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

NEW DEMOCRACY

On Assembly Elections Results

Oppose Russian Invasion of Ukraine, NATO expansion

Bring Indian Students Back Without Delay

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Call for Two Day Workers' All Indian Strike

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Impact & Stakes in Russia's Ukraine War

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Assembly Election Results: Challenges before the People

The results of the elections to five state assemblies point to challenging times before the people of the country. With the victory of fascist forces especially in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, though with reduced number of seats, there will be more strident attempts at deepening communal divisions and more sinister attacks on the people including attempts to close the democratic space opened by the farmers' movement. In Punjab, where RSS-BJP was not a major force, disillusionment with earlier ruling parties – Congress and Akali Dal - has benefited AAP. In other states RSS-BJP overcame the challenge posed by the opposition parties which had been hoping for people's disillusionment alone to bring them to power. In this, expenditure of huge money and unbridled support of corporate media undoubtedly played their role in the victory of RSS-BJP.

These elections have proved the type of challenge posed by ruling fascist forces. Their fascist onslaught is more systemic and hence challenge to it needs to be more systemic. Intensification of class struggle and mass movements will be the decisive factor in meeting this challenge of present times.

The period since return to power of RSS-BJP in 2019 has proved that it is people's extra-parliamentary struggles which have

challenged the ruling fascist forces. Historic farmers' struggle which forced the Govt. to repeal three black Agri Acts shows the direction from which challenge to rule of fascist forces is coming and will come. The mobilization of the farmers from West UP was reflected in the decline of RSS-BJP in the areas which had been the epicenter of the movement. BJP fared poorly in rural areas of Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, Baghpat, Meerut, Bijnor and Moradabad. In these areas the earlier communal division was mitigated to an extent largely among the peasant masses. Atmosphere created by the farmers' movement has been instrumental in reducing the number of seats of BJP by 52 and bridging the gap between RSS-BJP led alliance and the main opposition alliance to a mere 6%.

Election results show that RSS infiltration, rather near complete control of the Administrative apparatus i.e. state machinery, has reached a point where, coupled with their cadres on the ground they have electorally weaponized the Govt. welfare schemes and have made electoral challenge to these fascist forces rather difficult. Ruling classes have reduced the vast masses of people to that state of destitution and penury where Govt. schemes have become the life line of a large number of people. RSS cadres controlling the state machinery are able to control large sections of people. RSS-BJP has, through control over state machinery, combined communalism with 'development'. However, they were forced this time to speak on the issues faced by people, which showed the extent of people's disaffection. This also provides the basis and the issues on which people can be mobilized in coming time.

Electoral challenge to these fascist forces will yet happen in case of vast mobilization of people, severe crisis or where regional identity questions pose serious challenge. The limits of identity

politics have also been demonstrated, that bereft of class content this can easily be channelized by ruling fascist forces. These elections marked a serious decline of BSP, one of the main contenders for power in UP for nearly three decades. The votes polled by them are lowest over this period. BSP displayed a serious lack of intent in the contest for these elections. This decline of BSP has been used by RSS-BJP to offset the challenge by SP led alliance. In this, BSP leader Ms. Mayawati's mainly targeting SP led alliance in her speeches also helped RSS-BJP. SP led alliance made no efforts to win over these sections while RSS-BJP leaders- Modi, Shah, Yogi's praise of BSP and its leader Mayawati was meant to befriend these sections in the event of BSP not being a player for power in the state of UP.

These elections once again show bankruptcy of the opposition ruling class parties that sought to ride on people's anger without building or even participating in people's movements. In UP and Uttarakhand, the opposition parties of ruling classes remained totally inactive despite vast difficulties faced by the people e.g. during lockdown enforced migration of workers and during second corona wave besides rising unemployment and price rise.

AAP which has come to power in Punjab will now be tested and face exposure. Its rule in Delhi avoided serious scrutiny as Delhi is not a full-fledged state and important levers of power are in the hands of Central Govt. Punjab has a very high rate of educated unemployed with deepening agrarian crisis and very low level of industrialization. Different sectors of economy and social life are controlled by Mafia such as drug mafia, sand mafia, transport mafia and education. AAP represents a section of elite who find that power is monopolized by certain circles and families. Their main plank is

that with just the replacement of the people in power, conditions of people will improve even though policies remain similar.

These elections mark extra-parliamentary people's struggles as the main force against rule of fascist forces and to prevent complete fascist takeover of the state. This situation also underlines the role of revolutionary and struggling forces in building and developing this challenge through mass movement. The present phase shows it is not the divisions among ruling classes but the opposition of the people that will play the decisive role in the coming times. Decision of revolutionary peasant organizations not to participate in these elections and not to tail behind ruling class parties has been vindicated. The forces that acted otherwise have been rebuffed.

For working to implement this lesson, communist revolutionaries should pool all their forces and devote to building people's struggles along with developing revolutionary movement. They should overcome sectarianism and divisions to play their role. In addition, further attacks will be launched on the rights of states.

The emerging situation calls for all forces to join hands to build struggles. Sectarianism and capitulations must be shunned and fought against. Differences within Samyukt Kisan Morcha, an important fruit of the farmers' movement, should be overcome. Concrete steps must be taken to develop peasant struggle on MSP to every peasant besides taking the question of agrarian distress in a comprehensive way. Peasant struggles must be built in different parts of the country taking into account concrete issues of peasant masses in different states/regions.

Trade Unions must take up the challenge of attacks on workers. For this they must overcome sectarianism to mobilize vast

masses of workers, being prepared to face increasing attacks by the Govt. Complacency must be overcome and workers must be imbued with confidence to face the challenge.

Emerging situation calls for urgent steps to unite Tribals and Dalits with a struggle orientation. These sections must be mobilized on a vast scale on economic and social issues. Similarly youth and students must be galvanized to meet the attacks on education and rising scourge of unemployment. Struggles of women, who are facing increasing marginalization and coercion, must be built on wide scale.

All forces must be mobilized to defend the constitutional rights of the people. Role of the organizations for the defense of democratic rights of the people will further increase. Vast movements involving all possible forces need be built against increasing burden on the people which may be now increased with these elections out of the way, especially on price rise, increase in taxes on the people and growing mass unemployment.

Special Situation calls for special efforts. The situation does not permit complacency. People should be mobilized to face increasing conspiracies of ruling RSS-BJP to further sharpen their tools to further deepen communal division in society. Unite the people and rise in struggles. The serious situation has a bright side too. Revolutionary and democratic forces have an opportunity to play an important role.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy

10.3.2022



Oppose Russian Aggression against Ukraine !

Down with Imperialist Military Alliances including NATO !

Since US withdrawal from Afghanistan in defeat, contradictions among imperialist powers have intensified and Ukraine has become the latest victim.

It is the second attempt by imperialist powers since Second World War to shape the global order especially in Europe, the first being after dissolution of erstwhile Soviet Union. Then US led western powers had moved to reshape the order in Europe declaring victory in the 'Cold War'. Europe is again at the Centre of the present attempt at reshaping.

Russia has launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine by land, air and sea routes. Russian Air Force has launched attacks on all major urban centres and ground forces have entered from north, east and south at several points.

This war is essentially a fall out of sharpening conflicts among contending imperialist powers. USA and Russia are giving excuses for their stance in this war. All talk by US about democracy and commitment to international law and treaties is bogus. US had supported, nay engineered, overthrow of a democratically elected President of Ukraine in 2014, the beginning of the ongoing crisis in that country. US had encouraged, nay dictated to Ukraine to tear

apart Minsk agreements which had been signed by the Govt. of Ukraine and representatives of her breakaway regions; an agreement on which France, Germany and Russia signed as guarantors. While they talk of 'will of the people' of the countries to join NATO they are opposed to any such will of the people of Latin American countries. All along US establishment's aim has been to extend NATO closer to Russia. US establishment especially its military industrial complex has refused to draw any lessons from their fiasco in Iraq and Syria and utter defeat in Afghanistan. US imperialism especially its military industrial complex is intent on fomenting war. Biden Administration has continued to pursue the strategy of multi-theatre war drafted at the peak of the uni-polar world. They are unable to come to terms with multi-polar world.

