

JULY 2020

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# Liberation

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

The  
Worldwide  
Uprising  
Against  
Systemic  
Racism  
- Lessons  
for India



# Honouring the Historic Hul Diwas in 2020

Hul Diwas on June 30 marks the 1855 Santhal adivasi uprising against colonial rule and oppressive landlords, led by the Santhal brothers Siddhu, Kanhu, Chand and Bhairav, and sisters Phulo and Jhano. The uprising was met with a massacre by the British Army, but had a lasting legacy in terms of laws passed protecting adivasis' traditional rights to land.

Today, in 2020, Hul Diwas comes at a time when the rights and lives of adivasi people and the country's natural resources are under a concerted attack by the pro-corporate Modi regime. The Modi regime has allowed commercial mining of coal mines. A statement by Left parties of Jharkhand has observed that "this is a step in the direction of preventing the loot of mineral resources, water, forests and land by corporate houses protected and abetted by the Central government. Jharkhand is a State covered by the Constitutional responsibility under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution to protect Adivasi community. Commercial mining will adversely affect the lives of Adivasis in the State, as profit-centric private mining uses unscientific processes the brunt of which have to be borne by Adivasis and other poor people. In addition, commercial mining will have an adverse effect on ecological balance and forest conservation."

Coal workers have called for a 3-day strike from 2 July to 4 July. Coal workers' strikes have pushed back privatisation attempts five times in the past. But this time the Prime Minister himself is openly backing the commercial mining lobby by being present at an auction of mines on 18 June.

Meanwhile during the pandemic, the Environmental Ministry of the Modi regime has rolled out a draft proposal to amend the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) – a legal process that ensures that projects like dams and mines can get approval only after holding public hearings that assess the impact on environment and local communities. The draft proposal seeks to place many projects outside the purview of public hearings, which will mean that local communities will have no platform to make an informed decision, or indeed to have any say in the decision at all. In the case of forests, rivers, and land, the local communities are often adivasi communities. Ironically, the Government has introduced the draft proposal during lockdown and has declared June 30 – Hul Diwas day – as the last date for receipt of public comments on the draft proposal! How can adivasi communities access the internet, hold consultations, understand the implications and draft and send responses during the lockdown? The Government is deliberately leveraging a global pandemic to dilute environmental protection laws!

The Modi regime has also diluted the Forest Rights Act which had been enacted to protect the rights of adivasis and forest dwelling communities to forest land.

Meanwhile, adivasi communities continue to bear the brunt of police and paramilitary brutality, arbitrary arrests and incarcerations, custodial torture and killings, and draconian laws, especially thanks to a witch-hunt where any assertion of their rights or demands for justice is branded as "Maoism", "Naxalism" or "Urban Naxalism".

The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, as well as SC/ST reservations have also faced repeated attempts at dilution, with the Modi regime failing to defend these laws in the courts.

On Hul Diwas 2020, we demand:

- **Withdraw EIA Notification 2020 and Stop attempts to dilute the FRA**
- **Stop Commercial Mining**
- **Stop Dilution of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act**
- **Stop Witch-hunt of activists, free political prisoners, stop state terror, punish all those, including armed forces, responsible for massacres of adivasi people**
- **Protect and Uphold Reservations and the Constitution of India**



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JULY 2020

**CONTENTS****ARTICLE**

The Pandemic and Beyond.....5  
 Distress in Maharashtra ..... 13

**COMMENTARY**

Notes on Migrant Workers ..... 17  
 Impact of Agri. Ordinances .....19  
 Reservations & Social Justice .....21  
 Plot to Steal Bihar Elections .....22

**FEATURE**

Workers Defend Rights.....24  
 SHG Women's Struggle .....25

**FACT FINDING**

Baghjan Fire .....31

**RELIEF CAMPAIGN**

Cyclone Amphan .....35  
 Delhi Riot Victims .....37

**COVER FEATURE**

Uprising Against Racism .....42

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**Galwan Valley Clash:**

## Issue a White Paper on the LAC Standoff with China and Resolve the Border Dispute Peacefully and Diplomatically

Even as India is faced with the enormous public health emergency caused by the Covid19 epidemic and the massive socio-economic crisis triggered and aggravated by the lockdown in force since 25 March, Chinese and Indian troops clashed in the Galwan valley area in the Ladakh sector of China-India LAC on 15/16 June resulting in the death of twenty Indian soldiers including one colonel and reportedly also some unspecified and unconfirmed casualties on the Chinese side.

Reports of a standoff between the two sides have been doing the rounds in the media since early May. On May 5-6, 2020, a face-off between Indian and Chinese troops took place near Pangong Tso lake in which a few soldiers on both sides reportedly received injuries. On 28 May, MEA spokesperson for India invoked existing bilateral mechanisms for India and China to resolve disputes diplomatically. Meanwhile military level talks continued over several rounds on different levels culminating in the June 6 Lt General level talks after which the MEA said "the two sides will continue the military and diplomatic engagements to resolve the situation and to ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas."

Viewed against this backdrop of continuing talks through military and diplomatic channels to resolve the standoff, the Galwan Valley clash clearly marked a setback to the process. Amidst talks of de-

escalation, suddenly we witnessed a major escalation claiming a number of lives. In terms of the historical record, this was the worst incident since 1967 and the first instance of military casualty since 1975. Two days after the clash, the MEA issued its first reaction. Ironically, even as the MEA statement of 18 June blamed China for the clash, it did not admit that Indian soldiers had been taken into Chinese custody, and the people of India came to know about it only when China released ten Indian soldiers including four officers the same day.

If this was not shocking enough, what followed has been truly inexplicable. The MEA statement said that the clash had taken place on the Indian side of the LAC where China was trying to erect a structure, but only the next day Prime Minister Modi told the 'all party meeting' point blank that there was no incursion or intrusion and no loss of land or post. His statement was so clear and blunt that there was no question of misunderstanding it, but next day the PMO issued a long clarification while removing that clear denial from his video address. Meanwhile, China is using Modi's video in a big way to substantiate its own position and has staked its claim over the entire Galwan valley even though military analysts say the area has been largely under Indian control since 1962. There has been no specific official rebuttal of the

Chinese claim yet from the Indian government.

