the women of his village. The suddenness of the act of eviction was attested to by most of the people we spoke with in Dhalpur.

*There seems little if any intent on part of the state government to provide appropriate compensation or rehabilitation for the uprooted families.* This becomes clear from the manner in which the eviction was effected, and the subsequent dilatory tactics being resorted to by the state government in the Guwahati High Court in the matter of the civil writ petition filed before it challenging the illegal eviction of the people. The government is post facto imposing conditions for giving any compensation to the people such as those whose names appear in the NRC, or incumbent upon people being able to prove that they were not illegally occupying any land. The utter farce of such undertakings by the government before the court is inherent in the fact that *rather than giving an opportunity to the evicted people to be able to prove that they were the rightful owners of the land they tilled, the government moved unilaterally to change the situation on the ground, with the express intent to impose conditions on the people.*

In a report dated 24 September 2021, published in ‘The New Indian Express’ the Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma is reported to have said that – Only 60 families had to be evicted but 10,000 people swarmed to the site to put up a resistance. Where did they come from? Who brought them?” The same report attributes to him the allegation that ‘some families were occupying land measuring up to 300 bighas’, and that ‘the land of even a Shiva temple was also under encroachment.’ Another statement that had been propagated by the state government officials was that it needed to clear 77,000 bighas, about 25,454 acres, illegally occupied by the illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in the area, to make room for an organic farming project.

Such statements of the Chief Minister amount to nothing but brazen sophistry to mislead the people. As against the claimed 60 families, we found that a total of 966 families amounting to

about seven thousand people have been evicted. It was reported by the evicted people that more than half of the claimed 77,000 bighas had already been eroded by the Brahmaputra River.

### **Removing illegal encroachment or land grabbing to serve the vested interests?**

It is interesting to note that freeing 77,000 bighas of land from encroachers, which was the objective of the eviction drive effected by the state on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2021, had apparently already been achieved in June 2021. A report published in 'The Assam Tribune' on 9 June 2021 states:

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma while chairing the meeting of the Council of Ministers here today further directed to utilize 77,000 bighas of government land freed from encroachers at Gorukhuti, Sipajhar in Darrang district for agricultural purposes for which a committee has been formed under the chairmanship of Padma Hazarika.

Additionally, the land from which the villagers have been evicted was already under cultivation, and need hardly be diverted for agriculture.

That *there is an ulterior motive to the machinations of the Assam government* and it is acting on behalf of vested interests is further borne out by the *testimony of Parvati Das* who is the second wife of the mahant who established the Shiva temple in the Dhalpur 2 village, the land of which is said to have been occupied by the evicted villagers. Incidentally, Parvati Das's house has also been demolished by the police in the eviction drive carried out in September.

Parvati Das told that the Sattrra (temples of the Vaishnavite cult in Assam) in Dhalpur 2 village had been set up by her husband. Even though *there were no Hindu families in the neighborhood, the Muslim households in the village had contributed to the building of the temple*. After the temple was built, some *Hindus belonging to the villages across the Brahmaputra started performing puja in the temple and formed a committee to manage its affairs*. On temple committee's demand the Sattrra was allocated 120 bighas of land to generate revenue for its upkeep. However, this land got eroded by the river over the years, and now a fresh demand has been raised by the committee for 175 bighas of land to be allotted to the Sattrra.

Parvati Das told that her husband had been marginalized in taking decisions regarding the temple, and that after his death she has had little interest in the temple's affairs.

The stage for the brutal eviction drive in Gorukhuti was set by the Assam Land Policy, 2019 passed by the Assam government. With respect to the permanent and temporary Chaar areas Clause 1.14 and 1.15 of the Policy state:

**1.14** ..... Since encroachment has to be removed forthwith, system of collecting Encroachment Penalty (Bedakhali Jarimona) shall be discontinued. The system of

Touzi Bahira against allotted land only however shall continue. The Revenue Officials shall be duty bound to evict the encroachers at the earliest.

**1.15** Further, allotment and settlement of land shall not be considered for such lands which is reserved for any Government or public purposes or declared wet lands, hills, ecological sites, forest land and *land vulnerable to landslide or erosion*.

If the recent pronouncements of the Chief Minister are any indication, then the incidents in Gorukhuti are not the last of their kind. As per a report published on 3 November, 2021 in 'India Today', the Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma reported said:

“After Gorukhuti, we need to clean Lunding reserve forest. We are talking amicably and I spoke to many minority organizations and will talk again.”

We feel that the motivation of the government stems from its desire to appropriate more and more land from the people to serve the commercial and profit motive of the big corporate. It was brought to our notice by some of the villagers that they had heard talk of the government wanting to appropriate land for commercial plantations for production of palm oil. Given the overriding imperative of corporate profit driven economic growth model, the wellbeing of the people, especially those already marginalized, hardly remains a concern.

### **The conditions of the evicted people**

The present condition of the evicted people in the area remains precarious. They are living in makeshift sheds made from tin, straw, and bamboo, with little hygiene, lack of safe drinking water supply, severe shortage of food, and no medical care whatsoever. It was reported that some NGOs and private bodies have reached some relief by way of food, and have installed some hand pumps for water, but given the enormity of the situation such help can only amount to less than a drop in the ocean. It is remarkable that our team did not find any trace whatsoever of any government agency reaching out to these people to provide relief in any form, which further attests to the deliberate and nefarious intent of the government in inflicting the carnage on the people.



## **The underlying causes of the evident misery**

Going beyond the apparent misery of the people, we feel that *the present misery is but a symptom of the far more deep rooted reasons which have threatened the livelihoods of a large section of the people in Assam over the years and for handling which no systematic and scientific policy has been evolved by successive governments.*

It is well recognized that river Brahmaputra and its tributaries have led to erosion of vast tracts of land in different parts of the state resulting in forced voluntary internal migration of the people within the state. *This behaviour of river Brahmaputra begets a thorough scientific study to delineate the causes of riverine erosion, its social, economic and political impact, and to find out possible solutions. All of this should feed into formulation of a scientifically sound policy to provide relief to the people who are adversely affected by this phenomenon.* However, in their obsession with self-interest, the ruling classes in the state have utterly lacked any concern towards this end. As their ability to address growing economic and social distress among the people consequent to the neo-liberal economic policies becomes more and more constricted, they find themselves with little option but to deepen the fault lines prevailing in the Assamese society for furthering their agenda.

It is this context which engenders a *confluence between the hard socioeconomic realities resulting from the riverine erosion phenomenon and the communal agenda of the present RSS-BJP government in the state. It is for this reason that the Bengali speaking Muslims need to be constantly painted as outsiders even though they have lived in Assam and contributed to its growth over generations.* Divisions are sought to be driven deeper between not just the Hindus and the Muslims, but also between the Assamese speaking and Bengali speaking Muslims. However, it needs to be recognized that the river does not differentiate between people following different faiths. The problem that has befallen Bengali speaking Muslims could very well fall upon other communities following other faiths, as is indeed evident in the form of an eviction notice served on the Hindu families of the Nath cult (deriving from the Gorakhnath cult in Gorakhpur of Uttar Pradesh) in Kaitasiddhi village near the Guwahati airport. The entire agricultural land of this village has already been taken over for the airport; however, after the airport was given over to the Adani group recently, the government now seeks to evict these villagers from their homestead land as well, perhaps to facilitate the development of real estate by the Adani group around the airport.

Given the circumstances, *nothing could be more disastrous for the wellbeing of Assam and its people than pursuing such dangerous parochialism seeking to differentiate one section of the Assamese society from the other.* No doubt every measure ought to be taken to ensure that there is no further infiltration from any quarter into Assam that threatens its demographic constitution; however, it is time that the Assamese people should closely reexamine the benefits Assam has derived from almost selective targeting of Bangla speaking Muslims even as the most fundamental problems of the people remain unaddressed as yet.