Russian rulers have chosen to confront US and NATO led by them to increase area of their influence which had been systematically and considerably reduced since dissolution of Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union. Engaged in transition to 'private' capitalism i.e. loot and plunder of state properties; and for which they needed support of US led imperialist block, Russian rulers watched shrinking of their area of influence and expansion of US area of influence. With US getting bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, and having consolidated their control over Russia, ruling elite of Russia sought to claw back their influence. First they went about it area by area with limited aims e.g. Georgia and after US defeat in Afghanistan for whole sale roll back of US influence in the region. As events of Kazakhstan showed, Russia is re-emerging as the 'gendarme' in vast Eurasia.

Ruling elite of Ukraine, capitalist oligarchs, emerged like in Russia from loot and plunder of state properties. They had a conflict based in continued economic dependence on Russia besides

linguistic and cultural bonds, and their need to enlist US and West Europe for increasing their wealth and containing Russian influence. Rather than pursuing the interests of people of Ukraine, they hobnobbed with big powers. Fed up with oligarch politicians, Ukrainians elected a comedian but times are too cruel.

With this all out attack on Ukraine Russian rulers have proved that their talk of defending people of Donbas was just a stepping stone for their wider aim of controlling Ukraine. Russian President Putin who was earlier taking of ‘preventing genocide in eastern Ukraine’ has now launched a ‘special military operation’ to “demilitarize’ and ‘denazify’ Ukraine, aims which mean controlling Ukraine.

One of the main aims of the Biden Admn. of US is to reassert control over Western Europe where France and Germany were beginning to take an independent course. Biden’s slogan “US is Back” is targeted at that, and cancellation of Nord Stream 2 has been its focal point. In fact Russian Oil and Gas companies are contending with big oil companies of the West. In fact snuffing out challenge of Russian oil giants and increasing oil sales of US oil companies is one of the aims of US imperialism in this war. US has, from the beginning, made it clear that they are not going to send any combat troops, even ‘trainers’ in case of conflict and had withdrawn all their armed men from Ukraine.

Ukraine rulers have allowed their country to be a victim of intensifying contradictions of imperialist powers. US is trying to consolidate Western Europe and using Ukraine to rally support world over, while Russia is taking over Ukraine or at least substantial part of it, link areas controlled by it to that area in neighbouring Moldova which is aligned with Russia.

While Biden and Putin both have domestic compulsions to divert attention of the people from their deteriorating conditions, the real content of the present dispute lies in increasing scramble among imperialist powers for greater share of world resources, areas of influence and markets.

It is the people of Ukraine who are the real sufferers. Ukraine has long been a bone of contention among imperialist powers but has been ill served by its rulers. President Zelensky allowed his Govt. to be a tool of US's European policy and made himself totally dependent on "Ukrainian Nationalists". Against his election promise, he intensified attacks on Donbas regions, branded them as terrorists and refused to talk to them. Zelensky Govt. has been totally insensitive to problems of people, especially working class. People of Ukraine have every right to be independent and sovereign, a right threatened by big imperialist powers especially Russia, but present rulers do not represent this. Workers and people of Ukraine must step forward to not let their interests and aspirations be drowned by imperialist powers. They must step forward to peacefully resolve dispute in Eastern Ukraine in fraternal spirit.

Govt. of India has been caught in the bind due to this intensifying conflict between USA and Russia. Modi exhorted people of Uttar Pradesh to vote for his Party to strengthen a strong leader in view of situation in Ukraine without saying a word about what this strong leader would do. Ruling classes including ruling RSS-BJP have courted both USA and Russia to counter China. In fact their so-called independence stems from their courting different imperialist powers. But the present war is restricting scope for that. Indian Govt. has so far maintained 'neutrality', not criticized Russia in UNSC a stand being interpreted as favourable to

Russia both by Russia as well as western powers. Ukraine Ambassador's statement is also in same vein. Prime Minister of Pakistan visited Russia even after it had attacked Ukraine, ignoring opposition from US.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy condemns Russian attack on Ukraine. We consider this war is born out of increasing conflict among imperialist powers and their seeking and consolidating areas of influence at the expense of the rights and national aspirations of the people of different countries. The present war has once again proved IMPERIALISM MEANS WAR. CPI (ML)-New Democracy calls upon the people of India to demand to end of attack on Ukraine and disbanding of NATO and other imperialist military alliances while immediately halting their expansion.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy calls upon people to intensify the struggle against imperialism and its reactionary allies. Confront imperialist war designs with people's struggles for independence from imperialist dictates, liberation from oppression by imperialism and their allies, and strengthening revolutionary movement for their overthrow.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy also calls upon the Govt. of India to take urgent steps to ensure that Indians return safely from Ukraine.

Central Committee

CPI (ML)-New Democracy

February 24, 2022



**BRING BACK INDIAN
STUDENTS WITHOUT DELAY !**

**STOP RUSSIAN INVASION;
DISBAND NATO**

**DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM
SPECIALLY US & RUSSIAN
IMPERIALISM**

Thousands of Indian students are stranded in Ukraine in a war zone without food, water, electricity and amidst continuous shelling. These students had gone there to pursue medical education. They are being asked to come out of Ukraine on their own and the Govt. effort hitherto is limited to bringing them back once they come out of Ukraine on their own.

Indian students are caught in a war resulting from Russian attack on Ukraine. Russia in turn wants to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. The war is due to contention among Russia and America over influence in Europe in which people of Ukraine are victims, going through immense suffering. People world over are opposing this invasion and demand disbanding of instruments of imperialist military aggression including NATO.

We demand “STOP WAR” & “END IMPERIALIST AGGRESSIONS”. We recognize that these wars are for spheres of influence. Hence our slogan is, “Down with Imperialism.” This war is for imperialist aims and against the people.

This ordeal of Indian medical students has highlighted scarcity of medical seats in Govt. institutions despite country facing shortage of doctors, and skyrocketing fees in private medical colleges in India. We demand increase in seats and regulation of fees.

Union Govt. has displayed criminal apathy towards the plight of these students. Rather than taking steps for their early evacuation, a Union Minister mocked them for having failed to secure a seat in India! Students fleeing in this freezing weather come with tales of unresponsive Indian authorities and ill-treatment at the hands of Ukrainian officials.

Just as in the Corona period, the Prime Minister was totally absorbed in the election campaign for state assemblies. Govt. boasts of its high standing and friendship with Russia, Ukraine and US yet did not help needy students. Why does the Govt. not have time to approach Russia and Ukraine to let Indian planes evacuate Indians? Once again, Indian lives are of no worth!

Urgent steps are needed to ensure these students complete their education.

We call upon all students to join protests to demand immediate end to this war. We denounce Govt.’s apathy and demand BRING INDIAN STUDENTS HOME immediately.

Come out on the streets in large numbers in programmes all over India on **11th and 12th March!** Stand with war ravaged people and stranded Indian students !

Assemble at Jantar Mantar on 11th March.

WE DEMAND

* GOI Act Immediately ! * Russia & Ukraine Give safe passage to our students ! * Stop Russian Attack on Ukraine ! * American rulers, Freeze NATO immediately !

Progressive and Democratic Students Union (PDSU)

Punjab Students Union (PSU)

Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS)



(Activists of Punjab Students Union (PSU) and Progressive & Democratic Students Union (PDSU) Delhi demonstrating on March 11, 2022 at Jantar Mantar, Parliament Street, New Delhi demanding to bring back all Indian students from Ukraine immediately and denouncing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Demonstrators also demanded dissolution of NATO and other imperialist military alliances. Leaders of the participating organizations addressed the demonstrators.)

Supreme Court Must Stay Karnataka HC Verdict Which Will Result In Exclusion Of Hijab wearing Muslim Girls From Accessing Education

(A statement issued on 15th March 2022 on this issue is being reproduced here. This statement is endorsed by representatives of a number of women's organizations, democratic rights organizations and rights activists, writers etc. Karnataka High Court judgment is a blow to the right to education of Muslim girls and young women. The very concept of a 'uniform' is being distorted and specifically used to discriminate against Muslim girls. Concept of uniforms in schools had always meant what should be worn and not what should not be worn. Use of scarves was never considered a violation of uniforms. This discriminatory order to prohibit use of headscarves is part of Hindutva campaign to bar Muslims from education. Sudershan TV had run a campaign against higher education of Muslims, branding it as UPSC jihad. And now RSS chief himself has talked of a certain community entering Govt. services. His meaning and intent is clear and provides the context to the present attack against the right of education of Muslim young women. It is time the apex court must step in to stop this muddle lest the very administration of law is made to conform to prejudices spread,

upheld and enforced by a certain organization itself or through its frontal outfits.)

