

Volume - 28, No. 5-6

June - 2023



*Organ of the
Central Committee CPI(ML)*

NEW DEMOCRACY

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CPI (ML)-New Democracy Statement on Current Situation in Manipur

[This Statement was issued on May 5, 2023]

Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy expresses grave concern at the violence in Manipur which has resulted in several persons reported killed, scores injured, a large number of villages vandalized, property destroyed and churches attacked and burnt down. Central Govt. has taken over the security in the state under Article 355 of the Indian Constitution. Army has been deployed and shoot at sight orders have been issued.

The present conflagration of the violent incidents is related to a High Court order on April 19, 2023 directing State Govt. to seek Scheduled Tribe Status for the majority Meitei community. This exacerbated tensions between majority Meiteis and Kuki and Naga tribes. On May 3, 2023 All Tribal Students Union of Manipur held a big protest gathering opposing ST status for Meiteis. After that meeting, attacks took place in the Imphal valley and also in hill areas. In the Imphal valley houses and property of tribals were attacked, several people are reported killed (according to some reports nearly 30) as well as 23 injured including a tribal legislator. In Churachandpur Meiteis were attacked in which two persons were reported killed and some houses were burnt. A large number

of people have been forced to take shelter in camps set up for that purpose.

While contradictions among majority and dominant Meitei community and tribals are longstanding, a communal colour is being given to it by the RSS-BJP ruling the state which has taken Meiteis as their base to dominate the region. RSS hand is evident in the present attacks as a large number of churches are attacked and reportedly even the Churches belonging to Meitei community have not been spared. RSS-BJP is lending communal colour to the conflict. RSS-BJP has seen in this an opening as Meiteis are predominantly Hindus, though a section of them practice their tribal religion, while Nagas and Kukis are Christians. Despite longstanding contradictions among these groups, there was no communal tension along the religious line. Now RSS is working to communalize these contradictions. They are trying to follow the template they have laid down in Assam where they have communalized the situation in that state and carved out a base among Assamese Hindus. Existing contradictions are directed by them into communal channels; and in the process exacerbating them and sniffing out regional and democratic aspirations of the people and helping fascist drive of RSS-BJP in the garb of Hindutva and in the service of corporate and reactionaries.

At the root of the present conflict as well as the one going on for a long time is the question of controlling land and resources of the region. Recently an agitation has been going on in Churachandpur district against attempts to displace tribals from their lands in the name of wild life sanctuary. This new found love of the Govt. for wild life is a camouflage for handing over tribal land to

corporate and corporate paws can be seen all over these projects. Such attempts are being made in several states to evict tribals and other traditional forest dwellers in the name of wild life sanctuaries. Tribals opposed Chief Minister's visit to the district. Tribal anger burst forth due to survey being conducted.

There have been attempts by the State Govt. to dilute the constitutional safeguards to the people of Hill areas of Manipur under Article 371C of the Constitution and of the land rights of tribals. Earlier attempts including one in 2015 to infringe on tribal land rights was resisted by tribals in which 9 tribals were martyred.

In Manipur Meitei community is numerically a majority and politically dominant. However, it is mostly concentrated in the plains of Imphal valley. Meitei comprise 53% of the population and along with Meitei pangals nearly 64.6%. Two third seats in the state assembly are in Meitei dominated Imphal valley. Meiteis are dominant in different wings of the state machinery as well. But this Meitei dominated region comprises only 10% of the geographical area of Manipur. On the other hand, tribal groups, mostly Naga and Kuki tribes, constitute 35.4% of the population but inhabit nearly 90% of the geographical area of Manipur. Only a third of the seats (20) in the State Assembly fall in this region. As Imphal is administrative and commercial centre of the state, a number of tribals have houses and businesses in Imphal. This discrepancy in population and power on the one hand and land and resources on the other is at the root of the present conflict. There is growing unemployment among Meitei youth and democratic forces of Manipur including from among Meiteis oppose Central Govt.'s use of AFSPA.

The history of the British colonial conquest of the region is full of resistance of the tribals. As elsewhere in the country, tribals were in the forefront of armed struggles waged against British colonial domination. One such was Anglo Kuki war (1917 to 1919) which is commemorated by Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate. This gate was vandalized by some miscreants on May 3 which infuriated Kuki tribals.

The High Court order directing the State Govt. to seek ST status for Meiteis is avowedly based on protecting “ancestral land, tradition, culture and heritage”. It is not clear with Meiteis politically and administratively controlling the state, wherefrom this threat to their ancestral land, tradition, culture and heritage arises. Meitei language is part of the Eighth schedule of the Constitution and different sections of Meiteis are eligible for reservation under OBCs, SCs and rest eligible for EBC. The case of Meiteis is based on tribal status of the community during the rule of King of Manipur prior to its ascension to India. But then also there were separate laws governing plains where Meiteis lived and hills where predominantly Nagas and Kukis lived. Meiteis were not allowed to buy land in the hill areas.

Whatever the other factors, the rights of tribals to their traditional home in forests should be preserved. These should not be diluted. People from non-forest tribes should not be allowed to purchase lands of these tribes. In view of the conspiracies of the ruling classes against the tribals, to foment conflicts between tribals and non-tribal poor as well as among different tribes, transfer of land should be allowed in the same tribal group and not to those

outside these groups. Tribals' identity is rooted in their habitat hence all attempts to alienate them from their land and destroy or damage their habitat should be stoutly opposed. Further reservations and other safeguards for the existing tribals should not in any way be diluted.

Tribals' land and livelihood and identity are facing serious threats from the designs of ruling classes who covet the mineral and forest wealth of the regions inhabited by tribals. Tribals face the threat from the corporate and also from other rich sections from non-tribals.

Ruling classes raise the bogey of development to displace tribals from their ancestral lands and traditional habitat. Their plank of development must be exposed and demand for development without displacement should be raised. Tribals have suffered historic injustice and struggle should be waged to undo that. Tribals should be given all basic amenities and opportunities for development without alienation from their land.

These attacks on tribals should be seen in the backdrop of RSS-BJP govt. attacks against tribals through Forest Conservation Rules, 2022, changes in Forest Policy and proposed changes in Forest Conservation Act. On the other implementation of provisions of Forest Rights Act 2006 is very poor and its provisions are not respected in practice. These attacks against tribals in Manipur are part of the anti-people and anti-tribal agenda of RSS-BJP Govt.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy strongly condemns Biren Singh led RSS-BJP Govt. of Manipur for its attacks on tribals and

pursuing anti-tribal agenda.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy strongly demands that in all conditions tribals' right over their land and habitat be protected and no dilution be allowed in any name.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy appeals to people of different communities of Manipur to maintain peace and harmony. Peace between communities should be immediately restored. We appeal to see through the evil designs of corporate backed Hindutva rulers to divide them and displace them. We appeal to people of all communities to unite in struggle against exploitation and oppression targeting reactionary ruling classes.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy demands that miscreants and attackers of the innocents be brought to justice and full compensation for destruction of all properties including religious places should be paid fully and immediately.

CPI (ML)-New Democracy demands that democratic rights of the people of Manipur be respected and AFSPA be withdrawn from the whole of the state.

(Issued by Central Committee of CPI (ML)-New Democracy on
May 5, 2023)

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All India Tribal Convention

Successfully Held

All India Tribal Forum Formed

(All India Tribal Convention was held in Birsa Munda Hall in Alluri Sitaramaraju Vignan Kendram at Vishakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) on May 21, 2023. Convention was organized by All India Tribal Convention Organizing Committee. Over 600 delegates from a number of states participated in the Convention. States from which delegates participated included Odisha, Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Tamilnadu. We are here publishing the statement issued by the Presidium of the Convention at the conclusion of the Convention.
– Editor)

Inaugurating the Convention, Dr. Vasavi Kiro calls for a formation of a new Tribal Policy to ensure development of Tribal languages, culture and form a Tribal History Academy. Hails contribution of left Revolutionary movement in tribal struggles.

Convention ends with call to fight for ‘Tribal identity’ and Development without Displacement’.

Condemns repression on tribals, forced eviction, forced assimilation into Hindu religion and communal division by RSS politics.

Forms 15 member committee of All India Tribal Forum.



The one day All India Tribal Convention began with an appeal by the Chief Guest, renowned tribal author and activist, Dr. Vasavi Kiro from Jharkhand to fight for formulation of a New Tribal policy which will ensure development of tribal languages and culture and ensure formation of a Tribal History Academy. She highlighted aspects of traditional tribal medicine, cuisines and other knowledge.

When she hailed the delegates with ‘Sonot Jooaar’ – Long live nature; Ootey abuwa - this land is ours, Bir aabuwa – the forests are ours and Disum Aabuwa – Desh is ours to house responded enthusiastic claps and loud slogans of ‘Jai Joohar’.

The delegates applauded again when she stressed that Adivasis should get organized fight for their rights and many non Adivasis who are the real friends of the Adivasis have contributed

much to their struggle. She explained that while RSS led forces have been dividing the tribals and creating rifts, she knows that those who pledge by 'lal Salaam' have sacrificed much for Adivasi struggles.

In her 42 minute address Dr. Kiro said there are more than 700 million Indigenous people in the world, of which 200 million reside in India. Their 7000 indigenous cultures have been ignored and repressed even 75 years after colonial rule. India has more than 750 ethnic tribes of which 75 are most vulnerable. Their social, cultural, economic and political situation is very grave.