While the official statements coming from the government of India, including Narendra Modi himself, appear uncharacteristically muted, especially when contrasted with Modi's aggressive rhetoric in 2013-14 in the run-up to his 2014 victory or the Modi government's loud 'surgical strike' posturing against Pakistan, and in fact suggest a virtual acquiescence to the Chinese claims, the Sangh-BJP brigade is making up for it with their jingoistic hyperbole and virulent propaganda, much of which is directed against the opposition and especially the Left in India. The Sangh-BJP campaign revolves around three big mischievous and false planks: (i) hypocritically targeting small traders and common consumers for selling and buying Chinese products (when all through the Modi era India's economic dependence on China has kept growing with China emerging as India's number one trading partner and Indian big corporates forging close ties with Chinese companies and Chinese capital), (ii) accusing the opposition of being pro-China to silence every inconvenient question that the government cannot answer, (iii) making false claims of military-diplomatic strength and success when in real life we are seen to be paying such a high price.

While the regime remains silent about the actual state of affairs on the LAC front, it has also started peddling a new narrative about the role of the Indian Army. Modi claims to have given a free hand to the Army and a well-known anchor of a leading channel said the government should not be questioned for any lapses on the part of the Army which is entrusted with the job of patrolling along the

LAC. This is so different from the Pulwama-Balakot phase when Modi was busy claiming all credit and hogging the limelight all along. Is it to insulate the political leadership and blame the Army for any setback and adverse development?

The other sinister angle emerged when Modi asked every Bihari to be proud of the gallantry of the Bihar Regiment. The soldiers who fought hand-to-hand combat with the Chinese troops belonged to the

*Even as the Modi government drags India deep into the US-Israel nexus, India stands badly isolated from almost all neighbouring countries. Friendly relations with neighbours are a prerequisite for making our borders secure and peaceful. Clearly, Indian foreign policy needs a major course correction.*

16th Battalion of Bihar Regiment, but the regiment comprises soldiers from all over India. Of the twenty fallen soldiers from this regiment, as many as fifteen were from other states. It is not difficult to understand why Modi, whose government is otherwise busy undermining federalism in every possible way, is projecting the Indian Army through the prism of regionalism. Bihar is going to the polls later this year.

With so many unanswered questions about the Galwan valley clash still awaiting clear and credible answers, the two sides have gone back to the negotiating table to resolve the standoff through talks. Any war between

two nuclear powered countries in the middle of a pandemic and major economic crisis can only be a recipe for disaster. It must be ensured that the clash does not lead to a war and all issues are sorted out through negotiations. The border dispute cannot have a military solution, it can only be resolved diplomatically. And while the two countries address the issues through diplomatic negotiations, the Modi government must issue a White Paper on the Pangong Tso and Galwan valley stand-offs to take the Indian people into confidence about the real state of affairs.

Any conflict between China and India is also bound to have major global ramifications. A key difference between the earlier phase of China-India tension and the present phase comes from the shift in Indian foreign policy from the non-alignment era to the current phase of growing strategic identification and integration with the US and Israel. India's own tension or conflict with China thus gets subsumed in America's global design of targeting China and this can only aggravate bilateral tension between India and China. Trump never misses an opportunity to offer to mediate between India and China. Even as the Modi government drags India deep into the US-Israel nexus, India stands badly isolated from almost all neighbouring countries. Friendly relations with neighbours are a prerequisite for making our borders secure and peaceful. Clearly, Indian foreign policy needs a major course correction. Peace and cooperation with all neighbours must be the basic objective and foundation of our foreign policy to enable India to play a more effective role in the international arena. □

# The Pandemic and Beyond

## Free Quality Healthcare is a Fundamental Right

Arindam Sen

In Part I we showed how the colonial rulers dealt with the 1896 plague and the 1918 flu outbreak in India and how the present government is continuing with the same repressive approach in handling the Covid-19 pandemic. In this issue we continue and conclude Part I and go over to Part II.

### *(Continued) Part I*

#### Coping with Epidemics and Pandemics

Over the period between May 19 and June 22, Covid case count in our country has risen from 1 lakh to about 4.25 lakhs (nearly 14 thousand deaths) while the global count is nearly 9 million (nearly 4,62,000 deaths). In both cases, the numbers are rising precariously.

However, human resistance against the virus continues, and different countries, even different regions or states within the same country have their own stories to tell. Let us briefly review some of these.

#### How the Original Epicentre Fights the Outbreak

The first phase of China's fight with novel Coronavirus was tainted with the scandalous and tragic episode related to a bright young doctor who selflessly served his people and was punished for that.

It was the fag end of December 2019. Dr. Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist in the Central Hospital of Wuhan, learned from Dr. Ai Fen, director of the emergency department of the same hospital, that seven patients from a local seafood market were diagnosed with a respiratory illness resembling

severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). He studied the matter very closely and shared the information and his views over WeChat with former classmates, asking them not to make it public. But a screenshot of this communication got leaked and went viral. Dr. Li was summoned to a police station and was pressured to sign an admission of guilt. He and the other doctors -- all frontline warriors against Covid-19 -- were reprimanded by local police officials for 'rumor mongering and 'disrupting social order'.

In mid-January Wenliang was diagnosed with Coronavirus infection in course of treating his patients and hospitalised. On January 28, China's Supreme People's Court issued a statement which condemned Wuhan authorities' investigations into people like Li who shared early information about the virus. "It might have been a fortunate thing for containing the new Coronavirus, if the public had listened to this 'rumor' at the time, and adopted measures such as wearing masks, strict disinfection and avoiding going to the wildlife market," the commentary said.

While undergoing treatment, Li continued to post to his Weibo account and speak out against misinformation. "I was wondering why official notices were still saying there was no human-to-human

transmission, and there were no healthcare workers infected," he wrote on January 31. He breathed his last after seven days.

A tremendous outpouring of grief and public anger followed, with trending hashtags on Weibo such as "Wuhan government owes Dr. Li Wenliang an apology" and "We want freedom of speech". A group of top Chinese academics signed an open letter calling for the central government to issue an apology to Dr. Li and to protect freedom of speech. Li Wenliang was hailed in China and abroad as a heroic whistleblower, and Ai as the one who provided the whistle.