The Karnataka High Court in its order today has held that wearing of hijab is not essential to the practice of Islam; that College Development Committees (CDCs) have a right to prescribe a uniform; and that Muslim girls must comply with whatever uniform is prescribed by their college.

1. We, the undersigned organizations working for women's rights and democratic rights, note that the Supreme Court is already apprised of the issue. We are confident that the Supreme Court will protect hijab-wearing Muslim girls and women from discrimination and exclusion in the name of school or college uniforms.

2. The Karnataka HC judgment recognises that CDCs of colleges have a right to make decisions regarding uniforms. In Karnataka itself, many colleges have made additions to their rules specifying that hijabs could be worn along with uniforms. Likewise **we appeal to all CDCs in Karnataka to allow girls and women to wear hijabs along with uniforms just as Sikh boys and men can wear turbans, and Hindus can wear bindis, tilaks, threads, sindoor etc.**

3. We take this opportunity to remind the CDCs that not a single college in Karnataka originally had any rule banning the wearing of hijab; in fact one college rule book actually specified that students could wear hijabs conforming to the colour of the uniform. So it was not hijab wearing girls who defied the prescribed uniforms. It was Hindu-supremacist groups that disrupted colleges, forcing them to amend the rules to selectively prohibit hijabs. This was a chance for the Karnataka HC to address bullying in schools

and colleges and both the institutions; but failing to do so, has endangered many people from minority communities and identities who may look different or be different from the most.

4. We appeal to the Supreme Court to issue an immediate stay on the Karnataka HC order.

This order will have a far-reaching negative impact on the safety, dignity, and right to education of Muslim girls and women. We point out that the even the interim order of the Karnataka HC had resulted in not only Muslim girl students but even Muslim women teachers being prohibited from entering school/college grounds. The order became a pretext for publicly humiliating Muslim girls and women by demanding that they strip off their hijabs publicly at school/college gates as a condition for entrance. Hijab-wearing students were forced to miss classes and even exams as a result of the order; and some Muslim women even resigned as teachers in protest at the indignity of being forced to strip off an item of clothing. Also, the Karnataka order encouraged educational authorities all over the country to prohibit entry of hijab-wearing students and teachers into campuses.

Further, there were instances of hijab-wearing women being accosted and harassed in other public spaces too - for instance in a bank in Bihar. **So as to protect hijab-wearing Muslim girls and women from any further such grievous instances of discrimination, exclusion, publicly humiliation, and harassment, we appeal to the Supreme Court to lose no time in issuing a stay on the Karnataka HC order. This was a chance to address bullying in schools and colleges and both the institutions and courts failed in addressing it thereby endangering many**

people from minority communities and identities who may look different or be different from the most.

5. The reasoning of the Karnataka HC verdict is misleading and unsatisfactory on many counts:

a) The verdict spends most of its time arguing that the wearing of hijab (headscarf) is not an essential practice in Islam. But it fails to satisfactorily address the main issues: **is it not discriminatory and unconstitutional to selectively force a Muslim girl or woman to lose her access to education in case she wears a hijab?**

b) The verdict cites a passage from Dr. Ambedkar's writings on how "compulsory system of purdah" results in segregation and seclusion of Muslim women, to then argue that wearing of hijab/veil etc may inhibit emancipation, public participation, and access to education for Muslim girls and women. This is a shocking distortion of the thrust and intention of Dr Ambedkar's observations. Dr Ambedkar's remarks are not about any item of clothing. **Dr Ambedkar refers specifically to the compulsory purdah system preventing girls and women from appearing in public outdoors; a form of forced segregation preventing them from accessing education and from "outdoor activity". Dr Ambedkar did not suggest, as the HC order implies, that a Muslim girl or woman voluntarily wearing a headscarf (hijab) be prevented from accessing education and thus forced back into seclusion inside the home or segregation by being forced to study in a separate Muslim school or college!**

c) The verdict cites the Indian Young Lawyers Association vs. State of Kerala judgment (popularly known as the Sabarimala

judgment) to assert that the constitutional “right to freedom of religion” does not protect all religious practices; and that therefore cannot protect the practice of wearing hijab. **How can the Sabarimala verdict against prohibition of women’s entry into temples be used to justify prohibiting the entry of hijab-wearing girls and women into schools or colleges? !**

d) **The verdict makes the mistake of equating uniforms with “uniformity”.** In India, school/college uniforms have always accommodated social and religious diversity: allowing Sikh boys and girls to wear turbans, for instance. So such diversity that accommodates turbans and hijabs is not at odds with uniforms. Enforced uniformity has never been a feature of Indian schools and colleges. The verdict mentions the MEC EDUCATION: KWAZULU-NATAL judgment which held a South African school’s refusal to allow a Hindu girl to wear a nose stud with her uniform, to be unconstitutional. It holds that this case cannot apply to the hijab since the nose stud is “ocularly insignificant”! The ethical and constitutional arguments of a court should not rely on such subjective biases: which does not see a Hindu girl’s nose stud as disturbing to the eye but finds a Muslim girl’s headscarf to be so.

e) The verdict, as we have pointed out, wrongly applies Ambedkar’s concerns about forcible segregation of women, to the voluntary wearing of hijab. It implies that the practice of hijab itself militates against women, and thus should not be allowed in schools and colleges. **The verdict fails to understand the very concept of women’s autonomy and consent, since it fails to distinguish between forcible imposition of religious practices on women against their will; and women’s choice to observe certain practices based on their free will.** The Sabarimala analogy can make this point clear. Women

petitioned court to be allowed to enter Sabarimala since the prohibition on women's entry violated their rights and equality. **The court in striking down the prohibition on women's entry in the name of the temple authorities' "freedom to practice religion", did not in any way force women who believed they should not enter Sabarimala, to enter it against their will in the name of "emancipation"! Likewise, it is abhorrent that hijab wearing girls or women should be barred from entering schools or colleges in the name of "emancipation". Emancipation lies in respecting the autonomy of girls and women, not in forcing practices on them in the name of either religion or secularism.**

We reiterate our solidarity with the hijab-wearing Muslim students fighting for their right to education, dignity, and autonomy.

(This statement is endorsed by representatives of a number of women's organizations namely All India Progressive Women's Association, Saheli Women's Resource Centre, National Federation of Indian Women, Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan, Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression, All India Democratic Women's Association, Forum Against Oppression of Women, Feminists in Resistance, Bebaak Collective. Besides women's organizations the statement is also endorsed by People's Union for Civil Liberties, National Alliance of People's Movements and a number of activists including civil right activists, researchers, writers and a film maker)

□ □ □

Working Class Must Make Successful Two Day All India Strike !

(Trade Unions have called two day strike on March 28 & 29, 2022. The strike was earlier called for February 23 & 24, 2022 but was deferred then. A leaflet issued by Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) which has called for strike, here deals with the issues on which this strike has been called. It also outlines the importance for the workers to make this strike a resounding success to mount a serious challenge to the Govt.'s intensifying attacks against the workers. It is expected that this strike action would initiate a fight back from the working class.)

The Central Government has launched serious and all round attack on wage, job security hard-won rights of working class of India. It is with this objective that the Central Government brought in four Labour Codes replacing 29 earlier hard won labour laws. Brought in the name of simplifying labour laws, they will effectively do away with whatever few provisions in favour of workers existed in the earlier laws. The definition of industry has been changed, as a result of which many establishments will now no more be treated as industries. Since the threshold of the number of workers has been doubled to define a factory, lakhs of workers will

not be considered as workers now, thereby pushing them out from applicability of labour laws. Right to Strike under the new IR Code is practically made impossible and normal protest forms like mass casual leave will be considered as strike. Retrenchments will become easy for managements employing less than three hundred workers which was hundred earlier. Workers can be hired and fired at will. Another means to hire and fire is the Fixed Term Employment, where the situation of the worker will be worse than that of contractual workers.