She said Adivasis in India suffer because of state policy which is based on 'development induced displacement', loot of forests and natural wealth, land alienation, degradation of nature, failure to recognize their indigenous religions like Sarna and attempts to forcefully assimilate them into Hindu religion, failure to implement their Constitutional and legal rights. She said of the 10 crore people uprooted in India 80% are Adivasis and Indigenous people.

Dr. Kiro explained that tribal people are simple and ignorant and they suffer illiteracy, backwardness, malnutrition and illness, all of which can easily be tackled if the govt wants. But Tribal women she said suffer more from anemia and illiteracy.

She came down heavily on BJP govt. for following old policies of Congress rule period of giving away the resources of tribals to Corporations and MNCs.

She said forests are property of Adivasis, only they should have the right to use it or give it. Development should mean that

tribals and not corporations develop their resources and earn from them.

She ended by saying that while it is good that a tribal woman has had the opportunity to become President of India, Forest Rights are still not implemented and repression on tribals is continuing. She detailed all rights under the Forest Rights Act and said that implementation is tardy and on paper.

Reception Committee Honourary Chairman EAS Sarma, retired Secy to GOI said that the govt is bulldozing the Adivasis, attacking their rights and it should be mandatory that permission of Gram Sabhas, Tribal Councils be taken in all matters pertaining to them. But this govt. is so anti people that it does not consult even the National ST Commission. He said that the President and the Governors have the constitutional mandate to make laws that favour and help the Adivasis, but they do not use this power. He had sent a video message to the Convention as he could not attend due to ill health.

President of Reception Committee, senior Journalist Ramanamurthy explained how struggles have been continuing for long but there is a gap in being able to rally all forces fighting on these issues. He said the central govt in particular is denying all democratic norms to give away the land of adivasis to giant corporations. He hailed the Convention for raising the issue of Constitutional rights of tribals and trying to unify the Adivasi movements all over the country.

Guest speaker, senior Advocate and writer on Adivasi issues, Pala Trinadh Rao explained in detail the legal and constitutional

securities for Adivasis in Scheduled areas and how the govt is undermining them to favour Corporations and MNCs. He was sharp in his attack on alienation of tribal lands for mining, reforestation, Tiger Sanctuaries, Polavaram and other projects and on changes being made in law and in rules for these purposes. He said a determined struggle on the ground helps in asserting the rights legally also.

AIKMS President, Com. V Venkatramaiah released a book, **“Bharat ki Krantikari Adivasi Auratein”** written by Dr. Vasavi Kiro.

Speaking after this, Com Venkatramaiah appealed for widest possible unity of all Adivasi groups to wage a determined struggle for tribal rights. He sharply condemned ruling class parties who are sowing various differences amongst Adivasi groups bearing different backgrounds and promoting clashes in order to split their unity. He said even reservation rights in jobs and education are not implemented and are made an issue of mutual conflict. He called for formation of an All India Tribal Forum which can unite all struggling Adivasi forces is the need of the hour and articulate their issues in a focused manner. He appealed to all to learn from the SKM formation and struggle against anti farmer 3 black laws. He said we must build joint struggles on basis of issues. Earlier experience of forming Girijan Sangham in Srikakulam district was able to develop the movement to the stage of armed struggle.

The convention had begun in the morning with election of a 3 member Presidium consisting of Dharmula Suresh from Andhra Pradesh, Kedar Sabara from Odisha and Mukti Satyam from



Telangana. A martyrs' resolution was read by Rammohan on behalf of the Convention Organizing Committee and the house observed one minutes silence in their memory.

Mukti Satyam explained the draft call appealing for formation of the All India Tribal Forum. Various delegates from all 11 states were invited to the dais and they expressed their views. Fraternal delegates who extended their greetings included Bikhshapati from President AIKMS Telangana, Srikant Mohanty of AIKMKS, Jakkala Venkataiya President of Telangana Rytu Smiti, Channapan from Tamil Nadu, Satyanarayan of All India Tribal Employees, R Jagannmohan Rao of AP Teachers Federation and Dr. Ram Kishan.

Mr John O Haokip and 2 other delegates of Manipur also attended.

Various delegates spoke and gave their suggestions. After incorporating all positive suggestions the call was passed with raising of slogans for advancing the struggle.

The Convention resolved in one voice a clarion call to form an **All India Tribal Forum** to fight for “Tribal Rights for land and livelihood, for the Right of Tribal ‘Development without Displacement’ and to ‘Save Forests and Environment’ and to prevent Climate Change and ‘Natural’ disasters.

The convention passed four resolutions:

1. Condemning repression on tribals in Burhanpur in MP, Chattisgarh and other parts of India including air strikes in Dandakarnya;

2. Supporting women wrestlers and demanding arrest of BJP MP Brij Bhushan Singh;

3. Condemning RSS sponsored communal conflagration and violence in Manipur, demanding not to infringe upon existing of tribal groups; and

4. Condemning gang rape on tribal women by paramilitary forces in Vakapalli in AP.

The Convention concluded with the 600 plus delegates from 11 states unanimously approving formation of a 15 member Forum Committee. Convention gave it the authority to expand the forum and the responsibility to build and develop struggles. Forum Committee includes 4 convenors- Mukti Satyam of Telangana, Kedar Sabar from Odisha, Ramsai Soren from Jharkhand and one from AP. The members included Swapan Hansda and Sushil Lakra

from West Bengal, Dhananjay Oraon from Bihar, Bhimlal from UP, Chandan Soren from Delhi, Kanindra Jalika from Odisha, Suvarnapaka Nageshwar Rao and Sakru from Telangana and Mallesh and Durga from Andhra Pradesh. All of them were present on stage and they addressed the gathering.

Members from Arunodaya Cultural front, Nirmala, Durga, Venkat Lakshmi, Bal Nagamma, Sujata, Yeru Kondallu inspired the delegates with their revolutionary songs and dance performances.

[This statement was released by members of the Presidium : Dharmula Suresh, Kedar Sabar and Mukti Satyam on May 21, 2023 from Vishakhapatnam(AP)]



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All India Tribal Forum (AITF)

Declaration

One in every dozen Indians is a Tribal (8.6% of the population of India). As per 2011 Census, there are 10,45,45,716 people classified as Scheduled tribes living in our country; this figure does not include tribals not included in the ST lists. Tribal habitations are scattered over most of the states. Migrant Tribals are there in good number in metropolitan cities. India has the single largest Tribal population in the world, second only to the whole continent of Africa. Over 426 ethnic Tribal or Adivasi communities with a plethora of cultures, languages, lifestyles, mostly inhabit the hilly and forest regions though some now live in plains as well. Tribal concentrations are especially in the Central, Eastern, North Eastern and Western parts of the country. We, the tribals, are economically exploited, socially and culturally oppressed and robbed in the name of 'development'.

Beginning with colonial era, our exploitation, oppression and suppression has assumed alarming proportions. Our struggle against exploitation and oppression is part of Indian people's struggles, however there are special areas of our struggles outlined below especially in the arena of social, cultural, educational fields and relating to autonomy in our areas for which we are forming this forum.

Subjugation under British Colonial Rule

It was the British colonialists who systematically occupied our tribal areas. This control was sought for felling of trees for

timber for laying railway lines and forest lands for extraction of minerals especially for mining coal and minerals etc. British colonial rulers also co-opted several tribal social leaders and existing social structure in many areas into their rule by both force and guile, to facilitate both subordination of resistance and loot of forest resources. In addition, to keep these areas under their administrative control, British not only facilitated large scale entry of nontribal money lenders and traders into forest areas, but also brought legislation to deprive us of our rights over our own forests which we had inhabited for centuries. Thus the conflict over ownership of the forests mainly dates back to the colonial occupation and legislations they began enacting for regulating these areas from the nineteenth century. Such legislations were the Forest Act of 1865, Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the Forest Policy of 1894 and the Indian Forest Act 1927. The Forest Act 1865 provided legal sanction to forest administration in various parts of India and empowered the colonial state to acquire monopoly control over forests. The infamous Land Acquisition Act 1894 empowered the colonialists to snatch away our historical rights over our lands and forests. On the other hand, we tribals were shifted to other areas to meet the needs of labour in tea gardens, etc.

Due to the entry of the colonial overlords and the nontribal usurers, profit greedy sharks i.e. traders, landlords and settlers, life in forests was disrupted. Along with ruthless exploitation of the rich forest resources, there was vast displacement by changed uses of forest land accompanied by mindless attack on the forest cover. We are a relatively smaller percentage of the population, but bore disproportionately massive burden of displacement in the name of

‘development’ - nearly half of displaced population have been tribals. As the traditional life dependent on the forests was snatched away and no new avenues were provided, we became the most exploited sections of labour- both urban and rural.