Under tremendous pressure, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection investigated the matter. Its report recognised that Dr. Li and other doctors were mistreated and placed all blame on local police officials, refusing to accept that numerous such instances of suppression of democratic rights actually flow from the government's policy itself and that was what needed to be drastically changed. Those officials were then subjected to some sort of disciplinary action. The Wuhan police department revoked the admonishment and tendered a "solemn" apology to Li and his family members. In April, Li along with thirteen other eminent fighters against the Coronavirus

was commended as martyr.

Thus ended (or did it?) the true story of Li Wenliang, a bright young doctor and a member of the Communist Party (as the Central Commission mentioned in its report) who deserved to be felicitated for his vanguard role not posthumously but when he was alive.

Meanwhile, the fight against the pandemic was picking up steam.

Owing to shortage of protective gear and lack of information about the virus, nearly 3000 healthcare workers were infected in the first few weeks of the outbreak, but the gaps were soon overcome. Identification and sequencing of the unknown virus were done pretty quickly and the genetic information passed on to the WHO. This enabled scientists around the world to immediately start developing test kits, treatment options and vaccines.

On the ground initially there was a good deal of chaos and confusion. The health infrastructure was really overwhelmed with a ceaseless -- and growing -- influx of patients. A few cases of people suffering unattended were reported. Like we have seen Haryana and UP sealing their borders with Delhi, China also witnessed scenes like Henan authorities digging up trenches to block roads connecting Hubei so as to keep contagion at bay. But the central government intervened quickly and asked the provincial governments to follow the principle of "block one, not three", that is, block the virus from spreading, but don't block roads, traffic (especially of emergency supplies and essential goods) and internet access.

Things improved after an apex group of top officials from all ministries and led by Premier Li Keqiang was formed. It started guiding and reviewing in detail various aspects of the work on a day-to-day basis, thus ensuring

good coordination and prompt implementation of policies. Thousands of military medical personnel as well as soldiers were mobilised to assist civil authorities.

A good many stadiums and other places were converted into makeshift hospitals. In Wuhan two new hospitals -- one at Huoshenshan and the other at



"I think there should be more than one voice in a healthy society, and I don't approve of using public power for excessive interference."

-Li Wenliang

Leishenshan -- with 1,000 and 1300 beds respectively, were erected in about 10 days, using prefabricated units. They became functional from early February. Both are fitted with latest state-of-the-art equipment and systems such as specialized ventilation systems and depressurized rooms to prevent airborne microorganisms from spreading out of the hospital.

Hubei province and its capital Wuhan was put under lockdown from 22-23 January. The rest of the country remained partially open, but under different degrees of restrictions depending on the

spread of infection. In areas under lockdown, proper arrangements were made for supplying all essential commodities to the doorsteps of residents. E-commerce giants like Taobao, Alibaba were allowed to work with stipulated precautions, so supply chains of medicines, food items etc. were not as completely shattered as in our country. And of course, there was hardly any report of man-made crisis of migrant labourers.

Like many other events, the Chinese New Year celebrations due to start from 25 January were canceled, but by that time a large number of people travelled out of Wuhan and other parts of Hubei. However, by using its expertise in AI (Artificial Intelligence) the authorities were able to trace most of these people and began monitoring their health in quarantine centres or hospitals.

Apart from AI, China extensively used other digital technologies such as big data, cloud computing, blockchain, and 5G internet. The government saw to it that private as well as state-owned companies make their algorithms publicly available, researchers share data and firms step up access to video-casting tools for educators and those working from home. For example, Alibaba Cloud made its AI computing power available to public research institutions around the world to accelerate the development of new pneumonia drugs and vaccines. The 5G+ remote consultation system was widely used to connect hospitals across the country to the best experts in Beijing, thereby further improving the efficiency of diagnosis and treatment.

After two-and-a-half months of lockdown, Wuhan and Hubei reopened, with abundant caution, on April 8. The country started

limping back to a new normal with rigorous safety protocols. The government made it clear that there was no room for complacency. To guard against a possible resurgence of cases, Wuhan tested its entire 11 million population in May. Since then, some positive cases are being reported here and there, including Beijing, and authorities are taking prompt action. The key idea now is restraint, not lockdown.

In his recent book *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*, Slavoj Žižek observes that China dealt assertively and successfully with the outbreak in Wuhan. But, he says referring to the Dr. Li Wenliang episode, without an open space for citizens' critical reactions to circulate, mutual trust between the people and the state is impossible to sustain. That is China's great challenge.

And that in a way sums up the Covid-19 experience of China.

## A Vigorous “Trace, Test, Treat” Regime

Between January 19 and February 18, South Korea had recorded a total of 30 cases and no deaths. Within the next 10 days, there were more than 2,300 cases because the 31st patient turned out to be a super-spreader who, before her diagnosis, travelled to many crowded spots in Seoul and other cities. Hundreds of people at a church she had attended and in the surrounding areas tested positive.

A task force was created, comprising all government ministries and, crucially, all regional and city governments, too. This “joined-up strategy” yielded quick results. When one region ran out of hospital beds for example, nearby cities or provinces were asked to open up beds in their hospitals.

The moment the virus DNA

pattern was confirmed in Wuhan, Korean medical teams and bio-companies were able to develop new testing kits with surprising speed. Learning from its experience of handling the outbreak of MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, which is also caused by a Coronavirus) in 2015, a vigorous regime of “trace, test, treat” was put in place. Anybody in Korea who has symptoms or reasons to be tested can get the test within minutes at a ‘drive-thru’ or ‘walk-thru’ testing centres and receive the result by text message the very next day. In all complicated cases, hospitals test the patients several times before releasing them. This strategy has yielded remarkable results in controlling the spread of the virus and mortality rate, without declaring a nationwide lockdown.

When parliamentary election was announced for April 10, many voiced concerns for infection. But elaborate safety measures including repeated disinfection of the polling booths were made and people turned out with great enthusiasm and in record numbers (66.2 per cent, the highest in 28 years) and re-elected president Moon Jae-in's Democratic Party (DP). The latter got a clear majority on its own and a more reassuring majority with its ally Platform Party. This was in stark contrast against the last election in 2016, when turnout was low and no party got a clear majority. Naturally, the brisk voting and the comfortable victory are being attributed to Moon's successful handling of the crisis.