Overall, a twelve hour work day will become official. It comes with the dubious promise of a shorter working week day which workers know is a myth. Enforcement machinery has already been cut, now labour inspectors will become facilitators restricting their powers to bring to book non-compliant managements. These are termed as “labour reforms” but they are not in the interests of the working class. They are measures driven by the big businesses in the country and abroad and Ease of Doing Business is the overarching principle of the Modi government in framing the new Codes. These codes are slated to come into effect from 1st April if workers’ struggle does not ensure their repeal.

Let us remember, even if the labour laws were hardly ever implemented unless workers’ struggles enforced them, they provided a framework in which workers’ rights were established.

Under the cover of the pandemic, the Central government has declared that all PSUs will be privatized or shut. The policy of privatization has nothing to do with profit or loss making of a particular PSU. That is why profit-making Navaratnas like BPCL and Maharatnas are being sold out to private players. Visakha Steels is already under the axe of privatization. This process is

already on with bringing the largest insurer in the world, the LIC, for sale. The Indian Railways, railway stations, ordnance factories, defence units, coal mines, steel works, ports, docks, banks, oil companies etc all are to be privatized. Air India is back in Tata's pockets while public money will be used to pay back its debts. All PSUs were built by public money, on land acquired by displacing people and peasantry with the promise of building the country's assets. They cannot be gifted on a platter to the MNCs or the local Corporate. It is on workers' shoulders to save them. Privatization will mean loss of jobs and livelihood, loss of right to reservations of SC, STs in these concerns, throwing away of the public money spent to build up these PSUs and also handing over of the huge acres of acquired land on which they stand.

The Government has opened all sectors of the economy for foreign investment even as e-commerce companies eat up small markets of the country. Over four million workers walked home hungry and devastated by the unplanned lockdown and a maximum are yet to get back jobs. The AASHA and the Anganwadi workers, who actually were in forefront of the fight in the pandemic, are not yet entitled to minimum wage, ESI or PF. The thousands of contract workers in the municipalities, in hospitals and in other essential services who kept the country running even during the pandemic and anyway keep it running, remain neglected, and face continual job insecurity.

Now the Codes will do away with the responsibilities of principal employers. Gig workers need regulated wages and hours of work. All such sections of workers in the unorganized sector live and work in deplorable conditions due to the policies of the government. The list is endless, and the labour law implementation is urgently needed. But it has been crippled and will not exist in old

form if the 4 Codes are in place. All unorganized workers too need to be part of the fight-back against changes in labour laws.

Working class of India must take inspiration from the united struggle of India's farmers who were successful in beating back the attempt of the Central government to handover India's Agriculture and land to big companies. They must make the 28 and 29th March Strike a fitting, broad based, united answer of the working class to the pro-corporate policies of the BJP government.



Students' Demonstration against New Education Policy

A demonstration was held by Delhi Coordination Committee of All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE) on (March 16th, 2022) at Ministry of Education, Shastri Bhawan New Delhi. About 100 activists of different participant organizations gathered at Shastri Bhawan Gate and started sloganeering. Despite heavy police presence and barricading, participants managed to stay there and force the authorities to meet a delegation.

A five member delegation comprising of Coms. Bhim (KYS), Sumit (SFI), Abhigyan (AISA), Vikas Gupta (AIFRTE) and Mrigank (AIFRTE) went inside. Delegation met the Secretary for Higher Education, who was apprised of the points and views.

A meeting continued till the delegation came out. Speakers from all the organizations addressed the gathering.

Main demands are:

- Repeal FYUP
- Restore M Phil
- Establish More Hostels
- Control Rent in Student Areas
- Stop Implementation of NEP 2020
- Repeal Common Entrance Test (CUCET) For Central Universities
- Adjust Maintenance & Development Charges Collected During Closure of Universities

(AIFRTE Delhi Coordination Committee consists of students organizations including PDSU and teachers organizations)



JANHASTAKSHEP REPORT ON CUSTODIAL DEATH OF JISHAN IN TIHAR JAIL OF DELHI; ALL FOR THE CHARGE OF STEALING CIGARETTES.

(We are publishing here a report by Janhastakshep on custodial death of a young person who was arrested on the charge of stealing cigarettes. The incident is a testimony to the anti-poor character of state agencies in the country.)

In late evening on the 18th of February 2022 Janhastakshep learned of the alleged custodial murder of a 19 year old boy Jishan in Tihar Jail through a tweet shared on social media. *(The name as it appears on the Aadhaar card of the boy and in the FIR registered against him is spelt as Jishan and not Zeeshan, and hence we have used 'Jishan' throughout this report.)* Later we also read about the case in a report by Arbab Ali that was published in Maktoob Media on 19 February. What was most intriguing was that Jishan had been in jail for nearly three months for having stolen some cigarette packets from a roadside pan shop, and he ultimately ended up losing his life for that.

On 19 February, 2022, Janhastakshep decided to investigate the sequence of events leading up to Jishan's death. A two member team comprising of Dr. Vikas Bajpai, assistant professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and senior journalist Shri

Satyendra Ranjan was constituted for the purpose and the team set on to its work in earnest on the same day.

During the course of our investigation we spoke to the following persons for information in the matter:

1. Parents, other family members and neighbors of Jishan.
2. Arbab Ali, journalist
3. Investigating Officer in the FIR filed against Jishan at Preet Vihar police station, Sh. Sandeep Kumar.
4. Counsel for Jishan, Ms Apoorva Bhati.
5. Sub-Inspector Sh Niranjan Kumar, IO of the case filed at Hari Nagar police station in the matter of Jishan's death.
6. Sh. Abhimanyu and Ms Kiran (PS to the DG prisons) in the Office of the Director General Prisons, Sh Sandeep Goyal.
7. Office of the Superintendent of Central Jail 5, Tihar Jail, Sh Hukum Chand.
8. Law officer of Tihar Jail, Sh Zorawar Singh.
9. Medical Director of Deen Dayal Upadhaya (DDU) hospital, Dr B L Chaudhary.
10. Some other persons who spoke to us on the condition of anonymity.

Facts of the case:

The following are the statements of facts collated by the team to facilitate a sequential and logical understanding of the case.

1. As per the date of birth mentioned on his Adhaar card, Jishan was a 19 years old boy. He belongs to an extremely poor family. Jeshan's family residing at E – 40/144, jhuggi near Radhu Place,

Laxmi Nagar, Preet Vihar East, in East Delhi hails from the village of Rajpur Nawada of Najibabad tehsil of district Bijnor of Uttar Pradesh, and has been living at the above address for the last thirty years.

Jishan's father Mohmmmed Yakub, age 45 years is a cycle rickshaw puller, and his mother Shanno, age 42 years, works as a domestic help in the nearby colonies. Jishan himself used to work as a motor mechanic. Among Jishan's siblings are his sisters 18 years old Nargis who is married, and 12 year old Afreen. His elder brothers are Firoz, 22 years of age, who works in a barber shop, and 21 year old Ayub, who is handicapped. Another brother is 16 year old Afnan. The youngest of Jishan's siblings Afnan and Afreen are not attending any school despite being of school going age.

2. The tragedy of the accident of his birth apart, Jishan's problems leading up to his death began with FIR No. 455/21 (Annexure 1) registered under section 154 Cr.P.C. on the 19th of November, 2022. A case was slapped on Jishan under sections 457 (Lurking house-trespass or house-breaking by night in order to commit offence punishable with imprisonment up to five years) and 380 (theft in dwelling, house etc. with provision of imprisonment extending up to 7 years) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Act of 1860.

The said FIR was filed on the complaint made by one Anil Chaurasia, s/o Prem Nath Chaurasia. Anil Chaurasia makes a living by selling cigarettes, bottled water and snacks etc. at his shop located at 8 A/1, East Guru Angad Nagar, close by to Jishan's residence.

As per the FIR, on early morning of 19 November 2021 at 3.30 am head constable Chander Bhan Singh and constable Ombir Singh had caught Jishan red handed as he was stealing cigarette

packets from Anil Chaurasia's shop. Thereafter the police informed Chaurasia of the theft in his shop and the FIR was filed on a formal complaint given by Anil Chaurasia. It has been alleged in the complaint that Jishan was caught by the police as he was about to flee from the shop after filling a big plastic bag with cigarettes.