Glorious History of Anti Colonial Resistance

Against the aggression of the colonial rulers and the exploitation and squeezing by them and their surrogates- the money lenders, landlords, merchants and officials- we tribals of India fought many a valiant battle to protect our homes, lands and way of life. These struggles are part of the glorious history of anti-colonial movements of the people of India. Heroes galore were from among the Tribals’ struggles, be it Sidhu Kanu, Tilka Manjhi and Rindo Manjhi, Mahadev Koli, Birsa Munda, Laxman Nayak, Dwarabandala Chandraiah, Alluri Seetharamaraju, Kumaram Bhim and several others since 18th Century from different parts of India. The resistance of the Chakmas, Halbas, Santhals, Mundas, Bhils, Gonds, and other tribes to British colonialists, especially their resistance using traditional arms, are glorious chapters in Indian people’s anti-colonial struggle.

These uprisings forced the colonial rulers to promulgate some laws in defined areas like the Santhal Parghana Tenancy Act, Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act, the Scheduled Districts Act 1974 and the Agency Tracts Interest and Land Transfers Act 1917 which gave Tribals of those areas only partial protection to their rights over land.

Post 1947 – Loot of Forests Worsens While Our Welfare Neglected

The end of colonial rule and transfer of power to domestic ruling classes did not bring any relief to us. The class of our

exploiters became part of the new power structure, to which were added the ruling class politicians. Since 1947, our lot has further relatively worsened with continuation of our dispossession from our lands and means of livelihood.

Poverty, malnutrition, hunger, anaemia, lack of health and education facilities are rampant in our tribal areas. Access to drinking water, electricity, health and educational facilities is worse in comparison to other social groups. According to the Union Tribal Minister on 18th November 2019 in the Lok Sabha, 75% of tribal villages in India lack access to govt. healthcare, 51% have no access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) and 52% are not covered by piped water. The rate of dropout is highest among our children. The situation has worsened due to underfunding of public education and criminal negligence of such schools in our areas. While 86% of schools in tribal areas function without electricity, 26% are without drinking water. In the past few years thousands of govt. schools in tribal areas have been closed down. Only 16% of tribal students in the age group of 18 to 23 years get a college education. 29% of the tribal villages have no mode of public transport.

Health care is practically absent. We continue to suffer and die from common ailments like diarrhoea, malaria, anaemia and TB which are both easily avoidable and curable. Due to extreme backwardness, lack of health care facilities as well as scientific education, people in tribal villages are per force relying on *ojhas*, witch doctors and quacks for treatment of their ailments. Of the 1,17,064 tribal villages, only 3453 have a primary health centre (PHC), 7114 have a Community Health Centre and 18,185 villages have a health sub centre. 88,295 tribal villages have no access to state healthcare facilities.

Threat to Our Culture and Language

Besides denial and neglect of their material needs, rulers have over a long time suppressed our languages, culture and dismantled traditional organizations of self-rule. The attempt of rulers has been to absorb tribes into existing dominant national groups, denying the opportunity to develop our own institutions and distinctive features. In the cacophony and glitter of exhibiting some externals of tribal culture such as dance, music and handicrafts, its internal aspects are suppressed. These aspects manifest in intra and intergenerational equity, community feeling, according high status to women (The sex ratio for STs is 990 females for 1000 males), resistance to any form of subjugation, democratic decision making, solidarity, sharing, love of nature and attachment to land and forests. Many of these aspects have been much corroded in many areas thanks to the “assimilation” process.

Our children are unable to study in our own mother tongue, being forced to study in the mediums of the dominant languages of different states. Due to continual Govt apathy over the years and lack of support, tribals’ languages and literature are facing near extinction today.

Apart from rising attacks on tribal culture and livelihood, the Hindutva forces led by RSS are trying to Brahmanize tribal culture and customs with the aim of permanently submerging our identity. Cow worship and wearing of sacred thread as symbols of empowerment are being promoted by Hindutva forces. They are even aggressively propagating a ‘Ghar Wapsi’ as part of their communal campaign against Christian tribals. In recent years they have been encouraging the observance of different Hindu festivals

as means to Hinduize Tribals. This growing Hinduization among Tribals is being used by RSS to polarize and divide the tribal people on religious lines and there are attempts to create communal conflicts in tribal areas. The attacks on Christian Tribals in Gujarat's Dangs, Odisha's Kandhmahal district and in several districts in Jharkhand in the recent past are some of the instances of this growing danger. This is also leading to the growth of patriarchal attitudes in the tribal societies and examples are there e.g. resistance by tribal heads to participation in Councils by women as faced by women in north east, gang rape being given as 'punishment' and women being paraded naked for forming non prescribed relationships.

Protection must be there for our culture, there must be assistance to our languages, developing of scripts for them. Efforts of tribal intellectuals in this direction have been suppressed. Without scripts there is danger of our languages disappearing into local dialects of the dominant linguistic groups, a process that is already underway. The indiscriminate division of contiguous tribal areas among different states is also part of this "assimilation" strategy. This made us tribals minorities in these states, decreased our strength and voice and left our language and culture vulnerable.

We have also begun resisting this onslaught. Tribal organizations in Jharkhand are demanding a separate code for Sarna religious practice in the Census to differentiate Tribals from Hindus. The Indian rulers have ensured that Tribals are classified as 'Hindus' by default for lack of a separate categorization in the Census. RSS tries to portray Sarna as part of Hindu religious practice and tries to use it to isolate Christian Tribals.

'Development' has been the Name for Displacement & Plunder

Displacement has been haunting us tribals and non tribal poor traditionally dwelling in the forest areas. In the 1950s and 1960s, large scale hydel and irrigation projects and industries dealing with mineral resources were set up in tribal areas leading to massive displacements. Mostly these were public sector projects. We became cheap labour, our daughters became housemaids in the homes of urban elite.

With changes in Govt. policies in accordance on the diktats of imperialist powers, the present emphasis is on enabling MNCs and comprador business houses to freely exploit the rich mineral resources. Committee on State Agrarian Relations in "The Unfinished Agenda of Land Reforms" termed grabbing of tribal land, especially in Central India as biggest land grab since Columbus. Provisions of various protective legislations forced by struggles are now being modified. There is a race among the ruling class parties and state govts of various parliamentary parties to attract foreign capital as part of their FDI driven model of "development" which is a blueprint for devastation, and for uprooting us making us refugees. Vast tracts of our lands, several times over what may be a logical requirement, are taken over. The costs are heavy in tangible and intangible terms as the whole economic and culturally distinct social life of the people is destroyed. Development has to be people oriented and not for the benefit of MNCs and big business houses and addressing of this issue is crucial for the Tribal and non tribal forest dwellers and for people of the country. Tribal areas of Odisha, Jharkhand, MP and Chhattisgarh are its examples. Foreign and domestic merchants of destruction- World Bank, MNCs and compradors- are thrusting 'final solution'

upon us by relieving us of our means of livelihood in the name of development.

Our struggle against displacement played a major role in the enactment of Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition 2013. The present RSS-BJP Govt. has made several attempts to dilute its provisions which by themselves are only partial.

“Territoriality” i.e. the areas over which particular tribes are spread is integral to the special features of tribals. Displacements do not just displace us from our lands and livelihood, but disrupt the very lifestyle of a tribal community as its habitat is integral to defining it.

Rights Over Forest Produce

Of all the issues faced by us, the issue of our very right over the forest land and forest produce is the primary one. We are treated as encroachers due to non-recognition of our right over the forests which have traditionally been our abode and our source of livelihood. The nexus of forest officials, contractors, landlords and ruling politicians harasses us as our cultivation and procuring our livelihood from the forests is declared illegal. In spite of the provision in Acts which recognize the right of Tribals and forest dwellers to collect minor forest produce, harassment by forest officials continues.

There is also no mechanism to purchase at fair prices the produce of our cultivation and the forest produce we gather. We fall prey to the cartels of traders and moneylenders who make huge profits by buying from us at very cheap rates and selling at exorbitant prices. In some areas the whole business is run by a

handful of traders authorized by the Govt. Where Govts have formed cooperatives to purchase the produce, the prices are abysmally low and we are not allowed to sell to others at competitive prices.

This continuing colonial practice of depriving us right over the forest produce shuts its eye to our role as protectors of the forests and an integral part of the forest ecology. Instead a campaign is run by the ruling classes and their intellectual hangers on holding tribals responsible for environmental degradation and dwindling forest cover. The real culprits of environmental degradation are the imperialists and corporate who are mainly responsible for production of poisonous gases which are depleting the ozone layer. While the imperialist countries are not willing to bring down their own hazardous activities, developing countries are targeted by them, whose rulers target the Tribals and other traditional forest dwellers.

We are the most steadfast protectors of the forests as our very life and livelihood depend on forests. Shifting cultivation (Podu or known by other names in different parts of country) is a favourite target even though it has not degraded the forests for centuries, while contractors, forest officials and politicians have done so in a short period by felling trees causing environmental degradation. No steps are taken to curb the activities of forest mafia or to take up afforestation in the large parts of scheduled areas which are lying barren. Tribals in several parts of the country including in western ghats struggled against corporate loot and deforestation.

Autonomy and Self Rule

We have our own distinct characteristics. The administration has been acting as an occupying force. Institutions of self rule have

been undermined. Regional Autonomous Councils are needed for areas where tribals constitute large part of the population.