The Assamese nationalist forces would be better advised to take these factors as a central concern of their politics to forge an iron unity of all Assamese people against the divisive politics. *The only sustainable Assamese identity can be a composite identity that has space for all its people following different religions and speaking its myriad languages and dialects that constitute the 'taana – baana' (the warp and the weft) of Assamese culture.*

We the members of Janhastakshep led team demand that:

- All measures – economic, legal, social and political should be undertaken by the government without much ado to ensure the safety of lives and livelihoods of the evicted people.
- We demand that the Land Policy of 2019 of the Assam Government be withdrawn forthwith.
- An equally important demand is for constituting a team of scientists from various disciplines of physical and social sciences to study the phenomenon of riverine erosion and its consequences, and to formulate a long term policy to deal with these issues while ensuring widest possible public consultation.

(Issued by Sudhir Pattnaik, Biswajeet Mohanty and Dr. Vikas Bajpai, Co-convenor Janhastakshep on November 2 at Guwahati)

- Annexures attached with the Release are not being given her
- Several Photos depicting conditions in which evicted people are living were enclosed with the Report. We have published only one of thm.

## **Why is the Farmers' Movement demanding the Minimum Support Prices Guarantee Act?**

(On December 9, 2021 Farmers Organizations lifted their sit-ins at sites at Delhi border having received a written commitment on their demands.

Govt. had already repealed the three Agri Acts on the first day of winter session of Parliament. One of the main demands of the struggling peasantry has been MSP guarantee covering all crops and calculated on the basis of Swaminathan formula of  $C_2+50\%$ . **V. Venkatramaiah** here outlines why the farmers' movement is demanding MSP Guarantee Act thus making MSP a legal right.)

The announcement on November 19 that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is repealing 3 agricultural laws is a welcome development. This is a historic victory. For the last 15 months in the country, especially since November 26, the peasant movement continued on the borders of Delhi. The Central Government stated that it would set up a "select committee" to address a number of issues facing agriculture without discussing and resolving other demands, including the Minimum Support Price (MSP) Guarantee Act, which the farmers' movement is demanding and has been putting forth in the negotiations with the Central Government. All governments, including Modi, have been cheating and betraying the minimum support price issue for the last 70 years. Modi Government surpassed all the previous governments in spreading lies and false propaganda.

Sri Narendra Singh Tomar, Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, while announcing the MSP for Rabi crops for 2021-'22, in the Lok Sabha said, "This increase in MSP is in line with the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission.... The present Government under P.M. Narendra Modi accepted the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission. The increase in MSP .... in line with the principle of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times of the All India weighted average cost of production."

Shri M.S. Swaminathan is still alive and he himself clarified many times in this regard but Modi Govt. is continuing its false propaganda.

At the 42nd annual conference of the FAO, Union Agriculture Minister said, "Agriculture has always been a high priority for India and Government of India always committed to the welfare of the farmers.... price system for farmers is unparalleled in the world. ... Government of India ensures timely procurement of the crops..."

These are only some marvels of the Modi government's blatant propaganda on MSP. Swaminathan himself has repeatedly clarified to the media that the Modi government is not implementing the C2+50 per cent recommended by them, but only the A2+50 per cent. However, the Modi government is continuing the same false propaganda to camouflage its acts and deceive the peasantry. The propaganda that the price support system in India is better than in other countries is an utter lie.

During the 2014 general elections to Parliament, BJP included in its election manifesto and Modi campaigned extensively across the country that they will provide 50% more over cost of production and it will be implemented within 12 months. But, after coming to power, Modi has gone back on this promise. On 20.2.2015, it informed the Supreme Court that it is not possible to implement the minimum support price as it distorts the market price. In view of the forthcoming elections, excluding certain production costs the A2+50% as MSP has been implemented from 2018-19. An additional support price of 50% on A2 production costs (excluding land rent, investment in land e.g. – bore well, shed, fencing etc.) is fraudulent. Support prices are not increasing, at least not in line with rising prices. Inflation rose to 6.13 per cent in 2020 but price of paddy per quintal has increased from 1835 to Rs. 1888, i.e. 2.9 per cent only. The wholesale price index (WPI) has risen more than 10 per cent in the last seven months of 2021 and 12.5 per cent in October. However, the Modi government has increased the price of paddy by only 3.9 per cent per quintal. That is, the MSP is lower than the production cost. The condition of almost all crops is the same.

MSP for the Agri produce in the country have been low for the past 2 decades compared to international price. According to the FAO, the food world grain price index rose 32.8 percent between September 2020 and October 2021. One can understand how meagre the increase in support prices in our country is compared to the increase in the food grain price index in the global market.

In view of the recommendation of the Swaminathan Commission, the State Governments are estimating the total production cost, sending it to the Centre and washing the matter off their hands. The KCR government in Telangana state estimates the cost of production for paddy in the state is Rs. 2529. If 50% addition is added to this, it becomes Rs. 3793. The farmer is getting a loss of Rs. 1905 per quintal and Rs. 40 to 50 thousand in an acre per crop. The estimated cost of production of wheat for 2020-21 Rabi crops estimated by State Govt. in Punjab was Rs. 1674 and in Haryana Rs. 2081. If we add 50% to this, the MSP will be Rs. 2511 and Rs. 3122 respectively and farmers are getting loss per quintal of wheat of Rs. 586 in Punjab and Rs. 1197 in Haryana. In the same way the farmers are facing losses in all crops. Therefore, the farmers movement is demanding the implementation of recommendation of MSP on the basis of C2+50% as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission. Actually, there is no 50% profit to farmers. Taking into consideration the peculiar nature of agriculture i.e. natural calamities such as droughts, floods, hail storms, pests etc. and many flows in the

estimation of cost of production, vagaries of market, many factors need to be taken into consideration while determining M.S.P.

The policies implemented by the government in estimating the cost of production and determining MSP are flawed. On 1.4.2013, the UPA-2 Government appointed the Ramesh Chand Committee to “Examine Methodological Issue in Fixing MSP”. It submitted its Report in March 2015, and it identified several shortcomings in deciding the MSP and made 23 recommendations. To this day, none of these have been implemented. If these recommendations are implemented, production costs of crops will increase by 20 to 30 per cent (to that extent MSP will also increase), said Prof. R. Ramkumar, who is working in “Tata Institute of Social Sciences”.

Farmers do not have access to even the minimum support prices that underestimate the cost of production. In some states, Government is procuring paddy and wheat, to some extent pulses and oilseeds. The Kharif marketing season Report 2020-21 of the Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission (CACP) said that the country’s paddy price was lower than the MSP in the last 5 years and the price of maize was 26.4% lower in 2020. It is estimated farmers are getting a loss of minimum Rs. 1 to 2 lakh crores annually, due to selling their crops at less than MSP in the market.

That is why the enactment of the MSP Guarantee Act has been one of the important demands of the peasant movement from the beginning. AIKSCC had been demanding statutory law for MSP since its very inception in 2017. It prepared a draft law and already introduced it in both Houses of Parliament in 2018. Thus, the demand to make a law is not new. It has been under discussion for almost the last 2 decades. Vajpayee government appointed a “High Level Committee” chaired by Abhijit Sen on “Long Term Policy on Food Grains” on 17.11.2000 and it has recommended in 2002, “That CACP should go strictly on the basis of C2 cost of production in more efficient regions. The committee also recommends that MSP should have statutory status and CACP should be made an empowered statutory body.” In a 2011 report by the “Working Group on Consumer Affairs”, set up in 2010 under the auspices of Shri Narendra Modi, while submitting the report to P.M. Manmohan Singh, Narendra Modi wrote, “Why have an MSP that farmers do not get, government should make a law on MSP.” The matter was also announced in Parliament. “The CACP’s Report 2015-16” states that “..... to instil confidence among farmers for procurement of their produce, a legislation conferring on farmers. “The right to sell at MSP” may be brought out.” (P.34)

The Modi government is adamantly rejecting the “Minimum Support Price Guarantee Act”. Modi seems to be assuring MSP and continuing government procurement. MSP enforcement in the country is not guaranteed. Modi’s assurances are like a bundle of water. The assurance of minimum income is guaranteed if there is a law.