Jishan's family on the other hand asserts that he had not broken any locks and that he had only stolen one or two packets of cigarettes.

3. As alleged by Jishan's mother Shanno, when they went to the police station to plead forgiveness and release of their son the police demanded Rs 15,000 to settle the case. As the family was not in a position to give the money, Jishan was sent to jail on 20th November, 2021.
4. Jishan's parents had last met him in jail on 27th January, 2022. During the meeting they found him to be in normal condition and he did not complain of any discomfort suggesting ill-health or bodily discomfort.
5. On 15th of February, 2022, Jishan's parents received a phone call from sub-inspector Niranjana Kumar of Hari Nagar police station who informed them that their son was unwell and had been admitted in DDU hospital. He asked them to come over to the hospital to see their son.
6. Upon reaching the hospital they were told that their son was dead and they were shown the dead body of their son. The body had severe marks of injury all over the body which suggested that he had been brutally assaulted physically rather than having suffered some illness as they were being told. Jishan's mother reported that upon being asked as to why they had not

been told that Jishan was already dead, the sub-inspector reportedly told them that he apprehended lest the mother or anyone else in the family may get an attack.

It couldn't however be clarified if the parents had asked from police as to whether their son was already dead when he was brought to the hospital from the jail, or that he died after being admitted to the hospital? The parents themselves nevertheless asserted that their son was already dead when he was brought to the hospital.

The body was not handed over to Jishan's parents as the post-mortem was still to be performed on the body, which ultimately was carried out on the 17th of February, 2022.

7. On the 17th of February the family was handed over the body after the postmortem. Back at home, as ablution was being performed on the body before burial the family members told that Jishan's bones had been broken at several places, including ribs and elbows etc. Before burial the family took pictures of the body to have a record of them. Injuries had been sustained over the right and the left shoulders. As the family reported, that the shoulder bones on both sides had been broken (Figure 4). Both eyes were swollen with there being clear sign of hemorrhage (bleeding) over the right eye, over the nose and below the left eye. There is injury mark suggestive of blow by a blunt object over the forehead on the left side (Left side photo). The photograph on the right side shows signs of bleeding under the skin and (query) a piercing injury in the region where kidney is located. Figure 5: There were signs of severe hemorrhage on the shins of both the legs. Figure 6: Signs of extensive sub-cutaneous bleeding on the back of thigh and the legs. As can be

seen from the pictures, these injuries are not localized to just one part of the body, but are all over the body. The distribution of these injuries over the body rules out the possibility of the injuries being accidental or self-inflicted.

8. Unable to afford a lawyer, Jishan was provided legal counsel, Ms Apoorva Bhati, from the Legal Aid Services. When contacted telephonically Ms Apoorva told that she had filed the first bail application for Jishan within 15 days of his arrest, and another one soon thereafter (she did not remember the dates of the applications off hand) in the court of the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM). Both of these bail applications were rejected by the court of Sh Pankaj Arora, ACMM, Karkardoma Courts.
9. There had been two virtual hearings in the case on 21st January, 2022 and 4th February, 2022, the order sheets of which (Annexures 2 and 3) record that ‘Accused not produced from J.C.’ (judicial custody). Even though the order sheet does not mention any reason for non-production of the accused, but this is a worrisome lapse in terms of Court’s ability to assure itself of the safety and well-being of the accused kept in judicial custody.
10. The court had granted a conditional bail in the third bail application moved by the lawyer of the accused on 25th January, 2022. Granting the bail, the court set the condition of producing a surety of Rs 20,000 (Annexure 4). It stated:

The applicant / accused is not a previous convict for the similar offence. Keeping in view of the present scenario of Covid-19 and the period of custody of the applicant / accused, it is ordered that the accused / applicant is admitted on bail on his furnishing

personal bond in the sum of Rs 20,000 with one surety in the like amount

11. That despite having granted bail to the accused on 25th of January, 2022, in the hearing on 4th February, 2022 the court simply, and rather naively noted the nonproduction of the accused who had continued to be in judicial custody without any application of mind to the fact that this poor boy, who had no proven record of any past crime (as noted in court's own order sheet), was languishing in jail for as petty a crime as stealing cigarettes. Given the economic circumstances of the family it was nearly impossible for them to be able to produce a surety of Rs 20,000.

This is the state of affairs despite the fact that in the 1978 matter of *Moti Ram v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, the Supreme Court bench headed by late Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer had deemed the issue of unreasonably high sureties demanded by the courts as a human rights problem. It was suggested by the court that the surety amount should be determined in consideration of the socio-economic condition of the accused person. The dictum – ‘judges should be more inclined towards bail and not jail’ as articulated by Justice Krishna Iyer is perhaps good enough only for window dressing the system of criminal jurisprudence in the country to generate a sentiment of ‘positivity’ without entailing truly positive deeds.

12. Jishan's misfortune seems like an unending tragedy. Janhastakshep had had the case file of Jishan inspected by advocate and president of Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan, Ms Shobha, who told that finally the court had issued the release order for Jishan to be released from prison on the 14th of

February on a personal bond instead of demanding surety of Rs 20,000. As per the laid down procedure the release order is communicated to the jail on the same day by evening and the prisoner is supposed to be released from the prison the same evening. These apparent lapses, while being a matter of further investigation, potentially raise serious questions regarding the role of the jail authorities in the entire matter.

Jishan's parents told that the IO from Preet Vihar police station had come to their house on 10th February, 2022 to make inquiries about their address and get their signatures on some paper. The IO Sandeep Kumar later confirmed to Janhastakshep that this was as part of verification process for granting of personal bond. However, as explained to us by lawyers, no verification is required for releasing an accused on the basis of his / her personal bond, and that if the court was inclined to release the accused on a personal bond, this could have been easily done on 10 February itself.

13. The Janhastakshep team sought to make the necessary effort to inquire whether the statutory guidelines regarding 'Standard Operating Procedure' (SOP) issued by NHRC have been followed in the case of custodial death of Jishan. Unfortunately, our inquiries in this matter ended up raising many more questions than answering some.

We sought to seek answers in respect of a judicial inquest having been ordered in the matter Jishan's death in judicial custody from various officials of the jail administration. Our quest for answers from the jail administration only led to reaffirmation of an acute sense of criminal indifference and nihilism on their part towards the safety and well-being of prison inmates; especially

those belonging to the poorer and marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, and are languishing in jails for having allegedly committed petty crimes.

In the first round, the office of the Director General of Prison Services, Shri Sandeep Goyal feigned ignorance of any knowledge regarding the matter and directed us to speak with the superintendent of Central Jail 5 (where Jishan had been lodged), Sh Hukum Chand. After we were finally connected to the under trial office through the central telephone exchange of the jail, Hukum Chand declined to speak with us despite being present there. The attendant who had received the call was overheard through the phone asking someone (probably the superintendent) whether he should cut the call. Later we were directed to call the superintendent's office at another extension, but the call was never picked.

In the second round of our conversation with the DG's office on 22nd February, 2022, we were directed to the Law Officer of the jail, Sh Zorawar Singh, who could finally be reached over phone only on the morning of next day i.e. on 23rd of February, 2022.

The initial response to our pointed query to the Law Officer – 'Whether an inquest had been instituted into the death of Jishan', the answer was evasive. He replied that Jisan was a drug addict, and he suffered from some medical condition which led to lowering of platelet count in his blood. As a result of this he had profuse internal bleeding in the body leading to his death.

However, Zorawar Singh changed track when his initial reply was countered by the fact that one of the members of the Janhastakshep inquiry team, Vikas Bajpai, was a medical doctor

himself. It was pointed out to him that the distribution of injury marks over Jishan's body, the type of bleeding as evident from the photographs, and that the family members noticing fractures in several bones of the victim's body suggested otherwise.. The Law Officer submitted that what he had said was just his opinion, and that the conclusion reached through an inquest could be very different.