Due to exploitation by non tribal landlords and money lenders, large scale alienation of tribal lands has taken place. In many places we have organized and carried out militant struggles against our exploiters. Govts ruthlessly suppressed us using police and paramilitary. They were also forced to carry out legal reforms as a result of struggle and also to distract us from the path of struggle. For this there are some provisions in the Constitution. The Indian state has put the several areas of North east under the Sixth schedule of the Constitution. On the other hand many areas of the rest of India have been put under the Fifth Schedule. Neither these provisions nor the subsequent enactments like Panchayats' Extension to Forest Areas (PESA) or Forest Rights Act, empower us to govern territories beyond our villages. And even these are not implemented.

Unlike the autonomous councils in the Northeast under Sixth Schedule, the Fifth schedule does not provide space for governance to us. Sixth Schedule provisions are the reason why tribals in the northeast lost less access to natural resources like land and forests. The tribals of Central India however are rigorously targeted. Tribals in North-east under Sixth schedule should be given more rights including political rights for which there is a provision in the Constitution. Due to struggles of the tribals, in some 5th Schedule areas like old AP state and in Odisha, the state Govts were forced to enact 1/70 Act and 2/56 regulation respectively to protect tribal lands from alienation.

Many tribal inhabited areas of the country are left out of the scheduled area list- again an attempt to deny separate identity.

The Govt. had enlisted different tribal communities as scheduled tribes adding to it from time to time. But many tribal groups having all the distinct characteristics of tribals are left out of this list and hence denied benefits meant for scheduled tribes. Groups like Kol, Kondh, Dora, Gothi Koyas are enlisted as STs in one state but are excluded from the lists in other states despite living in similar conditions.

Besides repression and reforms, Ruling classes also try to divide us. Ruling classes create rifts and clashes among tribal groups in North East to deprive them of their rights and suppress them. While all tribals are backward there are also differences among us which are exploited by ruling classes to sow division among us. In particular there are differences among forest tribes and plain tribes. Reservation in jobs and other rights should be implemented in such a way so that while all the tribals get the benefit, rights of forest tribes are secured. Rights of hill tribes should be secured providing constitutional safeguards. We should foil the conspiracies of the ruling classes against tribals by forging unity on a principled basis. To foil ruling class conspiracies to divide us transfer of land should be restricted within tribal groups.

Enactment of Forest Rights Act

Indian rulers kept up the colonial legacy of forest management and oppressed the Tribals and poor non-tribal forest dwellers. The state continued to attempt to enclose and appropriate more and more forest area instead of returning the snatched rights over forests. New laws were enacted to this end. The Forest Conservation Act 1980 and the National Forest Policy of 1988 further strengthened state control and brought innumerable hardships to tribals. Encircling of forest land in the name of Wild Life

Sanctuaries also displaced tribals though human beings and animals have co-existed in the forests for millennia. ‘Development’ not tribals threatens Wild Life.

Based on these laws, we tribals were treated as encroachers in our own forests. The Supreme Court not only banned podu cultivation, but in 2001 passed an order that all those who could not prove their land titles prior to 1989, the year the Forest Conservation Act came into force, should be evicted as encroachers on forest land. This was virtually a declaration of war on Tribals and in many places they were forcibly evicted but the order was fiercely resisted. We or other traditional dwellers living in the forest for generation could not assert our rights by documentary proofs. Our militant fight back of this anti tribal order ultimately forced a halt to the operation of the order of eviction and forced the rulers to acknowledge the rights of the Tribals. Thus was enacted the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Its preamble acknowledged the historic injustice with us and other traditional forest dwellers. The Act has provisions to give the Tribal families legal rights over quantified acres of land in the forest; though it failed to recognize or give us our full rights over forests, for the first time a law recognized some of our rights. Implementation is slow and inadequate, many rights are not implemented and arbitrary rejection of claims under FRA by state govts, again led to a Supreme Court order for evicting over 11 lakh tribal and other traditional forest dwelling families in 2019 which we fought back to ensure stay. At times even while claims or appeals against rejection of claims under FRA are pending we are harassed by police and forest officers and attempts are made to evict us from our land. National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has also pointed out non-implementation of FRA on a large scale.

Intensification of Attacks against Us

With the RSS-BJP Govt coming to power at the Centre, the drive to open the forests for corporate loot received new stimulus. There has been attempt at subversion and dilution of the FRA. In the same process was enacted the CAMPA, the Compensatory Afforestation (Maintenance and Planning) Act 2015 whose provisions have been put into practice undermining the provisions of FRA.

Over last year, attacks against us have been intensified. RSS-BJP has made Forest Conservation Rules 2022 which, to facilitate handing over of our lands to corporate, undermine provisions of Forest Rights Act, 2006 especially those relating to power of Gram Sabhas. Forest Policy is sought to be change to further empower and strengthen forest security officials to suppress and dispossess us. RSS-BJP Govt. has introduced an amendment to Forest Conservation Act to further facilitate corporate loot and plunder taking out certain categories of land from purview of this Act. Further, the number of wild life sanctuaries has been increased to displace us from our traditional lands and means of livelihood without even implementing FRA. While implementation of laws which recognize our rights to an extent like PESA, FRA is tardy, attacks have been launched to take away whatever we gained through struggles.

We are made scapegoats when the state wants to express environmental concerns. Same state has no qualms in handing over vast tracts of land and forests to MNCs, even selling off rivers to corporate sharks. The new parlance is giving natural resources on 'long leases'.

Forest dwelling tribes have primary right over forest lands. The lands taken by business houses, landlords and even Govts. should be taken over to satisfy the land needs of tribals. To frustrate the designs of the ruling classes, the tribals must forge unity with non-tribal traditional forest dwellers and their rights to an extent of land should be protected, to mobilize them in struggle against non tribal landlords and other vested interests. A problem in developing such unity is also the brahmanical ideological domination in Hindu hierarchical caste society. Often even oppressed castes view us as inferior.

The other important issue is developing a marketing system protecting our interests in the sale of forest produce. We combine cultivation with gathering of forest produce. Minimum Support Prices (MSP) must be announced for a variety of minor forest produce. Govt. support price should be remunerative. Govt. purchase should be a support mechanism and Tribals should have the right to sell elsewhere at a better price.

While rulers dilly dally over recognizing our rights over the forests, the alienation of our land continues unabated. Andhra Pradesh and Telengana top the list in alienation of tribal land to non tribals. There are Acts in different states prohibiting this alienation but it still continues mainly to facilitate their ultimate handing over to corporate. Implementation of Acts is tardy, corruption rules and implementation is in the hands of bureaucrats aligned against the tribals.

Though tribals (STs) have constitutionally provided right to reservation in jobs and education but these provisions are not fully and properly implemented. Besides lower provision for the

education for tribals, there is discrimination faced by our people in getting jobs and admissions.

Allocation under ST sub-plan is being reduced and even the money allocated is not spent properly on tribal welfare.

This broad overview makes it clear that the forces against us are the imperialists and their institutions, their MNCs, big business houses of India, landlords, merchants, money lenders, contractors and forest officials; in brief, the international and national reactionaries protected by India's central and state govts. Though modes of exploitation are changing, these are the forces exploiting and oppressing us. These are the same forces which are the enemies of the Indian people and whose rule must be overthrown.

We have been part of the common struggle of the Indian people against imperialist exploitation and semi feudal oppression i.e. the struggle for a new democratic India. These heroic struggles were carried forward with our large scale participation in revolutionary struggles under the leadership of communists. The Great Telengana Armed Struggle continues to be a beacon. Tribals also participated in large numbers in the Srikakulam Armed Struggle, Godavari Valley Resistance Struggle and revolutionary struggles in Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and other states.

We tribals constitute an important part of the Indian peasantry which is the main force for the revolutionary transformation of the country. We have been and are part of all major peasant fight backs to exploitation. We have been in the forefront of struggles to defeat the renewed drive to usurp forest and peasant lands under 'new' economic policies by militant

struggles rejecting both forcible land acquisition and sops of rehabilitation. The Pathalgadi movement in Jharkhand and related areas of Odisha by predominantly Munda tribes was another fight back, this time against attempts at diluting of laws protecting Tribals' rights over their lands. Tribals in Telengana and other regions are fighting to save their podu lands braving state repression. Tribals in West Bengal, MP, Gujarat, Kerala and Maharashtra too fought for their rights. Tribals in North East are engaged in a complex struggle to save their livelihood and rights.

There is a sustained move by the rulers to suppress us and our legitimate struggles. In many parts of the country we are subject to ruthless repression in the name of anti Maoist operations such as Operation Green Hunt. The pro corporate rulers have used sections of some tribal leaders armed by them to forcibly displace us tribals from our resource rich habitations by projecting the violence wrecked by the state as intra tribal disputes, as in the case of Salwa Judum. In service of corporate, in various parts, large scale arrests, torture and killing of Tribal people, indiscriminate use of UAPA to crush us are continuing. Even other criminal laws are widely used against us. All these attacks are directly related to the rulers' policy direction of handing over natural resources to Corporate.

Formation of a Forum

We come together as *All India Tribal Forum* to raise the issues faced by our vast multitude, unite all the tribal communities inhabiting different parts of India, wage struggles to do away with the obstacles in our striving for a better life, for even basic essentials of life and against forces exploiting and oppressing us. Let us take up programmes of action for realization of our rights and unite all

forces willing and prepared to move in this direction. We should combine these efforts with those of others akin in aim and complementary in practice.