Moreover, the developed / imperialist countries gave 18.1% of their agricultural output value in the form of various subsidies by 2020. India’s minimum support prices are 17

per cent lower than the global market and overall the negative subsidy is 7.6% and due to this, Indian farmers faced losses of Rs. 2.75 lakh crore during the year 2020. And they are facing such loss in the last two decades. (Agricultural Policy Analysis and Evaluation Report-2021 OECD). As a result of these, crisis in Agriculture is continuing, especially since the beginning of globalization policies, particularly in the last 20 years. Farmers' suicides are continuing as part of this crisis.

Modi in his address to the country claimed that only a section of farmers have opposed the Farm Laws. This is completely false. He boasted once again that the 3 Farm Laws are for the good of farmers and exhibited his loyalty towards crony corporate such as Adani and Ambani and MNCs. Many surveys have exposed his hypocrisy and explicitly reported the pulse of the people at the ground level. Recent C-Voter Survey Report (November 23, 2021) revealed, that 70% of the people and more than 63% of NDA supporters are supporting the demand of legally guaranteed MSP. Such is the wide support among the people for this demand. Farmers beware! The Democles' Sword of pro corporate farm laws is still hanging over the farming community

It is a false argument that if the MSP Guarantee Act is enacted, more than half of the central budget will need be allocated to it. Farmers keep food grains, pulses etc, for their family needs, livestock feed and seeds. The public distribution system needs to be procured for anyway. If prices are high in the market, government procurement is not required. Experts say that 1/4 to 1/3 procurement of agricultural produce is enough to stabilize prices in the market. If these are taken into account, it may not exceed about Rs. 1 1/2 to 2 lakh crores. So, adjusting this is not a big issue for the government, which is waiving several lakh crores of rupees every year for corporate in the name of NPAs.

The only right way to eradicate poverty in the country, to solve the problem of unemployment, to expand the domestic market, to develop the country, to overcome the crisis in agriculture, is to increase the income of the farmers. Therefore, the minimum support price guarantee law is mandatory. The united farmers' movement must continue to fight for the Minimum Support Prices Guarantee Act and also for other demands.

(V. Venkatramaiah is All India President of All India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha (AIKMS))

Arrest and Punish the Army Officers Guilty of Mass Murders of Coal mine Workers and Civilians in Mon District of Nagaland!

## **REPEAL AFSPA, BASIS OF IMPUNITY OF ARMED FORCES**

**(Mass murder of Coal mine workers and civilians in Mon district of Nagaland has brought the issue of repeal of AFSPA on the agenda once again. There have been widespread agitations on this demand in states in North East. Central Govt. has announced a panel to examine the issue. However, Central Govt. had ignored the recommendations of Justice Jeevan Reddy committee which had earlier examined the issue and recommended withdrawal of AFSPA. We are here publishing a statement on this incident of mass killing of workers and civilians. )**

CPI (ML)-New Democracy strongly condemns the mass murder by an Indian Army unit of six coal mine workers in Mon District of Nagaland on the evening of 4th December. Two others are said to be critically injured. These workers were travelling home back from work on a Saturday, with 15km from their ordinary place of work in Tiru area to their village Oting. They were traveling in an open vehicle; the killings were cold-blooded. Seven more villagers were killed when Army opened fire on the villagers who had assembled hearing the gun fire.

Army quickly tried to cover up these murders as an “undercover operation gone wrong” and Union Home Minister has expressed regret over the killings but the Army and Govt. versions disclose the policies that Union Govt. has been pursuing in Nagaland and other states where Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is in force i.e. states of North-East and J&K. From what the Army said one may infer that the Govt. and the Army would have no regret if the killed had belonged to any Naga organization irrespective of whether there was any provocation or any reason, considering the killed were traveling in an open vehicle. Their cover-up also tells of the impunity of Armed Forces and of the repression to which people of North Eastern states are routinely subjected.

These cold-blooded killing of civilians has resulted in serious wave of anger sweeping through Nagaland and Naga inhabited areas of Manipur, Assam and other neighbouring states. Villages have put signboards outside their villages prohibiting entry of Assam Rifles, operationally a part of Indian Army. One protester was killed in police firing outside Assam Rifles office in Mon District. The villagers say 11 more are lying injured in various hospitals including the Assam Medical College at Dibrugarh and 2 others are 'missing'. The last two are widely thought to be dead.

Such is the anger sweeping Nagaland and other states of Northeast that Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Meghalaya have demanded repeal of AFSPA. Some parliamentary opposition parties have also demanded repeal of AFSPA. These killings have brought the focus on this notorious Act authorizing impunity; the crown jewel of the repressive laws in India. The existence of this Act shows the real character of rule in the areas where this

law is in force with Army subduing the people who are treated as “enemy”. This law must be repealed without delay.

This law was upheld by the Supreme Court albeit with some directions to prevent its abuse in the judgment delivered by Justice Madan Lokur. But the Law is itself an abuse of the process of law and hence these directions have obviously remained pious wishes on paper. Nothing short of repeal will do.

It is also significant that the Central Govt. especially under RSS-BJP rule has abandoned the ‘peace process’ which was being pursued with National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M). Since the abandonment of this process even after signing of a framework agreement in 2015, repression on the people of Nagaland has intensified. It is time that the Govt. of India should resume meaningful dialogue with NSCN(I-M) to further the agenda of peace in Naga Hills and not try to ‘solve’ the issue with the use of armed forces. These killings have also brought into focus the policy being pursued by RSS-BJP Govt.

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy therefore demands that Army officers responsible for these mass murders must be immediately arrested and prosecuted. We demand that Army including Assam Rifles should be immediately withdrawn from all civilian areas of North Eastern States including state of Nagaland.

*Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy forcefully demands that AFSPA must be repealed immediately. Democratic rights of the people must be respected in all states. We also demand that Union Govt. should resume peace process with NSCN(I-M) and hold meaningful dialogue with Naga organizations to bring peace to Naga areas respecting aspirations of Nagas.*

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy calls upon all revolutionary forces, people’s organizations and democratic rights organizations to forcefully raise their voice to force the Govt. to punish the guilty of these killings, repeal of AFSPA and restoration of democratic rights of the people, and resumption of meaningful dialogue to bring peace in the region.

Central Committee

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy

December 6, 2021.

# **Ukraine in midst of contradictions in Multi-polar World**

Zameer

Ukraine has been thrust into the forefront of growing inter-imperialist contradictions in the world. Contradictions among imperialist powers have been intensifying in the backdrop of deepening crisis of imperialism, decline of US imperialism including its defeat in Afghanistan and increasing scramble for the resources and markets all over the world. While important sections among rulers in USA still hope to carry on their hegemonistic drive with some changes in their tactics, other imperialist powers want greater share in the world resources and markets and greater role in shaping the world. In brief, US rulers are hesitant to come to terms with decline of uni-polar world and emergence of multi-polar world. Ukraine has come to occupy the centre stage in the contradictions between US imperialism and Russian imperialism but in fact it is one of the several flashpoints in the intensifying contradictions. Russia has been squirming under the US led NATO's eastward expansion and has called the day of reckoning. They are no longer willing to merely lodge protest. As US wishes to focus its attention on China as the main challenger to US imperialism, chickens of earlier expansionism targeted at Russia have come home to roost. Having long come out of its retreat under Gorbachev-Yeltsin dispensation, Russian imperialists under Putin wish to secure their borders, prevent NATO military and bases from reaching its post-Soviet borders. Russia wants to stall the eastward expansion of NATO stopping ascension to NATO of former Soviet republics and in a way even roll back the process or at least limit its military component to the extent it has proceeded till now. It is worth recalling that US failure to respond to Russian military action (2008) against Georgia's military march to pro-Russian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had sent a definite signal of the decline of uni-polar world.