The question that begets an answer is - how did the Law Officer arrive at what he called as "his opinion", especially as being a non-medical person he was most unlikely to be in the know of the function of platelets and the medical conditions which could result in excessive bleeding within the body leading to death, let alone establish a link between 'drug addiction' and 'bleeding due to platelet deficiency'? The only plausible reason to explain what the Law Officer had opined to begin with seems to be that this was the narrative woven by jail officials at different levels, possibly including the jail doctors, to put the entire incident under the wraps.

At this juncture, when again pressed for telling whether an inquest had actually been instituted, Zorawar Singh replied that this has to be done as per the standing instructions. Thereafter he begged leave from the conversation by telling that he shall inquire more about the incident and get back with more information. We did not hear from him again.

14. Meanwhile, a senior doctor at DDU hospital who was in the know of things regarding the post-mortem of Jishan, stated that there were multiple injury marks on his body that were four to five days old. Through another channel Janhastakshep learned that a board had been constituted to finalize the post-mortem report

of Jishan, and that at the time of writing this report, the forensic report on the internal body organs was still awaited.

The responses provided by the Law Officer of Tihar jail and the limited information provided by the doctor at DDU stand in direct contradiction with each other and suggest that the jail authorities are already trying to whitewash Jishan's murder under their watch.

What can be surmised from above facts of the case?

One apparent reality that emerges strongly from the above description is that the deliverance of 'justice' through the administration of criminal jurisprudence in the country may at best be incidental, while perpetuation of the present system through rule of Law and Rules as established is the primary objective. This orientation of criminal jurisprudence in the country owes to its colonial moorings not just in spirit but also in literally following the Criminal Procedure Code as was established by the British to maintain their rule over India. Superficial trappings of parliamentary democracy apart, the present scheme of things ends up reducing the working masses of India to being subjects of India's ruling elite who have gotten used to seeing themselves in the image of new 'emperors' of the country.

In this regard it is noteworthy that the sections 457 and 380 slapped on Jishan for the 'grand' theft of stealing cigarette packets from a shop derive directly from the colonial era Indian Penal Code (IPC) Act of 1860.

Crime committed under these sections is non-bailable i.e. the bail in the matter has to be secured from the court. We cannot comment whether these particular sections were imposed subsequent to the family's inability to pay Rs 15,000 demanded by

the police, as alleged by Jishan's mother, for the settlement of the case. However, our conversation with the IO Sandeep Kumar suggested that, given the circumstances of the alleged crime, i.e. breaking into the premises for theft at night, mandated imposition of these sections without regard to the triviality of the crime, or vulnerable age of the accused, or for that matter his socioeconomic background that lent him to being easy victim of the numerous brutalities of the world at large.

Likewise, in dismissing the first two bail applications filed on behalf of the accused; then granting conditional bail on production of a surety of Rs 20,000 without regard to the socioeconomic circumstances of the accused; in not taking any material cognizance of non-production of the accused in two consecutive hearings; in overlooking the fact that despite having been granted bail, why Jishan continued to languish in jail; and then issuing his release order on personal bond in the classic manner of too little, too late, the learned ACMM may still have satisfied the system he serves, as also his own conscience, for having done his duty. It is another thing that such satisfaction of official duties directly undermines individual lives and societal well-being. The lives are rendered into mere statistics, i.e. if at all.

The conduct of the jail authorities in this entire episode has bordered on criminality, as indeed it has in many other cases of deaths in judicial custody. As per a report published in The Hindustan Times on 28 September, 2021, the NHRC was constrained to communicate to the Delhi Government its observation that – that such incidents inside the jail point towards “negligence by the prison authorities” resulting in “gross violation” of human rights of the inmates in custody of the state. In fact, there have been numerous reports where in the statutory guidelines laid

down by NHRC are being flagrantly violated in cases of deaths in police or judicial custody.

As it appeared from our conversation with the jail authorities, it seems no inquest into the circumstances of Jishan's death had been initiated by them even one week after Jishan was murdered / grievously assaulted in the jail. There was only a weak submission by the Law Officer of Tihar Jail that the inquest will follow. This was the attitude despite categorical guidelines issued by NHRC in this regard.

In its order dated 4th September, 2020, interpreting the provisions of Section 176(1)(A) of Cr.P.C., the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has stated that in the matter of death, disappearance or rape, while a person is in police or judicial custody, an inquest conducted by Judicial Magistrate or Metropolitan Magistrate in such cases is mandatory. In fact, it states that:

So the inquiry is the condition precedent to determine an offence and unless the inquiry is conducted by Judicial Magistrate or Metropolitan Magistrate there seems to be no scope to determine that such incident of custodial death, disappearance or rape as the case may be, is an offence.

Janhastakshep strongly feels that if appropriate intervention is not made in this case at this stage it would be nearly impossible to get any justice whatsoever for Jishan and his family, and that the culprits shall manage to go scot free.

Our demands

In the light of the foregoing submissions Janhastakshep demands:

The Jail Superintendent of Central Jail 5 at Tihar should be immediately suspended for having failed to uphold the safety of the

prisoners under his watch. Other jail staff who are in a position to tamper with the evidence in the case should be immediately changed from their present posting.

The people suspected of involvement in the murder of Jishan should be immediately apprehended and booked under the appropriate sections of law.

An inquest should be immediately initiated in the matter under the watch of NHRC.

The NHRC should immediately take cognizance of the matter and adequate compensation should be given by the government to the family of Jishan.

Appropriate criminal proceedings should be carried out against the accused consequent to the findings of the inquest proceedings.

(Annexures with the Report as well as photos included in the Report including those showing injury marks on the body of deceased are not being published here.)

□ □ □

Farmers' Organizations Renew Protests Against Govt.'s Refusal to Implement Written Agreement

● **Ashish Mital**

Representatives of the Peasant Organizations of Samyukt Kisan Morcha met in Delhi on 14th of March and discussed the failure of the Govt. to fulfill the written promises made to the farmers.

The various issues which came up included the failure of the Central govt. to announce the formation of the Committee to look into the demand for MSP to all farmers. The formal letter sent from the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare dated 9 December 2021 appealing to the farmers to withdraw their agitation, had clearly stated that the PM and the Agriculture Minister have already announced the formation of a Committee including representatives of the Central and State govts and the farmers, including those from the SKM which will have a mandate on “how to guarantee MSP to the farmers of the country”. The letter stated that the “Govt. has already assured that the present arrangement of procurement at MSP shall continue”. After January 15 SKM

meeting when 31st January was observed as a Day of Betrayal, the Govt announced in Parliament that the committee shall be announced in March. However, the Committee has not been announced so far.

On the issue of withdrawal of cases and payment of compensation, the letter had stated that departments and agencies linked to the Govt. of India and including Delhi and all Union Territories shall “with immediate effect withdraw all cases linked to the agitation”. It also said that Haryana and UP govts have already in principle agreed to grant compensation while Punjab Govt. has also made an announcement. Though progress on the matter has been made in Punjab and Haryana and some cases were notified for withdrawal in Delhi, in other states there has been no development. No case has been withdrawn in UP, Madhya Pradesh and many other states, nor have the Railways and central agencies done so. The payment of compensation to the Martyrs’ families and to those injured has largely not been done outside of Punjab.

Meanwhile there has been reverse development in the Lakhimpur massacre case. While the main accused, the Union Minister of state for Home, Ajay Misra Teni continues to occupy his position, his son, Ashish Misra ‘Monu’, who was present along with the attackers, has been granted bail by the High Court. While the SIT formed by the Supreme Court has clearly stated that this attack was a conspiracy, the High Court kept the order of bail pending and quietly announced it a month later in February. A key witness has since been attacked after his release. Moreover, during this period, the farmers charged with murder of 3 of Misra’s associates when the mob had caught them, have been charge sheeted in a separate FIR lodged by the goons even though it had

been assured by the Govt. that they will be booked only under section 304 B under the same FIR.

The Electricity Bill has not been taken up nor has there been any consultation with stake holders/ SKM as promised.

Under these conditions the SKM meeting decided to call for the following actions:

1. An All India Protest day on March 21, with protests at Govt offices against failure of the govt to fulfil its commitments to SKM and with submission of memorandum to the President of India.
2. SKM shall organise protest programs in support of Trade Unions' All India Strike against 4 labour codes on March 28 and 29.
3. SKM shall hold a week long protest, MSP Guarantee Week, on the issue of MSP and related issues, demanding proper declaration of MSP of wheat, mustard and all other crops as per the C2+50% formula, procurement guarantee of all crops of all farmers and distribution of free ration of 10 kg foodgrain, vegetable oil, pulses, sugar, salt to each card holder every month. These week long programs should include big gatherings/ protests. They could be in form of dharnas, seminars, protest rallies, demonstrations, as is possible.