The Forum will fight that our forests, land and natural resources should not be handed over to MNCs and Corporate. We will fight back the notion of Development which results in alienating us from our lands, life and livelihood. Let us fight for recognition of our rights over our lands and against dispossession from our land. Let us fight against forcible displacement.

We come together to fight for our right over forest produce and its guaranteed sale on remunerative prices. Let us fight for MSP for minor forest produce and for guaranteed state procurement to ensure sale.

We unite to protect our culture and develop our languages. We will struggle for right to preserve and avow our religion.

We will struggle for autonomy of our areas. Let us fight for access to all government welfare services, for education and health facilities by govt. which are oriented to our needs.

We fight for full implementation of reservation in jobs and educational institutions.

We unite and fight against harassment of police and forest officials, against foisting of false cases, against UAPA and other black laws, against police and paramilitary camps in tribal areas and against all forms of state repression. We unite to fight against attacks by landlords, contractors and other anti-tribal elements against us.

Let us unite and fight for proper implementation of laws against alienation of our lands and for securing rights under Forest Rights Act.

Let us unite to fight for a *Tribal Policy* protecting and safeguarding our interests and promoting our needs for development.

Our struggle is an inalienable part of the vast struggles of toiling peasantry of the country. It will be one of the tasks of this Forum (All India Tribal Forum) to chart a path embodying this unity while taking into account the special features of tribal society. Our struggles as indeed of the entire peasantry are inextricably bound with those of the people of India to defeat our common enemies and for new democratic transformation.

*[Approved at All India Tribal Convention held on May 21, 2023
at Vishakhapatnam (AP)]*



Corporate 'Pug Marks' Cast Shadow Over Tribal Rights.

Hyping Tiger Sanctuaries for Minerals for Corporate

● **Ashish Mittal**

There is a wild hype about India's wildlife success even as India slips down the Human Development and Poverty Indices. Dressed in hunter attire, posing with binoculars, the Prime Minister inaugurated release of Namibian Cheetahs into the erstwhile Kuno National Park, now as a Tiger Sanctuary. NTCA has recently declared that tiger population has gone up from 2,967 in 2018 to 3,167, rise of more than 6.5% in 2 years. The media has hailed Indian Govt's efforts to restore and secure mother 'nature' even as the threat of Joshimath collapsing and spoiling the makeup looms on the horizon. Corporate greed is at its worst and tourist eagerness sighting picturesque tigers in the fold of nature stands by in driving this din, to drown the bleating of the sacrificial goats, the forest natives.

Since its inception in 1973, the tiger project has expanded from nine tiger reserves covering 18,278 sq kms to 53 reserves covering 75,796 sq kms. Of this 41,499.37 sq km is the core area. This accounts for 2.3% of India's land area of 3.287 million sq kms. As per the National Wildlife Database of Jan 2023, India has a total of 567 wildlife sanctuaries now covering an area of 122,564.86 sq km, which is 3.73% of our land mass. Another 218 sanctuaries are

proposed in the Protected Area Network Report covering a further area of 16,829 sq. kms.

The Indian Govt. formed the National Tiger Conservation Authority, NTCA in September 2006. The Wildlife Institute of India and NTCA have been surveying areas for pug marks and other signs of presence of tigers to declare them as Protected Areas and Tiger Reserves.

Tiger protection is wrapped under ‘biodiversity conservation’ to lend weight to constitution of a ‘Special Tiger Protection Force’ (STPF), announced by the Finance Minister on 29th February, 2008, even though nature is not even mentioned when any area is so declared. The STPF is a statutory authority to protect tigers from poachers. But it is the tribals who fear the STPF, as it is they who will be forcefully uprooted, even though they have resided for centuries in these forests in harmony with wildlife. The poachers manage their escape with help from politicians and forest department, while very often it is the Adivasis who get the blame and are falsely implicated.

Sample these:

On March 24, 2023, after the NTCA notified Dibang for conversion into a Tiger Reserve, the local Idu Mishmi tribals, a sub-group of the Mishmi tribes, considered endangered by the UNESCO and which consider tigers as their mythological elder brothers, opposed the plan saying that “it should not be done at the cost of lives and livelihood of local communities”. The Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society declared that this will entail deployment of the Special Tiger Protection Force and would cut off their access to the forests. They complain that the Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary was

created without following due protection as provided in the Wildlife Protection act of 1972 and the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. (Indian Express, “Why tiger loving Idu Mishmi ...”, April 10, 2023).

A big male tiger was spotted through camera traps in Kaimur of Rohtas district in 2020. In January this year the NTCA decided to declare this area as a Tiger Sanctuary. It will become the II Tiger Sanctuary of Bihar, covering 1,342 sq km. It is closely linked to movement of Tigers from Sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, Bandhavgarh and Panna and covering the border areas of Chattisgarh and UP, a possible ‘Tiger Corridor’.

The Ranipur Tiger Reserve (RTR) in Bundelkhand region is now Uttar Pradesh’s fourth and India’s 53rd tiger reserve. The news was shared by union environment minister Bhupender Yadav. It will be spread over 530 sq km of which 230 sq km will be the core area. Reason for this is that it is located around 150 km from Panna Tiger Sanctuary and is also close to Bandhavgarh and although there are no tigers, often pug marks are seen here.

The investigation report into the “Blatant Rights Violations in Nagarahole” by Nagarahole Adivasi Jammappale Hakku Sthapana Samiti (NAJHSS) reveals the following:

In Nagarahole forest region in Karnataka, the community ownership of forests is of Jenu Kurubas, Beta Kurubas, Yaravas and other forest-dwelling communities. It was first declared wildlife sanctuary in 1955 and an independent critical tiger habitat in 2007. Ever since these communities have been fighting against their forced eviction. But their resistance have been met with violent assaults, fake encounters, regular death threats, false criminal cases and destruction of their lands and crops by the forest department

and its security forces like special tiger protection force (STPF). More than 8 Adivasis have been killed in firing by the Forest Department.

The tribals of Nagarhole have been on an indefinite sit in at the Forest office since March 20, 2023. They argue that Nagarhole was declared “a tiger reserve without taking consent of their Gram Sabhas and in violation of all the provisions under Sec.38V of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) under which it was notified. Further that under Sec.5 of FRA, in the CFRR (Community Forest Resource Rights) area the Gram Sabhas have to protect, conserve and manage forests, wildlife and biodiversity. But the NTCA and other bodies have been violating these rights and supremacy of Gram Sabhas “by superimposing their model of tiger and other conservations”.

They are demanding that this ‘disrespectful commodification of forests and wildlife through eco-tourism projects and tiger safaris at the cost of Adivasi people’s free movement and co-habitation with the forests and animals inside Nagarhole’ should be stopped.

Violation of Tribal Rights and of Indigenous People:

These Wild Life Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves are blatantly refusing to address the rights of the tribal and other non-tribal populations living inside and nearby these areas. The attempt is to create a hype around growth of tiger population and drown the voice of sanity, humanity and legislative equity for local populations as granted in the FRA 2006, Schedule V and VI, PESA, LARR 2013, the SC and ST Atrocities Act and others.

The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:

A short review of some relevant provisions of the Wildlife

Protection Act, of Sept 9, 1972 and related facts will be helpful:

The preamble states that the Act is “to provide for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants and for matters connected therewith or ancillary or incidental thereto with a view to ensuring the ecological and environmental security of the country.”

“Protected area” has been defined as a National Park, a sanctuary, a conservation reserve or a community reserve; “Reserve forest” has been defined as “forest declared to be reserved by the State Government under section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (16 of 1927), or declared as such under any other State Act”; and “sanctuary” means “an area declared as a sanctuary by notification under the provisions of Chapter IV (Section 38V) of this Act”.

The Act provides for constitution of the National Board for Wild Life which has to— “promote the conservation and development of wild life and forests” and banhunting of any wild animal except under reasons specified.

In it under Section 18. Declaration of sanctuary.—

Under Section 2[(1)] The State Government may declare any area as a sanctuary if it considers that such area is of “adequate ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological, natural or zoological significance, for the purpose of protecting, propagating or developing wild life or its environment”. However, the only reasons that have been invoked in declarations of Tiger Sanctuaries so far are that signs of tiger presence/ sighting/ pug marks.

What the Act says On the Rights of affected people:

The Wild Life Protection Act provides for some guarantees to the affected people under Sections 18 to 24. It says the “State

Government shall make alternative arrangements required for making available fuel, fodder and other forest produce to the persons affected” till such time as the “rights of affected persons are finally settled”.

It commands the Collector to ‘inquire into, and determine, the existence, nature and extent of the rights’; and to publish ‘within a period of sixty days’ ‘in the regional language in every town and village’ the notification. Claims are to be filed within 2 months; the area claimed can be excluded or acquired as per LAA 1894 (LARR 2013 now); and this has to be completed within 2 years.

These sanctuaries are part of National Parks which are declared so under Section 35 (1) of WPA to protect their “ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological or zoological association or importance” and “for the purpose of protecting, propagating or developing wildlife therein or its environment”. Under the Act grazing is prohibited and there are restrictions on entry and to acts that may cause damage.

And the Act provides for “Conservation Reserve Management committees” to have Panchayat representatives.

Tiger Reserve Authority:

[The 42nd Constitutional Amendment passed this in 1976, brought Forests (17 A) and Protection of Wild Animals and Birds (17 B) under the concurrent list (as it was before 1920), thereby enabling the Union Government to enact legislation, overriding state laws, on a country-wide basis. A concrete outcome was the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 to control indiscriminate diversion of forestland by States for non-forestry purposes.]