However, it is never easy for a hegemonic power to manage decline. Having withdrawn from Afghanistan in defeat, US imperialism has been keen on sending the message around that withdrawal from Afghanistan has been less a matter of defeat and more of repositioning of the US forces in the emerging challenges to its global interests. Even as US forces were negotiating with Taliban the airlift of its personnel and whom they wished to carry from Afghanistan, US Vice-President was touring Asian countries to reaffirm US commitment to the region. Soon followed announcement of AUKUS- an agreement between three anglosphere countries with military component to send out a message to ruling elite of South East and East Asian countries that US imperialism will back them against China. This war like posturing but at best equivocal military

commitment was meant to reinforce in their supporters the confidence in US support shaken by withdrawal from Afghanistan. One obvious target of this as observed earlier, “The announcement of this military alliance so soon after withdrawal in defeat from Afghanistan has much to do to assert US commitment to security of Taiwan where pro-US rulers apprehend that lack of US commitment may embolden sections favouring closer ties with mainland China.” (ND, October 2021)

Similar messaging can be seen in the context of Ukraine where western powers especially US imperialism wants to send clear signal to the sections of the ruling classes of Ukraine opposed to Russia that US continues to support them in their contradiction with Russia. And these contradictions have their roots in both historical factors but more importantly in the contradictions among oligarchs fostered during the post-Soviet Ukraine. These oligarchs plundering the common resources look to both east (Russia) and west (US and West Europe) to increase their wealth. US and its allies’ posturing is targeted at these sections.

The other two centres of imperialist world i.e. China and European Union are also playing their role both broadly supporting their alliance partners and yet trying to further their own interests as well. Even the major powers of the Western Europe have been sidelined both under unilateralism of George Bush and America First of Donald Trump. Both of them, though pursuing different strategies, downgraded the importance of Western European powers. It was under Bush Admn. that US toyed with the idea of New Europe pitted against Old Europe. Important powers of Western Europe – Germany and France – would like to manage the present dispute conceding too much space neither to Russia nor to USA.

Western media and taking cue from them media throughout the world including in India, are presenting a distorted picture of the issues in Ukraine. Ukraine lies in the heart of Europe and western powers have long coveted the region. It is a country rich in fertile agricultural lands (reportedly the most fertile region of Europe) and vast mineral resources. From earlier period of European wars to Second World War unleashed by Hitler’s Germany, Ukraine has been eyed as an important prize. This richness of the region is laid over a diverse society consisting of Ukrainians and Russians and many other nationalities. The eastern part of Ukraine is its mineral rich region where most of its industries are based while southern part is strategically located at the Black Sea. Both these regions have high proportion of Russians. It is also worth noting that while Russian people themselves are also significant in number in Ukraine, Russian speaking people constitute a majority of the people in large parts and these include the Ukrainians. It is this composite society that is sought to be integrated into Western Europe and turned into a front against Russia.

It should be clear to everyone who cares to know both Russian imperialists and US imperialists are opposed to democratic Ukraine and view Ukraine from the mirror of power politics i.e. as a pawn in their quest for domination over Europe. Western powers talk about democratic Ukraine but have consistently undermined the democratic process there. Right from the emergence of Ukraine after the break-up of Soviet Union which was thrust upon the people of Russia and Ukraine by the then ruling elite led by Gorbachev and Yeltsin, those who came to power in Ukraine maintained good relations with Russian ruling establishment. Having turned most of the rulers of Eastern Europe – of the countries of Warsaw Pact- into pro-west acolytes through a series of colour revolutions which was another name of regime change especially in the period of uni-polar world, USA turned its gaze to former Soviet republics- Baltic states, Georgia and Ukraine. However, US while promoting anti-Russian ruling elites in these countries had no economic benefit to offer. Dangle of US and West European markets for their products produced with cheaper labour was hung. However, no real benefits accrued except for providing cheaper labour for the western companies. Most of these countries are undergoing deep turmoil in their societies and anti-Russian sentiments are being unleashed to divert the attention of the people and consolidate the power of the pro-West ruling elite.

In Ukraine, first colour revolution – Orange – was attempted in 2004-05 when in the elections pro-Russian Yanukovich defeated pro-West Yushchenko. Election results were disputed citing widespread vote irregularities. Sit-ins and strikes followed. Supreme Court stepped in annulling the results. In the re-run of the elections Yushchenko defeated Yanukovich polling 52% votes to the latter's 44% in the elections certified as fair by European watchdog. Even in these elections nearly half of Ukrainians were against pro-West candidate. In the next Presidential election in 2010, Yanukovich won in the election certified as fair by these watchdogs. Yanukovich wanted to make Ukraine part of European Union but also wanted to maintain close trade relations with Russia a position which was not acceptable to western powers. At the root of this contradiction lay the economic factors. Western powers had no use for the vast industrial base in the eastern part of Ukraine while they wanted to use the mineral resources as well as agricultural produce of Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia was a major buyer of the industrial and agricultural goods of Ukraine. Besides, Ukraine received large sums as a transit fee for the Russian gas supplies to West European countries. Hence economic rupture from Russia did not enjoy people's support in Ukraine.

But the European Union wanted to force Ukraine into submissive relationship. They ruled out tripartite relations even discussion involving EU, Ukraine and Russia. In 2014 they engineered another regime change- this time coined as Euromaidan – to force Yanukovich out of power. Violent demonstrations with open western support were organized. Yanukovich left capital Kyiv in February 2014 when sections of armed forces joined pro-west demonstrators. This time there was no pretense of democracy nor was

there any allusion to the people's will but simply throwing out Russian supporters. Ukrainian nationalists, despite their horrendous pro-Nazi past, were resurrected for the offensive.

However times had changed. 2014 was no 2005. Russian rulers concluded that western powers would not allow Ukraine to maintain relations with Russia but wanted to use Ukraine against Russia. Russia encouraged Crimeans to separate from Ukraine and join Russia. There was no doubt that overwhelming majority of Crimeans wanted to join Russia. It is testified by the repeated polls done by even pro-west sources. A report has cited a "2008 poll conducted by Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, 63.8% of all Crimeans supported secession from Ukraine and becoming part of Russia. In a series of polls conducted by a United Nations organization between 2009 and 2011, a majority of 65 to 70% of Crimeans consistently declared their preference to join Russia." 65% of Crimeans were reported ethnic Russians in 2001 Ukrainian Census. This besides the fact, Crimea had been part of Russia since 1783 and was transferred to Ukraine only in 1955 when Ukraine and Russia both were part of the then Soviet Union. However, these 'minor' details are not allowed to disturb the narrative woven by western media.

Russian rulers also encouraged the revolt in the mineral rich industrial heartland of Ukraine- the Donbas region- comprising Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the eastern Ukraine. Donbas is a centre of industries including coal mining and metallurgy besides a large number of consumer machines. People of these regions with Russians there being in big number, rose in revolt in March 2014 and resisted the Ukrainian Army. More than 14000 people have died in fighting in the region. Russia provides the main market for the industrial goods produced there. All the efforts to settle the military conflict in eastern Ukraine have floundered on the question of regional autonomy to be granted to Donbas. Ukrainian nationalists are not willing to grant this and breakaway regions are not willing to settle without this. Accords reached between Govt. of Ukraine and administrations of the two regions in Minsk (Byelorussia) in 2014 and 2015 in presence of Russia, France and Germany who acted as guarantors have failed to douse the fires of war. Ukrainian rulers egged on by US Admn. have refused to honour Minsk agreements and did not agree to even hold elections in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Even the European powers –Germany and France- have failed to persuade the Ukrainian Govt. The present flashpoint is partly related to these regions. There is a preparation for military assault by Ukrainian Govt. against these regions and military preparations for that are being made. Russia is obviously opposed to this assault and has vowed to intervene in case of such a military assault. Hence the much touted danger of Russian invasion is both true and false depending on how you look at it. To all intent Russia does not intend to invade Ukraine but Russia would also not permit Ukraine to invade Donbas region. It is same as it was in case of breakaway regions of Georgia or that of Moldova.