## A Developing Country with Few Cases and No Death

Vietnam confirmed its first Covid-19 case on January 23, declared a national emergency

within seven days and swung into action. It banned entry of Chinese tourists and imposed a 14-day institutional quarantine for all foreign arrivals. To arrest the spread of the virus it relied on a few relatively low-cost solutions: swift development of its own set of testing kits which were more affordable and got CE and WHO certification; quick strategic testing (e.g., of anyone showing even feeble symptoms and her contacts) aggressive contact tracing, vigorous public communication campaigns and targeted lockdowns of hotspots rather than a undifferentiated countrywide lockdown. And it worked fine. Though it has a long border with China, Vietnam has so far reported 349 cases with zero deaths and 326 recoveries. However, some of the measures (e.g., everyone entering a hospital or government building or a big city must, apart from undergoing thermal screening, fill in a health self-declaration form stating recent contact details as well as medical and travel history; anyone refusing to do so or furnishing false information being liable to be criminally charged) have been criticized for violation of civil liberties including right to privacy.

## Kerala Revisited

In our previous issue, we carried two pieces on the encouraging experience of Kerala -- one by Dr. E P Mohanan and the other by comrade Venu. Here we bring you an interesting district level story (one that Dr. Mohanan referred to, but with some more details) and an essential update.

Thus goes the story, excerpted from *What the world can learn from Kerala about how to fight covid-19* by Sonia Faleiroarchive, published in MIT Technology Review, April

13, 2020.

“On March 7 it was learned that about a week ago, a family of three -- father, mother and adult son -- had arrived from Italy. They skipped a voluntary screening for covid-19 at the airport and took a cab to reach their home in the town of Ranni, Pathanamthitta district, 200 kilometers away. When they started developing symptoms soon afterward, they didn't alert the hospital. [Later,] all three tested positive for the virus, and infected two of their elderly relatives. They were now in isolation at the district hospital but didn't want to declare the full extent of their movements.

Under the leadership of PB Nooh, District Collector of Pathanamthitta, a large team consisting of some 50 police officers, several paramedics, and volunteers, was organised. They quickly retraced the family's movements using GPS data mined from the family's mobile phones and surveillance footage taken from the

airport, streets, and stores.

They found that over the seven days since arriving in Kerala, the family had gone from one densely crowded place to another -- a bank, a post office, a bakery, a jewelry store, a number of hotels and even even a police station.

By March 9, Nooh's teams had a map and a flow chart listing each place they had been, when, and for how long. The information was circulated on social media, and people were asked to dial a hotline if it was possible that they had interacted with the family. Nooh's office was flooded with calls: the family had met with almost 300 people since arriving in town.

Now the teams had to track down all these people, gauge their symptoms, and either send them to the district hospital for testing or order them to self-isolate at home. The number of people self-isolating quickly rose to more than 1,200. Still, Nooh knew that people

who agreed to self-isolate wouldn't necessarily do it. So he set up a call center in his office, bringing in more than 60 medical students and staff from the district's health department, whose job was to call everyone isolating, every day.

The callers ran patients through a questionnaire meant to assess their physical and mental health, but also to catch lies. If anyone was caught sneaking out, “we had the police, the revenue department, and village councils ready to act,” Nooh says. But the carrot was as important as the stick: his office also delivered groceries to those in need. The district was placed on high alert. ...”

This was how the district brought the disease under control. Indeed, good macro-level policies are not enough, much depends on efficient micro-management.

Now for the update see box on the next page.

## Part II

### Socialist Medicine: Real Life Experiences

We have just surveyed various strategies of combating Corona adopted in different countries and regions in keeping with their economic conditions, systems of governance, etc. Yet there is one common feature that invariably stands out in all countries across the world: the enormously expanded role of the state in tackling the crisis. To mention just two examples, in a drastic departure from the holy principles of neoliberalism, the Spanish government put all private hospitals and other healthcare providers under state control for an indefinite period of time and also mobilized the military in the struggle against the virus, even

as UK partially re-nationalized its railways. Such measures are, however, partial and meant to be temporary. But we also have at our disposal a rich experience of the state taking full responsibility of healthcare (along with food, education and nearly everything else) for its citizens as a matter of basic policy. Why not take a look back?

### *Resume*

### November Revolution and the Rise of Socialist healthcare

The first socialist state was born in a situation of all pervasive crisis. As if the ravages wrought by Czarist Russia's involvement in the

first world war were not enough, the country had to withstand three years of civil war since 1918 . Famine and hunger, shortages of practically everything from food and medicines to fuels and other essential items, refugee and migration problems arising from wars, the high incidence of TB - - such was the backdrop when the nascent socialist state had to confront not one but a series of epidemics: typhus, cholera, the Spanish flu and localised outbreaks of smallpox. To make matters worse, elementary medical supplies such as iodine, sterile gauze, vaccines, disinfectants and even soap were in short supply. Worst of all, a large number of doctors and health workers remained



## Kerala in the Second Phase of the Battle

As of June 19, Kerala have had a total of 2,912 Covid-19 patients. While 1532 persons recovered and left hospitals, 21 patients lost their lives till date. The remaining patients are undergoing treatment in various government hospitals, while 130,655 and 1,914 persons are under home quarantine and institutional quarantine respectively.

The period from January 30 to May 3 marked the first stage of Covid-19 in Kerala, when Keralites from abroad and other states had not yet started returning to the state in large numbers. In this stage, there were just 499 patients. Only 3 persons of advanced age and with factors of co-morbidity died.

The second phase began from May 4 with the arrival of migrant Keralites. Up to June 17, as many as 84,195 persons from foreign countries and another 179,059 from other parts of India returned to Kerala. This led to spikes in both positive cases and mortality. Still, the rate of secondary transmission was brought down to 1 for 10 cases while it was 1 for 3 in the first phase. Overall, the rate of contact spread for these two phases taken together is approximately 1 for 7 (14.28%), which is much lesser than the rate noticed elsewhere in India and many countries abroad. The data recently released by the central government also specifically mentions Kerala's achievement in having minimized the rate of contact spread from 33% in the beginning to about 10.45% at present. This was made possible by more effective quarantining in homes and public institutions thanks to better co-ordination between local communities, volunteers and health workers. Even better results could be obtained if tests could be properly conducted for all returnees at the entry point itself.