Chapter IVB of the WPA deals with National Tiger Conservation Authority. This was inserted by Act 39 of 2006 w.e.f. 4-9-2006. Section 38L constitutes the NTCA. The tasks laid out for it are to “approve the Tiger Conservation Plan prepared by the State Government under sub-section (5) of section 38V of this Act”; to “emphasise on co-existence in forest areas outside the National Parks, sanctuaries or tiger reserve”; and to “ensure that the tiger reserves and areas linking one protected area or tiger reserve with another protected area or tiger reserve are not diverted for ecologically unsustainable uses, except in public interest and with the approval of....”.

So, the ultimate idea is to create a continuous Tiger reserve corridor, not just isolated Tiger Reserves. And such corridors are to be under armed protection of the STPF.

Tiger Reserve provisions on Rights of Affected People:

Section 38O (2) specifically states that “The Tiger Conservation Authority may, in the exercise of its powers .., issue directions ... provided that no such direction shall interfere with or affect the rights of local people particularly the Scheduled Tribes”.

Further Section 38V (3) states that “The State Government shall prepare a Tiger Conservation Plan’. It will ensure (a) protection of tiger reserve; (b) ecologically compatible land uses in the tiger reserves and areas linking one protected area or tiger reserve with another for addressing the livelihood concerns of local people, so as to provide dispersal habitats and corridor; and (c) the forestry operations are not incompatible with the needs of tiger conservation. Subsequently it states that the State Government

shall ensure 'the agricultural, livelihood, developmental and other interests of the people living in tiger bearing forests or a tiger reserve'.

It further explains that the core or critical tiger habitat areas are required to be kept as inviolate for the purposes of tiger conservation, 'without affecting the rights of the Scheduled Tribes or such other forest dwellers'.

Still further it explains that in the buffer or peripheral area where a lesser degree of habitat protection is required the aim is to promote 'co-existence between wildlife and human activity with due recognition of the livelihood, developmental, social and cultural rights of the local people' and 'the limits of such areas are determined on the basis of scientific and objective criteria in consultation with the concerned Gram Sabha'.

And it further clarifies that other than areas where voluntary relocation takes place 'no Scheduled Tribes or other forest dwellers shall be resettled or have their rights adversely affected for the purpose of creating inviolate areas for tiger conservation unless —(i) the process of recognition and determination of rights and acquisition of land or forest rights of the Scheduled Tribes and such other forest dwelling persons is complete'. It states that although the state govt may declare that the presence of human habitation may threaten the existence of tigers and reasonable option of cohabitation is not there, but that too 'has to be done with the consent of the STs and OTFDs residing there'. In the Act there are provisions of resettlement, of consent of Gram Sabhas for any such package and 'their rights not being extinguished unless they give consent'.

Chapter 4 C deals with Crime Control Bureau for Tigers and Endangered species. Other chapters deal with trade and commerce, prevention of offences, penalties, miscellaneous issues.

So, it is not only the Forest Rights Act but also the Wildlife Protection Act which legally guarantees traditional forest rights. But in practice we see no signs of “promoting co-existence between wildlife and human activity with due recognition of the livelihood, developmental, social and cultural rights of the local people” or livelihood protection of local people.

Wildlife under Forest Rights Act, 2006

We must specifically know that Section 2 (d) of the FRA states that forest land means “land of any description falling within any forest area and includes unclassified forests, un-demarcated forests, existing or deemed forests, protected forests, reserved forests, Sanctuaries and National Parks”. This position has been upheld by several judgements of the Supreme Court.

Review of some experiences on forest use, ‘protection’ and policy: Developing a peoples’ based policy initiative to protect and conserve resources:

A Review of the history of use of Forest produce and its protection reveals that cheap forest resources have been exploited by colonial rulers earlier and by big corporate and MNCs for their profits. Lip service has been paid to forest preservation, protection and rights of traditional communities, who have been deprived of their traditional abode without being provided any alternate means of survival. Question for us is, can forest life and forests, both be protected.

Priority in forest management should have been given to develop harmonious human cohabitation to preserve and conserve biological diversity; wildlife; soil and water conservation; and climate control measures along with procurement of useful minor forest produce; developing forest agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry and fisheries. Forest Dwellers are nature's own security staff. They have the advantage that they are natural to the region and with traditional knowledge to manage the forests. They and only they can be instrumental in such management. Modern development of their life should be integral to such management. Today, on the one hand natural environment is under great threat and on the other indigenous people are forced to live in extreme backwardness and it is mainly due to human indulgence for profitable resource extraction.

During British period, timber production on a sustainable basis from state reserve forests was the principal goal. Forestry development to fulfill growing needs of economic development came into focus post 1947. The new forest policy of 1952 policy emphasized higher priority to meeting of essential national requirements over local needs, conversion of low valued miscellaneous forests into high value plantations to meet needs of forest industries. Zamindari Abolition Act 1952, which formally extinguished the property rights of princes and landlords, transferred the forests under princely states to state govts. The size of forest transfer to states was vast viz. 29 million ha, swelling the forest area under Forest Department to 54 million ha.

Forest Agriculture: By 1976, the Report of the National Commission on Agriculture recommended displacing "low yielding and low investment forestry" and promoting "high yielding high

investment forestry”, again to meet raw material needs of forest industries. Forest Development Corporations, institutional finances, departmental logging and high value industrial plantations increased, but neither deforestation stopped, nor productivity increased.

Concept of social forestry has basically been used to increase tree and other plantations on available govt. lands, waste lands for fuel needs of rural people, cottage industry, rural employment, ecology, etc. These so-called public sector entrepreneurial efforts have totally failed. Under Social Forestry about 24.84 million ha of plantations were raised during 1980s and 1990s. The National Forest Action Program, India (1999) reports, “the performance of these.. has been poor”. The Mean Annual Increment of forest plantations compared poorly with “good quality industrial plantations”.

This effort also drew attention away and resulted in failure to promote regeneration of natural forests. Organized theft and illicit logging continued.

When during 1975-2000 concern for environmental functions of forests were raised in the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment, it led to a National Report in 1972 for imminent action to tackle extinction threat to tigers.

Later, in 1988, a new forest policy was formulated and a bold initiative to enable public participation in forest protection through Joint Forest Management was taken in 1993. Reports say this gave better results as forest loss decelerated. Involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies in the protection of State forests, usufruct rights of the community over forest produce, a

share in final harvest of timber and micro-plans for the forest were made. This system was popularly called Joint Forest management (JFM). By 2000 end, about 36,130 Forest Protection Committees managed a total of 10.25 million ha of forest area.

The recent emerging trend, however, is of growing trees outside forests and extracting non-timber forest products, basically minerals from forest land.

AND ‘Tiger’ love is very much part of the non-timber forest ‘produce’.

Of importance in this is the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 which made it compulsory for States to obtain the approval of the Central Government before making any transfer of forestland to non-forestry uses and had laid down the basis for compensatory afforestation, legislated later in 2015 as CAMPA. However, this act, CAMPA, neither guarantees land to be given by the user agency for afforestation, nor any fund to procure land for such afforestation. It bypasses the fact that deforestation is done in days, while afforestation takes decades. It is purely a monetizing policy for the govt. to obtain monetary compensation for loss of forest wealth. A new plan is now afoot to amend the FCA 1980 by which the forest management will be reduced to mainly maintenance of Carbon Index balance, ie, to reduce tree cover to assessment of its capacity to reduce carbon pollution.

Of the strategies adopted, the Non Timber Forest Produce, NTPF management and marketing through Girijan and block level Cooperatives achieved limited success as they became victims of bureaucratic and political indulgence and failed to empower people.

The Joint Forest Management reported better success.

However, in its review by the National Farmers Commission it was criticized for being ‘essentially a top-down command and control model’ and that it does not have people empowerment as a goal. It was recommended that JFM must “encourage bottom-up planning and implementation with ... a more commercially viable livelihood approach. Communities must be placed at the centre of the development process and the participatory and technological approaches need to be integrated”; that the JFM does not “include value addition and marketing”, hence the expected GDP growth is affected; that the ‘community based natural resources management and development’ has major potential for enhancing the well-being of people; forests should therefore be unlocked on sustainable basis for ‘strengthening the livelihood support system of the forest dwellers’. It was finally stated that the “JFM has been perceived mostly as a forest department program in which people participate. In fact, it should be a people’s program that the department should facilitate. JFM is not only what the department gives to people but also what the community has given to the cause of forests”. It was recommended that the community should assume a ‘central role in all planning processes and the government as the provider of extension and support services’.

These are valuable inputs for sustainable development of the forests, biodiversity, forest dwellers, environment, ecology, soil and water conservation, climate control and wild life and for securing life and livelihood of forest dwellers.

The above experiences have all ingredients of how forest management should be done and how forest dwelling communities should be empowered. Implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act, 2006 is possible in harmony

with above strategies of Joint Forest Management, involvement and empowering of Gram Sabhas, cooperatives for marketing of minor forest produce and govt support for agriculture, fisheries, poultry and animal husbandry.