In fact people of Ukraine desire peace and reconciliation but imperialist powers wishing to include Ukraine into the orbit of their influence oppose this. While Russia wishes to keep Ukraine integrated with it economically and politically, western powers wish to tear asunder this relation. The cause of peace is quite popular in Ukraine is also evident from the fact that present President Zelensky was elected promising to end the war in Donbas and heal the linguistic, economic and political divisions in the country. However, under pressure from USA he has changed course and lost public support as well. For the present ruling group peace with Donbas region and good relations with Russia are forbidden by US imperialists. Zelensky is prosecuting his opponents accusing them as having relations with Russia. He has closed down several opposition media outlets and ordered the arrest of Medveduchuk, one of the leaders of the most popular party Opposition Platform – For Life (OPFL) which had overtaken Zelensky’s Servant of the People in opinion polls. Zelensky followed this up with an attack on former President Poroshenko whose European Solidarity party too overtook Zelensky’s party in opinion polls. Both have been accused of terrorism i.e. having relations with Donetsk and Luhansk arranging for purchase of coal from the region. Growing isolation of Zelensky shows that the course of intensifying divisions in Ukraine at the behest of US is not a popular cause. One can only recall how the erstwhile comedian had been pulled in a tug of war between Trump and Biden.

However, situation has grown beyond this dispute. Russian rulers are adamant not to allow military presence of the Western powers- their bases, high tech weaponry in the regions bordering Russia. Russian President Putin and other leaders are accusing USA to have gone back on their promise of no eastward expansion of NATO, the military alliance led by USA. Russian leaders feel that today’s international situation permits them to call a halt to further eastward expansion of NATO. Russian actions also mean Russian security interests in the region must be recognized. Putin has specifically mentioned that at the end of cold war, Bush (Senior) Admn. had promised then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that there would be no eastward expansion of NATO. Western leaders however deny that no such promise had been made. In fact there has been eastward expansion of NATO with admission of 14 new members in five installments.

Putin has opposed admission to NATO of members after May 1997 accord (Founding Act) between Russia and NATO. The accord was signed in Paris. Besides establishing Russia-NATO Joint Council, US led NATO affirmed that nuclear weapons would not be stationed at Central European countries that joined NATO nor put “substantial” outside combat forces there. The question pertained to only Warsaw Pact countries and question of admitting any former Soviet republic into NATO was not even discussed. This explains why Putin wants NATO to stick to May 1997 deadline. However, the situation changed when in 2008 Bucharest Summit of NATO green light was given for incorporation of Georgia and Ukraine to be members of NATO. This decision according to Russian Govt. went against the political commitments of OSCE members enshrined in Helsinki Final Act and Charter for European Security. Russia has concentrated its fire on the 2008 Bucharest decisions. Furthermore, over last few years US Admn. has

withdrawn from one cold war pact after another which had limited the development and deployment of tactical nuclear weapons and their delivery systems e.g. Intermediate Range Missiles. This has obviously sent signals of the real intent of US imperialist rulers.

However, as recently declassified documents of US past Administrations disclose US Admn. has continuously misled Russian Govt. on its intentions. They deliberately lied to Russian counterparts about their intentions while they always envisaged eastward expansion of NATO. Deliberately loosely worded declarations are now being touted as evidence that no such promise was made. Though equally relevant is the question why then Russian rulers allowed themselves to be shortchanged? Obviously they too were acting against the interests of the people of Russia. They wished to resurrect Russian empire and bury the Union of Republics. For the imperialist rulers of Russia that was only a stepping stone.

Now the Russian Govt. has come out clearly for what they want. They have sent two proposals to US and NATO and also released them publicly. These proposals entail two set of proposals which they want US to agree to and in writing. First no former Soviet Republic, specifically Ukraine and Georgia, will be made NATO members to prevent US and her allies from stationing sophisticated weapons and Armies close to Russian border. Second set of proposals calls for reduction in the US led NATO's military buildup and military activities in former Warsaw Pact countries. Western countries especially US Admn. have agreed to hold discussions while asserting that there was no question of agreeing to Russian veto to NATO expansion. But the very agreement to hold discussions in three tiers i.e. between US and Russia, between Russia and NATO and among European countries is proof enough that Russian demands are being taken seriously. West would like to cuddle Russia without really making any commitment. They may just like to kick the can further. But that stage for all intent and purpose is over when the hegemon would just smile at smaller beings. Recall Obama saying that Russia was only a regional power. Today's multi-polar world may not admit of such an outcome as has been amply disclosed in the declassified documents. Russian Govt. says it insists on legal guarantees i.e. written agreements. Obviously the question is not of Ukraine right to independence but of USA's right to threaten every country on the globe. It is quite clear that US imperialist rulers would not admit such a deployment of high tech weaponry of their rivals on their borders.

It should be clear that neither US led NATO nor Russia intend to act in favour of the rights of the people of Ukraine. Ukrainians need peace and reconciliation. But their geographical situation and gifts of nature endowed to them are just too much to resist for the predators i.e. imperialists.

# **“Better”? It is Worse!**

## **Disposable workers in the age of layoffs**

- SK

It was in 1843 that Charles Dickens wrote his ‘A Christmas Carol’. It was around the same time that Frederick Engels was writing his book ‘The Condition of the Working Class in England’.) The appalling squalor and living conditions of working children and people in those times formed the backdrop for both the books. Charles Dickens “intended to open its readers’ hearts towards those struggling to survive on the lower rungs of the economic ladder and to encourage practical benevolence...” More than 175 years later, the US mortgage lender ‘Better’ chose to layoff 15% of its staff (900 employees) just ahead of the Christmas holiday season. They chose to do that in an online three minute Zoom call. The execution drew sharp reactions ranging from dismay to the accusations of being heartless. The reasons cited for the layoff reflected typical text book phrases - ‘market efficiency, performance and productivity’ to build a ‘leaner, meaner and hungrier workforce’ apart from blaming some of those laid off employees of ‘stealing’ from the company.

The bad optics in the ‘innovative’ usage of Zoom in downsizing, the visible heartlessness of the exercise and the bad timing have led to the media glare and outrage. However, one should note that the mass layoffs have been an ongoing global phenomenon since long. The ‘polycrisis’ where the pandemic and other crises converged, further exacerbated this cruel attack on the working people across the globe. It is just that they either do not make it to mainstream media headlines or that they fade away too quickly into oblivion. The New York Times journalist and author Louis Uchitelle documented this slide into the ‘age of layoffs’ well in his 2007 book, ‘The Disposable American’. He mentions that mass layoffs were a more recent phenomenon that emerged in the late 1970s. He wrote, “More than two decades have passed since the modern layoff first appeared as a mass phenomenon in American life. Until that happened, companies tried to avoid layoffs.... in the late 1990s we finally acquiesced. Acquiescence means giving up, seeing no alternative; we bowed to layoffs as the way things have to be. Now we justify them as an unfortunate necessity.” It is not a coincidence that this ‘acquiescence’ coincides with the wave of globalization and the free trade agreements that facilitated the movement of production and jobs to lower-wage countries and locations. Labour unions weakened and the ‘flexibility’ to hire and fire workers was projected as the ultimate ideal.

Even as mass layoffs are projected as ‘unfortunate necessity’ with ‘there is no alternative’ argument, general management perspectives do offer a different assessment. The 2018 Harvard Business Review article, Layoffs That Don’t Break Your Company notes that, “research shows that job cuts rarely help senior leaders achieve their goals. Too often, they’re done for short-term gain, but the cost savings are overshadowed by bad publicity, loss of knowledge, weakened engagement, higher voluntary turnover, and lower innovation, which hurt profits in the long run.” The article elaborates on what it

calls as 'bad layoffs' and 'layoff for wrong reasons'. Their research also pointed out that global multinational companies often resort to both.