Along with this protest other demands of farmers which have arisen during this period also need to be highlighted. One is that though the Govt says it is committed to continue whatever procurement is already on, during the last procurement season it has set limits to Govt procurement per acre of land and total procurement per district. Secondly, during this period the Govt has

made a new law taking over management by the Centre of hydro electric projects from state govts as well as developing new inter linking of rivers projects which will impact the facilities of irrigation in states. Thirdly some important issues were highlighted during the recent elections in UP and other states which need to be taken up, viz, the widespread destruction of crops by the stray animals as well as continuation of grant of free rations under PDS, which was started during Covid and extended up to the election month.

Central Executive Committee of AIKMS has called upon all its units including State Executive Committees to immediately take steps to organize these programs and to add the local issues during the protests.



Impact and Stakes in Russia's Ukraine War

Russian invasion of Ukraine is three weeks old. Russia has surrounded several major cities of Ukraine and has destroyed most of the airports in Ukraine. Russia has captured some parts of Ukraine in east, south, north and northeast. Civilian casualties are being reported from Ukraine and pictures of shelling of residential areas are also being shown. UN estimated number of civilian casualties to be 816 by 18th March while over three million are estimated to have left Ukraine for countries towards the west, some of them from other countries living and working in Ukraine. 6.5 millions are estimated to have been internally displaced. Number of those leaving Ukraine does not include lakhs who have migrated to Russia during this war and during last six years of conflict in Donbas. WHO verified attacks on 43 health facilities during the ongoing war. A large number of foreigners were stranded in Ukraine including a large number of medical students from India. These have mostly been flown back. However, as the war drags on, future of these students remains uncertain.

War is continuing in Ukraine with all the casualties associated with war, truth being among the first ones. Media outlets are reporting more as embedded journalists but then reporting of war rarely allows objective coverage as it differs from where you see it. Both sides are accusing each other of war crimes and

targeting civilians and residential areas. Damaged residential areas do give credence to such accusations. While US led drive towards eastward expansion of NATO has been the backdrop of the present heightened conflict between US and allies and Russia, Russian rulers' invasion of Ukraine has no justification but as seeking spheres of influence by imperialist powers. All these aspects have been dealt with in the CC Statement published in this issue.

What is being widely commented upon is the 'slow' progress of the invading Russian forces. Russian President obviously claims that his Special Military Operation is proceeding as per plan, a plan which is known to only him and Russian military command for obvious reasons. Ukraine President Zelensky claims that Ukrainian resistance has slowed down the Russian advance. Western powers especially US and UK are also echoing this line that Ukrainian resistance has slowed military advance of Russia. Zelensky's response has been to an extent schizophrenic. He has been claiming progress in discussions with Russia on reaching a peace deal and crediting Russia with adopting "realistic approach" in these discussions. On the other hand, Zelensky is in another orbit addressing western press and parliaments, calling for greater military aid demanding enforcement of "no fly zone" over Ukraine and claiming that Russia wants to wipe out Ukraine as an independent state. Probably he wants to keep both flanks covered having no control over the proceedings especially on the designs of the main contending imperialist powers- Russia and USA.

Slow progress in Russian military advance is being seen differently by some military experts who say that Russia has focused on destruction of Ukrainian armed forces which they have largely accomplished and attribute slow progress to keeping civilian casualties low. Russia has concentrated on destroying air force and

its facilities and on encircling Ukranian military forces. Russia has surrounded main cities including Kiev and Kharkiv but has refrained from attempts at taking them. Russian war aim seems to be to force capitulation of Ukranian Govt. and reduce its military abilities- that is the meaning of the two demands it has placed- demilitarization and denazification. This Russian approach of keeping civilian casualties low is also corroborated by British Intelligence Agency's statement that Russia is considering changing its strategy which may entail higher civilian casualties. One should also keep in mind military capacities of Ukraine which had inherited 30% of the military industries after dissolution of erstwhile Soviet Union. It had nearly 3 lakh armed forces and has built over a lakh strong National Guard over the last year. It has abundant supply of military hardware especially anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles from the western countries. However, continuation of war is bringing serious hardships to the people and also giving western media fodder to continue its war propaganda. Washington would obviously like to prolong the conflict as its aims from this war do not involve any concern for Ukraine. For this, they would create every obstacle in negotiations, just as they earlier subverted implementation of Minsk agreements reached between Ukraine Govt. and leaders of two breakaway regions with France, Germany and Russia as Guarantors.

During this war, a special focus has been a report on *biolabs* being run by US Govt. in Ukraine. Russia had called a Security Council meeting on the issue. Several countries including India called for dealing with the issue in accordance with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC or simply BWC). China specifically demanded USA to explain its involvement with *biolabs* in Ukraine calling US' response to the issue so far as "contradictory

and confusing”. However the western countries, especially USA, dismissed the claim as frivolous and only a means to divert attention from Russian invasion of Ukraine. This line i.e. dismissing reports about US funded biolabs in Ukraine as fake, could gain traction but for a statement by Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State of USA before the Foreign Affairs Committee of US Senate. On March 8, while testifying before the Senate committee, Nuland admitted “Biological Research Facilities” in Ukraine which are funded by USA. Answering a question by Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida, whether Ukraine has chemical or biological weapons, she further said, “Ukraine has biological research facilities which, in fact, we are now quite concerned Russian troops, Russian forces, may be seeking to gain control of.” Further, “So we are working with the Ukrainians on how they can prevent any of those research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces should they approach.”

The issue, which is sought to be papered over by the mainstream US media which is acting as a mouthpiece of military industrial complex, raises several questions about what USA has been up to in Ukraine on biological research laboratories. Reference to BWC having no information on US funded biolabs in Ukraine is not very relevant as there is no verification mechanism for the BWC and US is the only country opposing such a mechanism. Reportedly “According to the US submission to the 2021 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Meeting of States Parties, the US has 26 laboratories and other cooperative facilities in Ukraine.” Russia claims that they have found evidence of 30 such laboratories. Russian invasion of Ukraine does not absolve US of perpetrating such heinous crimes against the world people. There are reportedly 336 US funded such labs in 30 countries. In the instant case, US

newspapers debunking the claim tip toe around Nuland's statement but they quote only authorities associated with US Dept. of Defense like Robert Pope, the Director of the Pentagon's Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme. Terming such labs as bio-defense laboratories does not allay the suspicions. Here pertinent questions are whether US was funding biological research laboratories in Ukraine and what type of research these labs were conducting. It is important that these labs were funded by Pentagon and not Health Dept. Further if the research conducted by these labs was so innocuous what is the explanation of Nuland's testimony, "... we are working with the Ukrainians on how they can prevent any of those research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces..." Not letting dangerous pathogens be released among people is understandable but not letting them fall into Russian hands is incomprehensible unless that research could somehow be used for making biological weapons. However, such natural questions coming out of Nuland's testimony are not being raised by good girls and boys of mainstream and Wall Street media of USA!

It obviously begets the question why Nuland spoke what she spoke. Testimony before US house or senate committees is under oath and deliberate false statements are punishable. However, no punishment is due while lying before the whole world. Who would forget Colin Powel's claims before the UN Security Council of Iraq possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction? Lying to the world is OK but not so to US Congress or Senate! US Admn. owes it to the world people to come clean on these allegations. There has been an agreement in 2005 between the US and Ukraine according to which US Department of Defense representatives are authorized to participate in all activities related to Ukrainian facilities, and Ukraine is prohibited from releasing information that US

determines to be sensitive. Hiding behind the obviously unacceptable Russian invasion of Ukraine is not the answer. USA should agree to independent enquiry into US defense department activities in biological research laboratories through the agency under BWC.