It must be underscored that the Govt. is in urgent need for dollars as forex reserves are dwindling, trade balance deficit is rising, the govt of India as well as the Indian corporate are saddled with huge private foreign loans which need to be serviced. To invite foreign investments in dollars, the country has to be prepared to sell to them what they may be willing to buy. It is only a matter of time that from mining to eco-tourism, to huge infrastructure projects involving water and Climate management, all will be on a platter for direct and indirect FDI.

Before ending it will be good to read what the investigation report of Nagarhole concludes. “India’s conservation policy has created long-standing conflicts of who is first - people or animals? The conservation policy and practice that forest departments, wildlife bureaucracy, urban conservationists and the wildlife conservation aristocracy pursue across India is rooted in the exclusionary idea of ‘fortress conservation’ - a colonial model of protecting wildlife”. “Protected Areas (PAs) colonize, subjugate and displace Adivasis/ Scheduled Tribes, pastoralists, fisherfolks and other forest-dwelling communities. This hegemonic colonial model visualises forest dwellers as a threat to forest and wildlife while forest and wildlife officials along with ecotourists and conservation elite are the saviours of forest and wildlife. This has pushed for the creation of more protected areas, including wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and tiger reserves. In fact, what it really intends to

do is to take over total control of these vast ecological spaces for the exclusive pleasure and use by the global elite”.

“This green colonisation, disguised as ‘biodiversity conservation’, which has been destroying the lives, livelihoods and ethno-ecological life worlds of thousands of communities through displacement and eviction, is now being extended beyond and around PAs to unilaterally declaring these areas as ‘eco-sensitive zones.’ The concept of PAs has today become a means to annex forest commons, agricultural lands, water sources, etc belonging to Adivasi/Tribal and other forest-dwelling communities. Thus, this neo-colonial intent of the government has had a devastating impact on the forest dwelling indigenous and other marginalised communities as well as forest, biodiversity and wildlife”.

“This imposition of PAs on communities is a violation of constitutional rights vested in Gram Sabhas and forest rights committees (FRCs). In many instances, the forest department, along with the wildlife and forest conservation lobby (NGOs and bureaucracy) have played a sinister role in harassing families and community leaders who are against their community’s displacement. Many Adivasi/Tribal leaders have been slapped with false cases; many have been murdered and some tortured and forced to accept these relocation packages by the forest department and NTCA authorities. Often the compensation amounts are looted by the forest officials and others.”

With the govt. motivated to undermine security of forests, ecology, biodiversity, climate and natural wealth and with data of forest cover being manipulated to underplay actual loss of dense forest cover, which is the mainstay of such above security, it is now impossible to know the actual extent of loss of forests in India. It is

suddenly being propagated that forest cover has increased. The definitions of forests have undergone malignant changes which range from only 10% canopy cover over each hectare land to now carbon indexing of tree cover.

We must conclude by making clear demands:

Dismantle all Special Tiger Security Forces from all Wildlife Sanctuaries.

No to Displacement of Adivasis and OTFDs from forest.

Build a Joint Forest Management Plan with democratic and empowered participation of Forest Gram Sabhas. Secure Bio Diversity, Forest Cover, Climate Security, Tiger Protection and Protection of all endangered species through such Joint Management.

Develop basic and eco-friendly civic, education and health infrastructure and facilities for Forest Dwellers.

Ref: 1. *A reveiw of Forestry and Land Use Changes in India, 1901-2000* by K. D. Singh

2. *FRA, 2006.*

3. *FCA 1980.*

4. *WPA 1972.*

5. *CAMPA, 2016.*

5. *Indian Express, April 10, 2023*

6. *Nagarhole investigation* by NAJHSS



Support to Women Wrestlers' Protest

On completion of ten days of the protest by wrestlers at Jantar Mantar, Parliament Street, Delhi police assaulted protesting wrestlers in the night yesterday (May 3, 2023). Wrestlers have been protesting accusing Wrestling Federation of India President Brij Bhushan Singh, BJP Member of Lok Sabha, of sexual harassment of women wrestlers and demanding his arrest. Supported by the RSS-BJP Govt. Brij Bhushan Singh, a Bahubali from UP, has refused to step down. So blatant has been the support of RSS-BJP Govt. that not even an FIR had been lodged by Delhi Police (controlled by Central Govt.) and even when an FIR has lodged on the direction of the Supreme Court Brij Bhushan Singh has not been arrested till now. This delay is all the more contemptible given that one of the complainants has been a minor. While shielding the accused of such a heinous crime, Delhi police beat up the wrestlers on the pretext of merely bringing cots for the night due to heavy rains in the city over last two days.

Protests by wrestlers have drawn wide support from different sections of the people. Number of people gathering to support the protest is rising day by day and different sections of people are raising their voice in support of the protest.

Wrestlers had earlier also protested on the same issue. At that time they hoped that the Committee constituted by the Govt. shall deliver justice. They have been forced to take on the present round of protest.

RSS-BJP Govt.'s response to wrestlers protest for action in sexual offence charges shows the true face of its concern on women's issues and the real face of their "beti bachao, beti padhao" slogan. It shows clearly that they treat women and girls as objects of exploitation and do not see any need to take action against offender.

RSS-BJP shielding of Brij Bhushan Singh, a bahubali from UP, has also shown that their so-called campaign against Mafia in UP is communally charged and political motivated. RSS-BJP are trying to monopolize muscle power so vital in winning the election to perpetuate their power. RSS-BJP dependent on their muscle power dare not act. The other two Ms money and media too they have tried to monopolize through Electoral bonds in the case of former and takeover of large sections of media by friendly corporate.

The protest by wrestlers also show the abysmal state of affairs in relation to sexual harassment in work places. Despite Vishakha judgment, grievance committees do not exist in most of the institutions and are merely formal in most cases and seldom address the real concerns of the complainants. Apex Court handling of complaint of sexual harassment against the then Chief Justice Rajan Gogoi had sent a very negative message to the victims of sexual harassment. Supreme Court while ordering registering of FIR should also monitor the progress and direct the arrest of accused.

Govt.'s response to this protest also shows blatant favouritism to those close of power. While so many innocents are routinely arrested and languish in jail for years without any charge, BJP MP is not only free but intimidating the protesters brandishing all kinds of threats.

The protest once again highlights the almost negligible presence of institutional framework in governing sports as in other public institutions, but a complete and unchecked sway of those in power in various bodies governing games and sports. Young girls and boys devote precious part of their lives to make a mark in their field and win laurels for the country and society. Their hard work and devotion needs respect and recognition but the sharks like Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh rule the roost in these spheres and young boys and girls are exploited; if they protest their voices are muzzled. Rather than recognizing their talent, abilities and passion, they are treated as beneficiaries (labharthis) of the system. Those in power who lose no time in appropriating the laurels won by these wrestlers have no qualm in perpetuating their exploitation and slandering their protest.

This protest deserves all the support. Make all efforts that this protest succeeds. This protest of wrestlers is about justice to the victims of sexual harassment, but more importantly this is for dignity of women at all places including work place and a sexual harassment free public life.

All sections of people must be mobilized to support the protest especially women, youth and students. Join the protesters at Jantar Mantar in large numbers. Hold meetings in all areas to mobilize the people in support of the protest and the larger issues that this protest is raising.

May 4, 2023



Big Peasant Rally by Kirti Kishan Union



Rally by Kirti Kisan Union (KKU) on May 26 at Moga (Punjab)

On May 26, 2023 Kirti Kisan Union (KKU) organized a big rally at Moga to focus on the issues faced by the peasantry. More than ten thousand peasants from across the state participated in this mass meeting. Speakers focused on the issues faced by the farmers in Punjab and dealt with the causes of growing agrarian distress in the state.

Leaders who addressed the Rally included Com. Nirbhay Singh, Com. Rajinder Singh Deepsinghwala and Com. Raminder Singh Patiala. Speaking at the Rally, KKU leaders highlighted the issues facing the peasantry and agriculture in Punjab. They warned

Bhagwant Mann government to stop playing with people's emotions on the issue of water and called upon the people to raise the slogan of canal water to every farm and clean drinking water to every household. Speakers underlined how the imperialist sponsored 'green revolution' model has caused devastation in Punjab and raised the demand to implement non-toxic, pro-nature and farmer friendly, profitable and sustainable farming model instead of green revolution farming model. Demand to enact a law on guarantee of purchase at MSP of all agricultural produce was raised. Others prominent demands raised included demand to open India-Pakistan trade through Attari and Hussainiwala road corridors, demand to waive off the debt and demand to give ownership rights to the *abadkars*.

Earlier, KKU Punjab held its state conference on 4th and 5th April, 2023. KKU has membership and organization spread over 15 districts of Punjab. 718 delegates were elected to attend state conference of which 620 participated. Conference elected a new 29 member committee of which 25 members were elected at the Conference. Com. Nirbhay Singh Dhudike was elected President and Com. Rajinder Singh Deepsinghwala General Secretary.



A Short Note on NExT

● **Mrigank**

Medical Council (NMC) recently announced that there will be a test at all India level for medical students which will replace both the final year exam and the PG entrance exam (NEET-PG). The Gazette notification says:

“The National Exit Test (NExT) shall form the basis of:

Certifying the eligibility of the medical graduate to register to practice the modern system of medicine in India and therefore serve as a Licentiate Examination.