How to deal with the huge influx of returnees is a difficult question at this moment. As per figures available with Non Resident Keralites' Affairs (NORKA), total number of Keralites registered for returning home is a whopping 4.27 Lakhs. In this context, the Government of Kerala now insists on (a) primary anti bodies detection tests (which takes hardly half an hour) for all chartered aircraft passengers before take off and (b) carrying those tested positive and others in separate flights. This is indeed necessary because carrying 200 or more people in an air-conditioned aircraft is likely to result in a big flare up of Covid-19 even if one or two among the passengers happen to be already infected. On the other hand, if Covid -19 infected and non-infected passengers are brought in separate flights, prior arrangements can be made at the entry point for effective quarantining and hospital care as might be needed. So at this particular juncture this procedure, though perhaps rather inconvenient for some, is necessary in the broader interests of the passengers themselves and of their compatriots in India.

- By Venu with inputs from Dr E P Mohanan who is a Consultant in Kerala Health Services; also courtesy to Dr V G Pradeepkumar, former President of IMA Kerala Chapter.

engaged in the war fronts and many of them succumbed to infections while treating typhus and other contagious diseases.

Last but not the least, the Bolshevik government had to function in the face of ferocious opposition from not only the bourgeoisie but also

from Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries.

It was against such heavy odds that the revolutionary people led by the Communist Party started building a novel healthcare system as an integral part of the socialist project. Its basic principles and features were as follows.

1. The right to health was enshrined in the Soviet Constitution and medical services, like education, was completely free and available to all.

2. Both preventive and curative medicine were considered necessary, but the main focus was on the former.

3. Like almost everything else, healthcare was centrally planned and executed by the People's Commissariat of Health (the Soviet alternative for health ministry, one can say the first health ministry in the world) but was powered by enthusiastic involvement of local communities through mass organisations of youth, women, workers and others. It had specialised departments under it, the most important one being the department for protection of motherhood and infants.

5. Mass sensitization programmes on all kinds of health issues - - from personal hygiene to food habits and lifestyles to epidemic prevention - - were conducted throughout the year by means of amateur theaters, film shows, interactive lectures, and the like. Here also, workers' clubs and other bodies played a vital role.

The health infrastructure was put in place in big cities in a few years after revolution, for other cities and towns it took some more time and spread to the vast countryside only in the late 1920s and 1930s. The problem of rural health was sought to be solved with some offbeat, imaginative measures in the second

country to tread the socialist path.

## From Barefoot Doctors and Traditional Medicine to Integrative Medicine

When China was liberated in 1949, it was economically far more backward than India, one of the main reasons being the deep scars left by the war of resistance against Japanese aggression and the civil war against the Kuomintang government. The healthcare system was in a shambles and almost non-existent in rural areas. The underdeveloped country sought to address the problem by sort of recycling and improving whatever resources were available at hand: the so-called barefoot doctors and traditional Chinese medicine or TCM.

Barefoot doctors, or traditional practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine, who came mostly from peasant or artisan backgrounds and did not have any institutional training, had long been a common sight in rural China. In the 1960s a program was launched for training and regularisation of a section of them. Those to be trained were selected by corresponding villages and after training, sent back to their own villages. This helped reinforce the existing bonding between the physician and the people. The training covered both herbal and western medicine. However, Chinese herbs being more easily available and affordable, in rural areas these were more in use.

Although bereft of advanced medical knowledge or skills, the barefoot doctors helped a lot in providing primary/emergency care, treating common ailments as well as public health/epidemic prevention campaigns, etc. Thus they played a crucial role in reducing the town-

country hiatus in medical services.

In the 1980s and '90s this system was abolished in course of a modernization drive that embraced all aspects of life in China. However, many of the barefoot doctors continued to serve as registered and regularised village doctors or auxiliary health workers.

TCM, including acupuncture and moxibustion, has all along been enjoying full state support, and has witnessed considerable progress and standardization. State-sponsored research in these areas has yielded quite encouraging results. For example, Professor Tu Youyou was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2015 for her "discoveries concerning a novel therapy against malaria". At the same time, the government is putting more money into R & D in modern medicine and related technologies. The two-pronged approach has been called the Chinese version of integrative medicine. At this moment, the Ministry of Science and Technology is funding many of the Covid-19 vaccine trials in China and the country has emerged as an acknowledged front-runner in this field.

Over the past three decades or so the medical scene in China, like everything else, has undergone drastic transformations including technology upgradation and infusion of Chinese private capital as well as foreign capital. While the public healthcare system is still predominant in terms of numbers of hospitals and patients served, private services are growing rapidly.

We don't have the space to go into the pros and cons of all these; let us turn our attention to a small country that is valiantly struggling to hold aloft the flag of socialism in most difficult circumstances.

## The Country known for "Medical Internationalism"

Soon after the Cuban revolution of 1959, the Fidel-Che government embarked on developing a unique healthcare system by enlisting some 750 physicians and medical students for what they called the Rural Medical Service. The aim was to provide "disease prevention and revitalize health services for those most in need, whether because they are poor, in precarious health or live far from urban centres".

Gradually a full-fledged infrastructure was developed, which is divided into three sectors or layers. The first is the neighbourhood-based consultorio. All Cuban physicians are required to work at a consultorio for one to two years after graduating from a medical school. During this time they are partnered with a nurse and together they deliver medical care in the neighborhood assigned to them. In the morning they see and treat patients in the clinic and in the afternoon they make home visits -- separately or together -- to check on patients who may need home care.

The nurse is seen as the lynchpin in this mechanism. The physician may choose to leave after completing the required residency period, but the nurse stays on, may be for the rest of her tenure or even her entire life. The basic idea behind this programme is that primary care should be provided at the community level with an emphasis on assessment, health promotion, and disease prevention by healthcare providers living and working in the same neighborhood as their patients. Thus, they would get to know the people they care for and experience the same problems and exposure to disease.