The question is not about the heartlessness of the act or the impertinence of a snob. The question is also not about ignorance or lack of wisdom. The roots of the short-sightedness lie elsewhere and thus assert despite having smart people at the helm. To understand better, one has to refer to the term used by Engels in his 1845 book mentioned above - reserve army of labour, which Marx theorized as the necessary part of the capitalist organization of work. It helps to restrain, drive down the wages in varying conditions of prosperity, stagnation and overproduction. The reserve army of labour has to be seen from the global context. Citing the ILO data despite its numerous limitations, Monthly Review published as article in 2011. It noted, "If we take the categories of the unemployed, the vulnerably employed, and the economically inactive population in prime working ages (25–54) and add them together, we come up with what might be called the maximum size of the global reserve army in 2011: some 2.4 billion people, compared to 1.4 billion in the active labor army.." The mass layoffs add to various strata (static, floating and latent) of the global reserve army of labour which in turn serves to maintain a downward pressure on wages and to increase job insecurity, making it much harder for workers to fight back.

A 2009 Hollywood movie 'Up in the Air' discusses mass firing of employees over Skype meetings instead of conveying the bad news in person with a certain dignity. The boss remarks: "What, stabbing them in the chest instead of the back." The recent incidents reveal that the bosses make their choices. The three Christmas ghosts of past, present and future transform Ebenezer Scrooze in Christmas Carol in to a benevolent person from being a miser. The past, present mass layoffs across the globe and stark future should make one fight back and transform the system itself.

## **IFTU Solidarity with Bank Strike Against Bank Privatization Bill!**

The National Committee of the IFTU extends support to the two day strike of public sector banks' employees on 16th and 17th Dec against privatization of public banks. The Modi govt. is slated to bring a bill to this effect in the winter session of Parliament.

The Modi Govt., in fact, has also placed on agenda the privatization or sale of all public sector industries. Under cover of corona lockdown, it has accelerated policies for handing over various sectors of economy as well as Education and Health for intensified loot of Corporate. The privatization of various sectors will also further aggravate unemployment. Reservations for socially backward sections will be done away with at a time when there is even more need for socially affirmative action.

IFTU supports the struggle of the bank employees. We oppose privatization of public enterprises built on public money!

(Issued by National Committee, IFTU on December 16, 2021)

## **Glasgow Conference Outcome Marred by Imperialist Hypocrisy, Corporate Greed**

**(Climate Change is being discussed every year since 1995 in the form of Annual Meetings. This year has been 26<sup>th</sup> edition of these annual gatherings. However, there has been very unsatisfactory movement towards goals that would limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 C as the target set by parties in earlier conference. The main stumbling block has been refusal of imperialist countries to own up to their share in degrading the environment and hence undertake actions commensurate with that share. They would like to underdeveloped countries to take up main burden of climate change. They resort to hypocrisy when they talk of global action but do everything to maintain their dominance. Their very effort to so-called clean energy is moved by the corporate greed. Imperialist countries have repeatedly failed to honour their commitments of financial support to underdeveloped countries. However the urgent need to arrest climate change should not be ignored.)**

The participating 197 countries sealed the Glasgow Climate Pact at the end of the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference Of Parties (COP) on November 13, 2021, a day later than scheduled. The global leaders agreed to phase-out subsidies for fossil fuel and *phase down* the use of coal, which is responsible for 40% of annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, this created deep anguish among developing countries that still are grappling with basic development agendas. The use of fossil fuels has enabled the developed world to attain a high level of wealth and well-being, said India's Environment minister. He further emphasized that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) refers to mitigating Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from all sources and does not indicate any particular source. Therefore, targeting any specific sector is uncalled for!

Another big battle between the developed and developing nations emerged around climate finance. Developed countries pledged to mobilize US\$ 100 billion annually to support developing countries to adopt climate change a decade ago in 2009. However, it remained unfulfilled. During COP26, despite specific demand from developing countries about the commitment of US\$ 1.3 trillion, the outcome document only mentions mobilizing UD\$ 100 billion through 2025. Likewise, there was no serious commitment to creating a Loss and Damage Facility to deal with relief and rehabilitation efforts for countries damaged by climate change disasters.

Leaders from mostly the developing countries promised to stop deforestation by 2030. Many consider it an essential step for climate mitigation as trees absorb a vast amount of CO<sub>2</sub>; however, such policy may seriously impinge on the rights and access of forest-dwelling indigenous communities living in tropical countries, including India. More than 100 countries have also signed a scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions. However, India did not sign on this agreement. Furthermore, a provision was made to allow old carbon credits earned after 2013 under the Kyoto Protocol mechanism to be traded until 2025. This was a relief for countries like India that had invested a lot in Clean Development Mechanism projects.

On the hindside, COP26 postponed its commitment to cut Green House Gas emissions or enhance the Nationally Determined Contributions to meet the goal of climate stabilization at 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius until the next summit in Egypt. This is especially disheartening considering the fact that the world could cut only 6.4 percent emissions during the global lockdown in 2020 against the required 7.6 percent annual cut for the next decade to prevent the globe from warming more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

India remained in the limelight during the summit. On November 2, the second day of the conference, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the promise to cut India's emissions to net-zero by 2070 (on the lines of the USA, China, and other major G20 countries). This announcement came as a big surprise as the government of India had been rejecting the global pressure to commit a net-zero goal for more than a year. Modi further put forward four commitments: to increase non-fossil fuel energy capacity to 500 gigawatts (GW); meet 50 percent of its energy requirements from renewable energy; reduce carbon emissions by one billion tons; and bring down the emission intensity of the GDP by 45 percent, all by 2030. Towards the end, India again came into the limelight as India and China and others bargained hard on the text of the final agreement document, primarily on the text related to phasing-out coal and a commitment by the developed countries for financing climate-friendly transition in developing countries. Many believe that it was under the pressure of Indian negotiators that the agreement's final text replaced *phasing-out* coal with *phasing-down coal*. However, India denied this claim.

The Energy Experts question India's feasibility of increasing renewable energies of up to 500 GW by 2030. It means deploying about 10 GW-11MW of renewables every single working hour for the next nine years, says Arunabha Ghosh. On the other hand, the conservationist Ashish Kothari raises the concern about serious ecological consequences of proposed mega energy parks for which 10000 sq. km area in seven states are identified. Further, on what basis do we target to generate 500 GW of energy through renewables by 2030 when India does not have a goal of minimum energy need of a family? While at COP26, Modi calls for a global movement on LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment), India has no policy to trace and regulate energy usages by its affluent and upper-middle-class families. India's climate mitigation policies neither integrate existing traditional indigenous technologies, which have a low carbon/environmental footprint. In all countries, including India, the path to net-zero is primarily dependent on technological fixes. However, what is required is indeed a lifestyle change based on a low carbon consumption model, both in developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, there was hardly any serious effort was seen during COP26 in this regard except for some lip service like Modi's speech. So, is Greta Thunberg right in saying that politicians at the summit were just "pretending to take our future seriously"? India is now the fifth-biggest economy globally, and Knight Frank's Wealth Report 2020 projects a 73 percent growth in the number of Ultra high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) in the next five years. So, why can India not think about transiting to a climate-friendly development path without the money of imperial power?

There is also an additional question why governments of India do not utilize local workforce for checking pollution, making good footpaths so that people can walk to their next door grocery shop instead of taking a car. Why technology in India can't be used in municipal works and cleaning activities so that dust does not mix with polluting gases and further increase global warming. As a matter of fact, India should not hide behind development needs and do substantial for social and local infrastructure development.

# **Truth of alleged genocide of Kashmiri Pandits exposed through RTI**

**P.P. Kapoor**

Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels famously said that if a lie is repeated over and over again it becomes a truth. Hitler's political progeny of fascism in India - the RSS and BJP are quite effectively doing the same work of spreading lies until these are established as truth. These forces have an expertise in spreading rumors and lies against minorities, especially the Muslims and the Christians, in a systematic manner to spread hatred in the society for the purpose of polarizing votes in elections.