Determining the eligibility and ranking for the purpose of admission of those desirous of pursuing further Postgraduate Medical Education in the country in broad medical specialties and therefore serve as an entrance Examination for admission to courses of Postgraduate Medical Education.”

Different issues need to be addressed in this. One is the concept of combining two distinct types of tests into one. While the PG Entrance test will evaluate the best of abilities, the licensing test is necessary to determine the minimum quality required for medical practice. One can see that the concepts behind both examinations are completely different.

It is stated in the Notification that the testing will utilize superior MCQs. This is unfair to the underprivileged groups in society, especially those living in rural areas of the country. They

would be unable to practice medicine despite being accepted into MBBS programmes, adhering to state regulations, and attending courses in colleges recognized by the NMC. MCQ testing would not be the best approach of evaluating students' abilities and knowledge.

IMA, in a statement, urged NMC to reconsider this decision. It argued in a statement that the standards of all colleges cannot be compared to those with well-trained teachers and established processes because roughly 50% of all medical colleges in India were founded during the past 10–15 years. The statement further says “That too AIIMS conducting NExT will be detrimental to the students of newly started medical colleges. A minimum common standard of education should be ensured prior to uniform examination by periodic assessment and upgradation,” The IMA said that creating an exit test for a medical licence for Indian medical graduates is “mocking at our own system”.

In addition, the IMA said that over the past six to seven years, more than 300 new medical colleges have opened in India.

It claimed that the purpose of establishing all these additional medical colleges would be defeated by a nationwide exit exam for a license to practice.

According to the doctors' body, the NExT for license will result in frustrated medical students who are almost ready to become doctors but are refused practice. This will deter prospective students from enrolling in medical colleges due to the uncertainty.

Because a common national exit exam for licensing had been mandated on the students without the establishment of a unified medical education standard, it was further said that all new medical

colleges would ultimately be devoid of students and will be forced to close.

IMA concluded by saying “The whole exercise of NExT has been a grossly one-sided affair without listening to the legitimate concerns of the medical students and the profession. IMA rejects NExT in toto for its anti-students content, ... Under these circumstances, we appeal to the central government to intervene and instruct NMC to reconsider the proposal for NExT,”.

There are many more aspects to it as well. It is just another attempt by the Union Govt. to undermine federalism. India has a wide range of healthcare demands and issues; thus, each state should be able to administer the qualifying exam however it sees fit in order to meet the goals of its own healthcare system through its medical university. With NExT, which aims to be a uniform qualifying exam for the entire nation, this won't be achievable.

In the NExT exam, which is meant to replace NEET-PG, students won't be evaluated on their first- and second-year course work or for their final-year part I subject in “social and preventive medicine.” Only the clinical subjects and the non-clinical subjects' applied components will be evaluated. This is an odd development that is very dissimilar from NEET-PG. The knowledge of basic science and public health is essential for any medical or surgical speciality. That apart, there are many postgraduate seats in non-clinical disciplines for which NExT scores will be utilized for admission.

As part 2's real courses are already complex and time-consuming to study, having to review part 1's ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology will be a strain for final-year MBBS students.

Due to the excessive strain, this exam would put on final-year students, the majority of them will unavoidably be forced to retake the NExT exam in order to raise their scores for post-graduate admissions. Students would be compelled to seek the assistance of the multi-million-dollar coaching industry even more than previously if multiple choice questions were the only type of questions in step 1, as is the case with NEET-PG currently, due to the additional requirement to qualify for step 1 in order to complete an internship. One must also keep in mind that the entire absence of alternative question kinds, such as essays, from the qualifying examination restricts evaluation and hinders various learning activities.

Another issue is the proposed rule that calculates the score for post-graduate admissions by averaging the results of the last three NExT step 1 attempts. If they are unable to get their desired postgraduate seat on the first try, this will unnecessarily require them to work hard for longer than a year.

In the present NEET-PG environment, many students give up their jobs and family responsibilities for at least a few months in order to pass the exam. With NExT, if the average score over three attempts were to be calculated, it would disadvantage low-income students because they might not be able to afford to take breaks from their work for longer than a year. It could also undo a student's year-long effort to raise their score because the average score can be more negatively impacted by the poor score received in the first attempt.

Particularly, the already low representation of women in postgraduate seats will further deteriorate since it would be challenging for them to manage several years of sustained

preparation for NExT because they could have to juggle pregnancy and childcare responsibilities.

There are general policy-based issues which these specific issues indicate. All these high-pressure MCQ-based exams, as we have seen in JEE, NEET, CUET etc., not only almost necessitate coaching, but also undermine learning of the subjects. As core subjects are nothing but tools to get good scores in such exams and emphasis is on what is commonly termed as ‘cracking’ these exams rather than understanding the concepts of the concerned subject. A major trick in MCQs is elimination and good guesswork.

Incident of a NEET student committing suicide in Tamil Nadu, despite being top-ranked student in the state board is well known and is a glaring example of what such tests mean for common students.

As is the case with high fees private colleges and education loans, when a student will invest in coaching, his objective will get back the money as early as possible. Thereby, ethics and social concerns will take a further backseat.

The centralized test is part of the RSS agenda, which wants to do away with any federal structure and semblance of democracy. This is also the part of agenda of GATS and WB as well. They want uniform content, exams and control. This will be easier for the private sector to operate.

In the end, most of the people who will pass out and will be able to get MBBS degree will be from rich background and almost all from upper caste (coaching will not have any reservation). They will suit very much for booming five-star hospital industry.



Statement From Sudan

(Below is a statement issued by the Sudanese Communist Party on the crisis gripping that country. War is continuing between Sudan Army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This statement deals with the devastating fighting that broke out last month between different factions of the armed forces. We are publishing this statement for the information of readers about the situation in Sudan.)

Stop the War, Restore Peace!

April 29, 2023

To the steadfast and patient masses of our country:

We address you today while our country is languishing under the scourge of an absurd war that our peaceful people have no interest in and because of it many of you are living under the sounds of war, fleeing, and loss.

The armed conflict between the parties to a murderous blood pact, the armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), erupted over ultimate control over power and resources. It is driven by their contradictory and respective commitments made to international and regional interests seeking access to the country's resources and location. This, by extension, made these foreign interests parties to the conflict.

To the masses of our people:

Throughout the rule of the former regime, the two warring parties used their forces to strike at the Sudanese people and put

down their revolution by shooting, displacing, and disappearing activists. They were equally complicit in the massacre designed to disperse the peaceful sit-in protest, which will remain a deep wound in the heart of the Sudanese nation.

The two warring forces went far, conspiratorially, to consolidate their power. They spearheaded the counterrevolution and hatched the October 25, 2022, coup to suppress and kill revolutionaries by various criminal means, including detentions and the issuance of fabricated criminal indictments against the innocent. They displayed no hesitation in unleashing war on heavily populated cities without regard to the humanitarian cost, causing over 500 casualties and 3,000 injured. In over 80% of hospitals in the capital Khartoum and in some provinces of Darfur, hospital closure is total. The conflict, insecurity, and the targeting of civilians and their properties in the cities have also resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of people who moved to neighboring provinces and countries.

In this regard, the situation invites all national and democratic forces, peace-loving forces, and human rights and justice organizations, at home and abroad, to mobilize toward the creation of a broad front with the support of the free peoples of the world and their organizations to stop the war and mitigate its effects and restore peace. A spontaneous grassroots effort, based on the best traditions of our people that dictate helping those in need, has emerged in many regions. This nascent effort offers a good beginning that can evolve to achieve the following goals:

– Spread the call to stop the war and promote a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence and repudiation of racism.

– Abide by international principles and standards regarding the temporary cessation of hostilities, in preparation for a permanent ceasefire.

– Apply pressure, domestically and externally, to stop the war, limit its scope, and mitigate its effects.

– Prevent any international or regional party from intervening on behalf of one of the combatants.

– Apply pressure, domestically and externally, for the United Nations and its organizations to provide humanitarian aid and open corridors on the ground for humanitarian access.

– Place all commercial enterprises that belong to the army, RSF, security, and police under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance.

– Abolish the law organizing the RSF. Disarm and demobilize it along with Islamist militias and the armies of other Movements as a prelude to their reintegration into civilian life, and the creation of a professional national army.

– Monitor and document crimes to bring the perpetrators to justice.

– Emphasize the need to move military installations away from cities and populated areas.

– Protect the social fabric and uphold the values of equality and protection of rights.

The great people of Sudan will continue their struggle toward the creation of a sovereign civil democratic state, where the people exercise sole dominion of the country and resources.

Moreover, by revising the peaceful democratic struggle that ushered in the glorious December Revolution, the people can thwart all regional and foreign attempts to impose the military's participation in government per the plans of tripartite and quad mechanisms, which have contributed to the breakout of the current hostilities.

The timing of this absurd war and its battlefields indicate that it is yet another in a series of coups designed to disrupt and reverse the gains made during the transitional period. It will not succeed and will enhance the determination of the Sudanese people as they strive toward their rights and lay the foundations for civil democratic government.

No to war, yes to peace: A civil democratic state is the choice of the people!



Organ of the Central Committee, CPI(ML)

June - 2023

NEW DEMOCRACY

Price : Rs.20

Editor : Com. Y. S. Rao

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

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