Biden Admn.'s open declaration that they are opposed to commit a single US soldier to Ukraine on the one hand, and egging on Ukraine to adopt hostile attitude towards Russia and scuttling all attempts at honouring agreements like Minsk Agreements, should be viewed as the pointers of the designs of Biden Admn. Biden Admn. is driven by military industrial complex or war industry, Wall Street or corporate including oil industries, and an exercise to nip the attempts of West European powers to chart a course away from US led Atlantic alliance. This is an attempt to reinvigorate NATO which French President had described as brain dead. While there is rallying around the banner in immediate sense, its longer term future is yet to unfold. US Admn. has sent much war material to Ukraine and sold much more to NATO members of Europe besides stationing larger number of troops for which expenditure is to be borne by the host countries. The present situation has definitely given a push to US Admn.'s longstanding demand that European countries i.e. NATO members commit at least 2% of their GDP towards defense, the bulk of which will be used for the orders from US war industries.

A very sinister design behind US aggravating the tensions in Europe is to disrupt the oil and gas supplies to Europe from Russia. The aim here is twofold. One to strike at the Russian giant oil companies which are acting as competitor to giant oil companies of USA and second to raise the prices of oil in the world market. Second aspect is important to make shale oil of USA profitable in the

international market as its prices are higher than the oil extracted in Middle-east and Russia. US offer to fill the gap of oil and gas supply to Europe from Russia comes at a higher price tag.

US attempts to disrupt trade ties between Western Europe and Russia has already given rise to demands to reach Trans Atlantic Trade Partnership (TATP). Trump Admn. had withdrawn from negotiations on TATP. Germany has already raised the demand for concluding TATP. Biden Admn. has not yet responded to this demand but TATP will not go down well in US where such trade pacts are seen harmful to domestic employment. But with time this demand may gain more traction.

US and European trade sanctions against Russia are meant basically to cut Russia off world trade. This is the meaning of Russia being made to pay heavy penalty for invasion of Ukraine; it has little to do with saving Ukraine from Russian invasion. But cutting Russia off comes at a heavy price especially in the sectors of fossil fuels and food grain supplies especially of wheat where Russia and Ukraine are important players. Cutting Russian oil and gas supplies cannot be easily compensated at least in the short run and will lead to rise in the prices of oil and gas in the international market. This will result not only in difficulties in West European countries which have been dependent on Russian gas and oil, but will also impact the post-Covid recovery of economic activity in a number of countries. Higher prices of crude would mean a greater burden on the public exchequer especially in backward countries like India which are dependent on crude imports for meeting their needs of petroleum products and would result in general rise in prices of all commodities including essential commodities at a time when a large section of populace has been pushed into poverty due to mismanagement of

Covid treatment and shifting of the economic burden on the common people during imposed lockdowns.

To mitigate immediate impact of sharp rise in prices of oil and gas in the world market, US is pressurizing Arab countries particularly Arab monarchies to increase oil extraction. These oil exporting countries have thus far resisted US pressure. Moreover it will not be easy to replace Russian oil and gas. In the short term it is even more difficult. There are issues of transportation of oil and gas as well besides pumping extra quantities of oil. US has even reached out to Venezuela whose Govt. under President Maduro US and its allies do not even recognize. The visit of US officials to Venezuela has been confirmed by Venezuela Govt.

Another impact of the rise of petroleum products will be on the agricultural operations and it will have more impact on countries like India which have large agrarian population dependent on agriculture. Rise in prices of petroleum products will result in rise in prices of fertilizers which will further increase input costs in the agriculture. It will further squeeze peasants in India who already suffer due to lack of remunerative prices for their produce.

Not only crude oil and gas supplies, the crisis will impact the poor countries referred to as developing countries as it will lead to increase in prices of food grains. Russia and Ukraine are important exporters of wheat and with this granary embroiled in war; production and exports will definitely be hampered. This will have much bigger impact on the poor countries dependent of import of food grains. Countries of Africa will be the biggest sufferers. Horn of Africa, one of the poorest and conflict ridden region is already facing severe drought and increase in prices of food grains will have very serious impact on all countries dependent of import of food grains.

While a large number of countries are suffering from the effects of this war, outcome of this war will shape the world situation in a big context. Leaders of the most countries are expressing that this is challenge to the existing world order. And the existing world order is dominated by America and its allies, mainly Anglo-American alliance. The dominance of this alliance has been so pervasive since the advent of collapse of Soviet Union and advent of uni-polar world that the world media has come to see America as international community. See in the present war, the countries which have not supported US sponsored resolution represent more than two third of the population of the world and yet, international community has condemned it! Even when US and its allies invaded Iraq without any sanction from UN, with some European countries like France and Germany even opposing, then also they were representing international community. World people definitely oppose Russian invasion of Ukraine but they also oppose US led NATO's expansion to the borders of Russia. They demand that it be disbanded.

For last some years, US and its allies have started talking of "rules based order". It may sound appealing but what does it mean? What are these rules? Who has framed these rules? The international order to the extent it can be called any order other than might is right, is UN based order. Obviously US and allies' rules based order is different from UN based order. It is to impose rules framed by US on all countries of the world.

But the days of such dictates of US and allies are over along with uni-polar world. World has become multi-polar. Whether Russia succeeds in imposing its rule on Ukraine or succeeds in controlling parts of South and East Ukraine, post-Cold War security framework imposed by USA on Europe is being refashioned. All

powers are contending for their share. But at stake is not only the security architecture of Europe but the whole ambit of power relations in the world. While Russia has enough military might economic sanctions may yet prove to be a big handicap in the long run. And here, China, whom USA considers its main contender globally, has an important role to play. It should be kept in mind that the western sanctions against Russia since 2014 has made Russian economy somewhat resilient to western economic sanctions. However, China can play an important role in absorbing the exports and providing the necessary imports thereby reducing the impact of sanctions. On the other hand, several countries including India have come forward to trade with Russia bypassing Dollar. Emergence of a rival currency framework may be one of the unforeseen and yet near term proceed from this war. Several West European countries have clearly stated that they are not in a position to immediately stop oil and gas imports from Russia. Long term will any way be decided by the outcome of the present conflict. Several European countries including France and Germany are maintaining direct contact with Russian leadership. Turkey and Israel as well are maintaining direct contact with Russian leadership. These are countries who voted for the resolution against Russia in UNO.

China is going to play an important role in the ongoing conflict especially on whether it brings about end of pre-eminent position of Anglo-American combine in the world. While there is no going back to the earlier period despite all the bravado of Biden, this outcome is yet in the making. Biden would any day like to escape the harsh domestic realities where, despite support from bipartisan leadership approval of his handling of Ukraine crisis, he does not enjoy people's support. Biden's stay in White House has been

marked by his speaking twice- once when he speaks and second time when his aides tell what he had spoken.

War in Ukraine is reverberating in many parts of the world. And not only economically as higher prices of crude oil and food grains are impacting the most vulnerable countries and people but also in political terms. In South Asia none of the major countries – India, or Pakistan and China, have supported US position against Russia. Post-US withdrawal in defeat from Afghanistan has changed the strategic dynamics of the region. Similarly in Middle-east several countries have not supported US and allies in UN and even those who have, have voiced need for consideration of Russian concerns. These include Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iran, Turkey and Israel. It shows that post-intervention in Syria, no power in Middle-east likes to openly antagonize Russia.

And in Latin America, tide is gradually turning against America and its allies. Even in Columbia, whose rulers have been most steadfast supporters of US imperialism, people's struggles have mobilized large number of people and the people's anger is threatening to find electoral expression in coming time. And lastly in America itself, important leaders both from right and left of the ruling class political spectrum have opposed Biden's handling of Ukraine crisis. But yet again a marvel of corporate controlled media projection- Russian war for right or wrong reasons, reportedly enjoys support among majority of Russians and yet it is Putin's war.

On the other hand, in America, Admn.'s role in handling Ukraine conflict is disapproved by majority of people and yet it is not Biden's call but of USA. Hopefully this corporate media's inverted projection of the world will come to an end. All other conflicts in the world including US-UK supported Saudi-UAE war

on Yemen have been banished from news though the pictures of destruction look almost similar.

Inter-imperialist contradictions are redrawing the power relations in the world. Rulers in imperialist countries and in third world countries are trying to increase burden on the people in the name of difficult international situation. This will hopefully breed people's resistance against imperialism and domestic reaction.



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