The second layer is the polyclinic which are staffed with pediatricians, and other specialists who provide necessary therapies and referrals to patients as well as training to healthworkers. Most of the polyclinics now offer services previously available only in hospitals, such as ultrasound, optometry, endoscopy, thrombolysis and so on. The polyclinics are also responsible for keeping health statistics and reporting these to the Ministry of Public Health. The third link in the health care chain consist of hospitals and specialty institutions.

It is highly deplorable that an excellent healthcare system like this has been suffering from a serious funds crunch, which negatively impacts the quality of services, largely owing to economic sanctions imposed by the US. However, Cuban medicine is still recognised as one of the best in the world. Rich Warner, an American citizen who spent seven years in Cuba as a medical student, gives an impartial and balanced account of the medical scene in this underdeveloped country (see box for excerpts from his article published in *The Conversation* on November 30, 2016 (retrieved June 14, 2020)).

Along with a unique socialist healthcare system that is centrally planned yet thrives on a deep integration with the masses, Cuba boasts a fine tradition of medical internationalism. The Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Havana, operated by the Cuban government, is one of the largest medical schools in the world as well as a prominent part of Cuban healthcare system. Since 2005, ELAM has graduated tens of thousands of physicians from low-income communities. Mostly enrolled are students from outside

## Is the Cuban healthcare system really as great as people claim?

The Cuban healthcare system, born out of its revolutionary socialist ideology, regards accessibility to healthcare as a fundamental right of its citizens. It focuses heavily on a preventative approach to medicine and offers the simplest check-up to the most complex surgery, free of charge. Dental care, medicines and even home visits from doctors are all covered by the system.

As an American citizen, I was always impressed by how much Cubans were able to accomplish with so little. The professionalism and humility displayed by healthcare workers was without doubt commendable. It is these people who, though receiving paltry salaries (doctors earn about £52 a month), are in many instances overworked because thousands of their colleagues were sent to other countries such as Venezuela and Brazil to participate in healthcare missions.

In addition they do this without access to the latest in diagnostic technology or have to wait weeks for basic equipment to arrive at hospitals to perform procedures, even at times without electricity or running water. They still find the strength to push through all these obstacles and challenges to deliver a service worthy of praise.

...The government gains about US\$8 billion annually as a result of its overseas medical missions. Sending thousands of doctors overseas, though a commendable action, leaves a domestic system under pressure. With fewer doctors and specialists at home, queues at hospitals and clinics are longer, and so are waiting times. Doctors have more work to cover in a stressful profession with limited resources. A patient may end up travelling to another province to visit a specialist because the one stationed nearest to him or her has been sent to Venezuela. This may be the reason why many more medical professionals are currently being trained across Cuba to help fill the void left by those sent around the globe.

... Some of the clinics and hospitals in operation are in dire need of repairs. ...[There is] urgent need of more modern medical equipment and stable electricity and water. [A major factor behind this is] the trade embargo placed on Cuba by the US government ...

The island continues to offer hundreds of scholarships annually to foreign students including those from the US. These scholarships are generally open to students from low income families who may not have been able to attend medical school because of their socioeconomic background. The Latin American School of Medicine is one of the largest medical schools in the western hemisphere with thousands of students from over 100 different countries.

The Cuban healthcare service has stood the test of time. It has afforded a foreigner like myself the opportunity to study a career free of charge while many of my colleagues are thousands of dollars in debt after attending medical schools in the US. It ensures that open heart surgery doesn't result in lifelong indebtedness. It has created globally competitive biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. It doesn't turn people away because of their socioeconomic status. It is a system that has been there for its people. Yes, it has its flaws and challenges which need remedying, but it is not merely a propaganda tool for the powers that be.

Cuba -- mainly from Latin America and the Caribbean but also from the United States, Africa and Asia. ELAM's motto is simple: "To provide free medical education to bright students who are passionate about becoming doctors, but lack the financial means to do so and this will drive them to return to serve in communities like their own".

Starting from 1963, when the evolving socialist state sent a medical mission to help the Algerian war of independence, the island nation has been regularly sending best medical professionals to help other nations. In addition to countries like Venezuela (where it sent and trained medical personnel in exchange for oil) Bolivia and Nicaragua -- which have been co-fighters against US imperialism -- it has so far sent health workers to more than 90 countries.

In 2014 WHO promoted the deployment of medical personnel from Cuba to Africa to fight the Ebola epidemic. In the current war against Coronavirus Havana has sent medical personnel to Lombardy -- the wealthy but hardest-hit region in Italy -- as well as to Angola and several Caribbean states such as

Suriname and West Indies. On 16 March, the cruise ship MS Braemar, with over 1,000 passengers and crew on board, was given permission to berth in Cuba after it was rejected by the Bahamas for fear of infection. In Cuba at least five passengers tested positive for novel Coronavirus. Thanks to the Cuban authorities, the patients received proper medical care and the worried passengers were able to fly back home.

### Conclusion

The three public health systems we have just discussed were built up in conditions of extreme poverty, hunger, and general backwardness. The driving force, in each case, was not huge capital investment but a commitment to serve the people, the confidence that what is apparently impossible can be achieved by relying on the masses, and a bold, determined leadership. In fact today the material conditions in our country -- and in many other countries -- are far more matured compared to the immediate post-revolutionary conditions in those countries for putting in place an elaborate and upgraded public health infrastructure. So why

shouldn't we immediately fall for it with the same urgency with which we are now combating Covid-19?

Our experience over the past three months have laid bare the utter unwillingness and incapacity of the pampered corporate hospitals in providing large-scale life saving services. Everyone can see that it is the government hospitals, subsidiary health services and various special arrangements made by the state that, for all their shortcomings, are taking care of more than 80% of Covid cases. Given that the incidence of epidemics, pandemics and other serious maladies like cancer, TB, diabetes are sure to grow by leaps and bounds in the coming years and decades (as virologists, epidemiologists, doctors, and scientists working on environment and ecology testify) we urgently need a stable and strong public health ecosystem, committed to free quality healthcare for all and powered by a flourishing democracy with a participatory system of governance.