In the year 1990, with the rise of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir in which innocent common people started getting killed, the RSS and BJP activists started projecting these killings as a very big massacre of Kashmiri Pandits not only in India but also in the world. The capitalist media lent its full weight to this propaganda. As part of a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign the Kashmiri Muslims were projected as villains and terrorists. By propagating such claims, the RSS-BJP put into effect their agenda of polarizing the society and garnering votes in elections across the country.

To know the truth of this alleged massacre of Kashmiri Pandits and verify the claims made by the Modi government to resettle the Kashmiri Pandits back home in Kashmir, I filed an RTI application in July 2021 under the Right to Information Act-2005, in the office of Manoj Sinha, the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, administering directly under the supervision of the Modi government ruling at the Centre. It had been asked in the application to tell the total number of Kashmiri Pandits killed in Jammu and Kashmir since 1990, the year when militancy raised its head in the state, till the date of reporting. Along with this, information had also been sought regarding the total number of persons of other communities killed by the Militants in the same time period. Apart from this, it was also asked that how many Kashmiri Pandits and people of other communities had migrated out of Jammu and Kashmir till date, and from among those Kashmiri Pandits who had migrated out of the state, how many Kashmiri Pandits had returned to the state, or had been resettled in the state.

The information furnished by the Jammu and Kashmir administration in response to this RTI application has exposed to the whole world the reality of false claims made by the RSS-BJP and capitalist media regarding the alleged genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in the state. The DSP (Headquarter) and Central Public Information Officer in the Police Headquarter, Kashmir, told under RTI that in the 30 years period from the year 1990 to the year 2021, a total of 1724 people had been killed by the Militants in the state. Of these people, Kashmiri Pandits accounted for only 89 of those killed, while the remaining 95 percent i.e. 1635 were largely Muslims along with a few Sikhs. A total of

1.54 lakh persons migrated in the last 30 years, out of which 1,35,426 (i.e. 88 percent) were Hindus, while 11,212 were Muslims, 5013 Sikhs and 15 others migrated. Even though the RSS-BJP governments never tire from beating the drum of being the biggest well-wishers of Kashmiri Pandits, but even after six months having passed since this RTI application was filed, neither the Modi government nor the state administration have been able to tell as to how many Kashmiri Pandits who had migrated from the state have been resettled in Jammu and Kashmir.

This RTI disclosure has made it clear that the RSS-BJP have only encashed Kashmiri Pandits by making them pawns of their communal polarization politics. It is because of their politics of dividing the people and enchasing their votes that RSS-BJP systematically instigated Kashmiri Pandits to flee the Valley in the year 1998. Kashmiri Pandits became victims of this provocation and fled from the valley in huge numbers. It is for this reason that in the last 30 years, out of the total 1724 people killed by the Militants, only 5 percent i.e. 89 are Kashmiri Pandits, while out of a total of 1.54 lakh people who migrated from the state during this period, the highest i.e. 88 percent (1,35,426) are Kashmiri Pandits. On the other hand, Muslims accounting for 95 percent i.e. 1635 people of the total people killed during this period at the hands of the Militants, the Muslim community did not migrate in large numbers. Only 11,212 Muslims and 5013 Sikhs migrated from the state.

These figures and the RTI disclosure expose the grand lie spread by the RSS-BJP in full public view. This RTI disclosure has started a new debate about the false impression and false claims of alleged genocide of Kashmiri Pandits all over the world including in Jammu and Kashmir. A section of the media including The Telegraph, Free-Press Kashmir, and Hindi daily Dainik Bhaskar have published this information prominently.

Dr. Raja Muzaffar Bhatt, President of RTI Movement Jammu-Kashmir, in his detailed article published in the Kashmir Observer on this revelation, has described in detail as to how the right wing pro-Hindu organizations had defamed Kashmiri Muslims in the world by spreading lies continuously for the last 30 years. This RTI disclosure is an eye-opener for the elements who without rhyme or reason defamed and made fun of Kashmiri Muslims.

# Let Bengal Raise Voice

Tapas Roy

West Bengal, the epicentre of several glorious movements including those of Naxalbari, Singur-Nandigram where peasantry played a major role, is now under the rule of Trinamool Congress (TMC) government helmed by Mamata Banerjee. In fact, TMC government has been in power for continuous 11 years. TMC government came to power after the disastrous fallout of Left Front government led by CPI (M). That government had been in power for continuous 34 years and needless to mention that it was counted an achievement on the part of Left front.

TMC government led by Mamata Banerjee came into power through Assembly Elections held in 2011 following a series of mass movements against the forcible acquisition of land, particularly fertile, multi cropped agricultural lands in several areas such as Singur, Nandigram, Raichuk etc. etc. in the interest of Corporate, absentee landlords, promoters etc. etc. by Left Front Government. Though Mamata Banerjee and TMC could grab the outcome of the movement and came into power but historically it is true that almost all the democratic forces, Human Rights organizations, intellectuals played a very effective role in building up the movement that stirred whole of Bengal and eventually the Left Front government had to succumb.

Since Mamata government came to power, it has engaged itself in a large number of undemocratic attitudes, particularly to its previous allies and also to the demands of the toiling masses. The mass movements were halted. Movements for the right causes particularly for employment, for democratic rights, for rightful demands such as dearness allowance to the Government employees were crushed by State machinery. Even UAPA was imposed upon the political activists, promises of “will free political prisoners” proved to be utterly false.

Mamata government came into the power with tremendous mass support particularly in the rural areas where left front particularly CPI(M) proved to be a brutal force against peasantry by its mal-activities through Panchayats, and because of forcible acquisition of fertile lands. In agricultural areas, the rural vested interests with collaboration of middleman and mahajans etc. took over the scenario and the peasantry particularly small farmers were in deep trouble as they seldom get the actual prices of the produce.

It is true the Left front government strengthened its stability and tenure through administrative Land Reforms and its first two terms, more specifically first term, it was to an extent able to record names of bargaidars and to decide and distribute the ceiling surplus land. It was also due to the pressure of the peasant movements including those led by revolutionaries. Panchayats and the rural institutions and also the rural administration performed with some pro-people attitude. The good result was also achieved by the farmers as govt. machinery in the local panchayats kept a vigil on the sale of the produce so that the farmers were to an extent not deprived. But these good actions begin to fade out in late 1980s and since 1990s, the Left front government became a close ally of neo liberalism and land reforms saw a great setback. The interests of the peasantry were shelved, the lands were literally snatched through Land

Acquisition Act 1894 and SEZ Act and the corporate and the real estate dealers left at large to exploit the masses particularly the village people. The eventual happened. The people, not only in villages but throughout West Bengal got aggrieved. Mass movements were organized by several democratic and political forces and ultimately Left front government was thrown away in 2011 Assembly Elections. The TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee could draw electoral advantage from the movement and public anger and came to power.

The TMC government miserably shattered people's expectations. Soon after it came to power, the party workers from the topmost to rank-and-file did indulge in corruption. Some new words appeared- cut money, 'Tola Bazi' (loot) etc. etc. - all these words can be assigned to a number of TMC leaders.

The arena of land, during the tenure of TMC has come out to be a rosy ground for corporate. There is no more land reforms, even on paper. Instead, the corporate and non-agricultural capitalists are invited to invest at the cost of farmers. No more recording of bargadars, no more vesting of ceiling surplus land; the land and land reforms department of West Bengal government is engaged only in mutation and conversion for the capitalist/ real estate dealers, promoters. There is no land policy of this government.

The situation in agriculture sector is also miserable. The Mamata government once announced that it has enhanced the income of a peasant three times, of course to surpass Modi's announcement of two times. But in West Bengal too, the peasantry as a whole is suffering from deep crisis. The price rise of the essential commodities needed for sowing and harvesting, the inadequate market facilities, the very presence of middle men of course with TMC background controlling the market has put the peasantry in distress. During TMC regime about 250 farmers have committed suicide but the TMC government is hiding the fact, of course to avoid paying compensation to the families and also to keep alive the trumpet of the myth that in this state peasants are very happy and safe. This year, heavy rainfall has resulted in tremendous loss for the farmers but the government has failed and is quite unwilling to compensate adequately.