Yes, right to health, as part of right to life, is a fundamental right. We must have it. Now. □

# FIGHTING COVID-19


What India needs




More Testing




More PPEs



More food/ration




More public hospitals



Relief Shelters







Light and sound show gimmick

# AC 2020: Fire Engulfs Life at Large, Flames Touch Personal Lives

*Ajit Patil*

**D**uring the most widespread drought Maharashtra has seen in hundred years in circa 1971-72 A.D. Comrade Bhaskarrao Jadhav of Lal Nishan Party, a communist poet as well, wrote a song which became popular in the movement demanding work in rural Maharashtra. This movement won the Rojgar Hami Yojana (Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Act) which was the precursor to the MNREGA. Even today the workers and the employees in Maharashtra pay a portion of their salaries and wages running into crores to finance the scheme. With the neoliberal policy shift, the rich and middle peasantry in active collaboration with the corporates have disrupted and to an extent dismantled the scheme to keep the agricultural wages at the lower level and also to encourage migration from the rural areas to the Industrial areas for cheaper labour for corporates and MSME sectors across Maharashtra's industrial areas and auto hubs.

The song in Marathi went: "आग चहू बाजूनी लागली संसारा, सवालाचा जबाब दे रे देशाच्या सरकारा!" Translated loosely: "Our life is engulfed by the fire (you lit) all around, we demand answers from you, Government of the country".

Modi's cruel and unplanned lockdown has once again brought India to the situation described by the song, in 2020 AC (After Corona).

## A Tale of Two Cities: Pune and Mumbai

Com. Dilip Pawar of Shramik Ekta Mahasangh of Pune brought about the subject of suicides in the Number Two metro city in the state

– Pune, in the Trade Union Joint Action Committee meeting on the 20th of June.

**Pune:** The IT capital, the once preferred city of upper caste retirees, a self-declared citadel of knowledge of the high castes now converted to a market of education by high caste high class merchants of (Indian) Venice, the modern Auto hub, the city of two wheelers, the city of the Peshvas and also the Phules, Gokhale, Agarkar, Maharshi Karve, Javalkar of anti-Brahmin movement. But also the city of Godses. A political playground of Sharad Pawar, Ajit Pawar, Kalmadi, leaders of the Socialist party as well as Javadekar! A city of military cantonments, armament factories, Armed Forces Military College and National Defense Academy. A city actively promoted by the ruling classes for corporates. A city of startups, MSMEs as vendors to the Auto companies and the IT sector. A city intentionally encouraging the culture of "owner driven" economy to expand the base of the capitalist system. A city of mainly intra state migrant workers from the agricultural hinterland of Western Maharashtra as well as the perennially drought affected regions of North and Central Maharashtra-Marathwada. A city earlier known as the bicycle city but after expansion in the years gone by, systematically starved of a public transport system to promote the two wheeler industry of Bajaj and Firodias, the close associates of Gandhiji in the freedom struggle! Continued thereafter by the 4 wheelers from General Motors, Volkswagen and Tatas. A city

of crowded pubs and eateries overflowing on Saturdays with young generation geeks. A city of possibly the largest numbers of Indian Diaspora mainly from the higher castes.

A city once known for its salubrious weather now converted in to an ever expanding concrete jungle by the powerful builder lobby. The once agricultural land owners sold their land, made huge money, turned mafia, flaunted kilograms of gold on their selves, entered politics of all hues and also murdered each other.

As in Mumbai about 33.5% population was staying in slums according to the 2011 census situated on about 5 % of the total land used for housing. Of these, 45% slum households do not have in-house toilet facilities and 10% do not have electricity.

A city once had a vibrant trade union movement. It still boasts a 75 year old municipal workers union led by young communists, and the first union of the domestic workers in the country which led the first strike by domestic workers.

The home of the Film and Technology Institute of India.

This Pune witnessed 10 suicides in the last one week!

Comrade Dilip Pawar spoke to me about this.

A small businessman aged 34, and his wife (30) killed their 2 very young kids by hanging and then committed suicide. They had found no business in the last three months of lockdown, and the debt trap tightened around them. They had fallen in love and married across

social barriers – and the social isolation they suffered as a result made matters worse.

A painter, two daily wage earners, a Mandap contractor, two employees of the Hinjewadi IT hub – all took their lives.

The corporates have come out with daggers drawn, slashing salaries between 10 to 30% in the organized sector (contract workers will of course fare even worse). The “techies” too (who once proudly distanced themselves from unions and embraced corporate culture) find themselves on the chopping block of the IT industry.

The “fire in the belly middle class” has started feeling the heat below their seats in private sector as well as state government – a circular is out to terminate the services of employees with co-morbidities.

Comrade Dilip Pawar feels that this is only the beginning of a crisis unfolding in Pune. Unless we demand work and sustenance allowance with immediate government intervention the situation is likely to deteriorate.

**Mumbai:** *Ai dil hai mushkil hai jina yahan, jara hatake, jara bachake yeh hai Bombay meri jaan!*

Anyone who has listened to this old song along with Cheeno Arab hamara, Hindostan hamara can much accurately visualize the City of Mumbai – then Bombay - even today.

**Mumbai:** A city born out of 7 islands given as dowry to the British by the Portuguese! A city built, nurtured, brought to glory and fame by migrants from many a provinces of the colonial India. From the merchants from Gujrat to the Kamathi construction workers from Telangana. From Parsis, Memons, Bohras, Shias, Sunnis, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Buddhists to

East Indians flocking to this city of colonial opportunities. From Mathadis, textile workers from rural Maharashtra, migrants from Tamilnadu, Bombay, Karnataka, Bengal, UP, Bihar, Rajasthan. Shipbuilders for opium trade with China to textile mill owners. The Pathare Prabhus, who were the original inhabitants with Aagris and Kolis - agriculturalists and fisher folk.

An all-weather port. A city well connected by rail and road with rest of Maharashtra and India. A city of social reformers, educationists, trade unionists, freedom fighters.

A city with glorious working class history from reformists to revolutionists. From martyrs in the cause of the motherland and 107 martyrs to the cause of democratic linguistic state in the federal framework. A city of glorious revolt of the naval forces against the British which was the last nail in the coffin of British imperialist rule in India. A real united revolt with flags of all colors green, red, tricolor flying high, flying together!

A city of humid hotness with ferocious beauty of the much loved and much hated monsoon.