The recent historic peasants' movement against the three anti-peasantry, anti-national, pro corporate agricultural laws has unmasked the hypocrisy of TMC and Mamata Banerjee who propagates herself as the ardent anti-fascist, anti BJP, anti-Modi leader of the country. But the fact is this; neither she nor her party took a single programme in the state against these laws. Instead they did not support the strike called by the peasant organisations. Their leader in Lok Sabha, Sudip Banerjee, initially supported the bill. Later, realizing the people's and particularly peasants' mood and to keep the disguise of anti-Modi stance, Mamata Banerjee began to oppose the three bills but she or TMC seldom raised voice against corporate or even RSS; rather invited Ambani, Adani to invest freely in West Bengal.

The Left front government was long in power, for 34 years from 1977 to 2011. Prior to that, the then Congress government enacted APMC (Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee) Act. The Act had some positive aspects. The law had to be enacted by the rulers to pacify the grievances of the peasantry that created several peasant movements throughout the country during late 1960s and early 1970s. The Act was created to resist middlemen's dominance in agricultural arena and to ensure proper sale price to the

peasants. But the then Congress government in the state did not take any steps to implement this. Moreover, the peasant organisations could not compel the government to implement it due to lack of movement at that time and also due to onslaught on democratic organizations and movement at that time. The Left front government implemented the Act, formed markets where peasants could control those under the direct supervision of the government. This implementation produced some good results as it could reduce the massive power of the middlemen ('Phodey') to a large extent. The farmers could get better prices for their produce and there was no bar to sell the produce to any market desired by the farmers. But some of those early successes of the left front regime was practically jeopardized later due to indifference of machinery and also due to domination of the rural vested interests in all spheres of rural governance including panchayats and other organizations, even political organizations like CPM. The broker rule returned in many forms shattering the early success. Even these reform measures disappeared particularly after 'globalization'.

Mamata government during its continuous regime right from 2011, never tried to escape from the corporate bonding. On the contrary some adverse measures were taken in the disguise of pro people activities. For example, in the agricultural sector, Mamata government terminated around twenty thousand farmers' cooperatives by an Ordinance in the name of abolition of brokers' and bureaucratic rules upon peasantry. But the funny thing is- the brokers and middleman gradually took over the control of the business in the agriculture sector that was opened freely to the private enterprises. The contract farming was encouraged. The farmers/ peasants often had to fall prey to the 'cut money economy' nourished fearlessly by brokers and middleman. These fellows almost all belong to the ruling party that is TMC, receiving 'blessings' from the party and administration bosses. In 2014, TMC government introduced the West Bengal Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Amendment Act and in 2017, again this Act was amended further. By these amendments the government opened the doors of the market completely to private enterprises. By these acts any person, company, institution, cooperative society, government undertaking or agency can purchase directly from the farmers. The commission agents can be appointed and thus brokers in agricultural sector have been legalized. Thus by these amendments, the entry of corporate including foreign capital was made free. Moreover, the amendment in 2017 suggested e-trading for farmers. Needless to mention that these amendments in nature are quite similar to some clauses of the recently repealed three Acts by the central government, that is BJP RSS government. These Central Acts have been repealed following a massive democratic and patriotic movement but the Acts of West Bengal government are still there although its withdrawal has been demanded by several peasant organizations but Mamata government as usual has turned a deaf ear to the rightful demands to oblige its corporate masters.

And recently Deocha-Pachami-Dewanganj-Harsinga coal mining project, aiming at eviction of a large number of people (estimated to be above 21,000) belonging mostly to tribal, Muslims and other communities, has completely unmasked the pro corporate character of Mamata government. The project will cause eviction, de-agriculturization, deforestation and harm to the environment of a considerable locality/ area of Muhammadbazar in Birbhum district. The local inhabitants protested instantly but the

government is firm to carry out this corporate agenda with the help of its machinery and also with the help of hooligans.

Thus, all democratic forces must realize the anti-peasantry, anti-people, pro corporate attitude of this autocratic, self-proclaimed anti BJP anti-fascist rule of the West Bengal Govt. and also must build up resistance in the interest of toiling masses not only of West Bengal but also of the whole country, taking lessons from the heroic and historic peasant movement.

## **Homage to V.K. Ohri, Lawyer of Struggling People**

In the death of V.K. Ohri struggling people and those fighting for workers and oppressed have lost a valuable friend.

An advocate with excellent grasp over criminal law, incisive appreciation of facts and understanding of law, and ability to root for essential in the maze of presented facts, V.K. Ohri harnessed all these abilities to defend workers and oppressed from the false prosecution which they are routinely subjected to in the course of their struggles. He was a friend, reliable and dependable, for those who challenged exploitation and oppression. He defended them to the best of his ability and that was substantial. He was a lawyer activist whose activism was rooted in softening the blows of criminal law which those struggling routinely face.

Defend them he would; and that too with confidence. But more importantly he would instill in them the confidence to fight more for just causes. He could not always win, though he generally would, but he always won the trust of the people for whom he stood. Workers would be happy to be defended by an advocate who would unapologetically espouse their cause and forthrightly place their stand. Workers would come after a court date more filled with courage and energy. He would say, you struggle, I am here to defend you!

In over four decade of legal practice he had never asked any *worker* for fees, he would accept whatever they gave him. And this was so not only when he had established himself as an eminent criminal lawyer in Delhi but also when he was struggling to find his feet in the profession. Workers may at times worry when he was late in coming for the hearing, but faces would light up when he would appear.

He had a sense of justice of the oppressed. He would stand with them knowing the inherent justness of their cause, with no idealist chatter of the same. He shared a world view free of exploitation and oppression and took upon himself to contribute to this through legal defense of the struggle for justice in all its dimensions i.e. for the realization of that world view.

Gifted as a lawyer, Ohri largely concentrated on his practice in the lower courts especially district courts. He would say that 90% of the case in made or marred there, hence it was essential to fight it there to secure legal justice. Only a handful of cases reach higher judiciary, limited both by the resources of the petitioners as well as ambit of legal challenge permissible at that stage. It is the disorderly and dusty lower courts

that decide the quality of justice and not the glamorous and gilded higher courts as the elite would clamour to portray, often according relief not to those who had and felt the need but to those who can make their need felt. When the former remain dirt filled, the latter are reduced to show pieces. Ohri chose to concentrate his work where it mattered most to those he had chosen to defend, and not where it might have mattered more for himself.

VK was a votary for fighting legally at a time when the real fight was going on; not only when the fight had ended and rights and wrongs being adjudicated ex post facto. He was a fighter to the core in the real sense. That would bring the best out of him. His confidence and fearlessness was infectious.

VK stood not only for workers though it is where he started, but also for all oppressed. He stood for all who were victims of injustice and who had suffered in the cause of the people and society.

In a large number of criminal cases he defended the workers of industrial areas and govt. establishments. He rose high when defending the low in society. Best would come of him in cases which others shunned; the worst cases. He also defended students including doctors and nursing students and youth in their struggles. He defended aggrieved women; secured justice for a working class daughter who was raped in police custody and also fought for a Supreme Court employee who allegedly suffered at the hands of the then Chief Justice and there were many, many more such.

The Lawyer activist in him was in full element defending those subjected to crude repression in J&K. He would often go to Kashmir to defend them. He successfully defended journalist Iftikhar Geelani when a baseless case was foisted on him.

His tireless efforts during anti-Sikh violence in Delhi in 1984 related not only to legal defense but standing for those subjected to violence.

VK lived an extra-ordinary life. He breathed his last on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2021 after suffering briefly from liver disease.

V.K. Ohri will be missed by all those who knew that he was there whenever the need for legal defense arose. The best way to remember him is to make his work for the defense of exploited and oppressed known widely, to enthuse young lawyers to follow his role model for their legal practice; to be in service of struggle for justice. His life and work will enthuse lawyers who would carry forward the legacy of VK and those who similarly contribute to the defense of the struggle of workers and oppressed.

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