A so called melting pot of cultures, religion, castes, sexes, with all fault lines wide open just beneath the surface. The most unequal city for the masses. A city of huge dehumanized existence of more than 60 percent of the population in slums occupying just 5 % of the habitable and not so habitable land mass. A city of dilapidated buildings, high rises existing with the slums.

A city of local trains – the life-line of all the economic activity- with more than 50 lakh commuters per day travelling by rail and another 20 lakhs by the famous BEST buses. People spending on an average 3-4 hours in daily commutes.

The Finance and Industrial Capital breathing down on every soul 24 x 7 in this city.

A city which somehow keeps ever growing reserve army of labour just alive by selling dreams and vada-pav!

A city of neo liberal monuments like Metro 1, Coastal roads encroaching on the sea, New International Airport, Nonfunctional mono rail and “redeveloped buildings” converted to towers, horizontal Slums “redeveloped” in to vertical ghettos.

A city of mafia dons, gangsters in a nexus with builders, politicians, government and municipal authorities, the film industry.

A city of old, overcrowded but humane public hospitals like KEM, JJ, and Nair versus swanky five to seven star private hospitals set up on public land, treating the masses like trash.

A city of medical tourism, tourism, hospitality industry, the Udupi restaurants, 5 star hotels, PG accommodations.... (Out of the total work force in India the hospitality, hotel and tourist industry provides a whopping 12.5 % direct and indirect employment. Closure of these avenues has led to and likely to lead to a significant unemployment).

A city of working women who occupy public space with much greater assurance, perhaps, than in any other Indian city.

## So what is it like to be in this city 2020 AC?

Archana Shelar hails from Konkan. A third daughter conceived in the search of a “lamp of the family” (a son), a cancer-affected father (a textile worker from the oil extractor Teli caste). In 1982, during the textile strike, nine of her near family lost jobs. She started working from the age of 9 to help the

family to meet two ends. At 15 she started selling vegetables during the textile strike.

The husband, a rickshaw driver had to take up a job on contract for 25 years. She has been working as a work from home tailor to domestic worker starting with sweeping, washing clothes and utensils and slowly graduating to cooking – a “career” of 27 years! And to crown it all she took up the role of an activist in organizing domestic workers.

Her son lost his job. He is a skilled hardware IT technician working on contract for 7 years. After the pandemic broke, he was asked to work for half the salary or quit. Her daughter is at home presently getting salary in lieu of surrendering leave. They live in a slum locality in a middle class suburb. Both the son and daughter are past the usual “marriageable age” and this year also seems an impossibility. The 2 auto rickshaws used to give some additional income are idle. She has been asked not to come by 2 families and not paid for lockdown.

*And today she is selling vegetables again!*

I interviewed her about her experiences:

*“We all get up at 2.30 am and go to the wholesale vegetable market. Come back home. Following precautions against Covid the entire family sets out to sell vegetables from 6.30 am to 1.30 pm. Back home, a bath and a quick lunch. A quick nap and I set out to cook for a family from 5.30 pm to 8.30 pm.*

*“I am selling vegetables in a predominantly middle/ higher middle class area. I found that these families have been buying very small quantities. I asked many of them. They told me that they are eating a full meal only once in a day. Night time is for some rice or upma.*

*“I was approached by an auto*

*driver of around 65. The couple is on their own after the 2 daughters got married. He requested me to give him vegetables but has no money to pay. He said he has not eaten vegetables for weeks and could not restrain himself. I gave him vegetables worth Rs.100.*

*“On the same day a taxi driver in a similar age bracket came to purchase vegetables. The taxi business has been already in doldrums and he does not venture out due to age. He purchased vegetables worth Rs.185/- but could only find Rs.85/- and paid that.....”*

Our work amongst the migrants tapered off as they left the city. But suddenly in the last two weeks we have been approached by several hundred families from Kurla – Chembur area and some Bihari Muslim families of Jari workers from Mumbai central area for ration and jobs. Most of these are work from home “karigars” like Jari workers, Chappal top makers, safety pin makers, tailors etc. They shared their angst with me while requesting for ration kits.

*“Sir, for last three months we have no work. The family has spent whatever it had. The main outsourcing industries have clearly told us that they cannot give work as they have no orders. And you know for the next 4 months no one will buy leather chappals.... Everyone will buy cheap PVC stuff for rainy season..... Can we get some loan or a job.... At least some ration?.....”* This was repeated by almost 60 % of the callers

Many were followers of Sant Ravidas (so, Dalits), staying on rented houses near the Ravidas Temple in the Kurla/ Chembur area. They are migrants from Nagour in Rajasthan, who came 15 years ago and now have nowhere to go back to! Some others from the same area are in tailoring, making pins.

Some of the men are alcoholic. The entire families have, even pre Corona, “worked from home” in these piece-rate jobs. Some sons and daughters are educated or are still students, but education is in a shambles now. A list of 430 such families was shared by an NGO.

During the earlier phase we had helped migrants from Bihar employed in the Jari Industry in the Mumbai Central areas. Some of them approached us again for kits as they did not have the money to go back to Bihar or maybe did not wish to face the aftermath of journey back home. All of them are Muslims. Saba, a 16/17 year old, 12th standard pass girl called me to request for ration kit. I asked her why she did not approach us earlier. She said so many people got it but no one shared the information. Now I got your number and so I am asking. When she got the ration in the afternoon through the good offices of an enlightened and ever helpful official, she called to thank me. She said I should have asked for a job as well and broke out in to a laugh laced with a tinge of sadness.

The number of cases are rising across the region and the much maligned public hospitals and their under-protected doctors, nurses and support staff are heroically holding the fort against Covid 19. The private hospitals are busy in looting the patients. The most affected are the common people bereft of proper housing, proper nutrition, proper sanitation, proper access to good health care and services - and now jobs and salaries.

This is a glimpse of the ground situation unfolding across the entire MMRDA region.

**I am sure many a cities will have similar tales with some variations across the country.**

Though the industry has started up again in Maharashtra, the jobs,

salaries are under threat for both permanent and contract workers. Cash flows are severely affected for the families, individuals as well as the MSMEs. Job losses and salary cuts are severe in IT and service sectors. Industry is starved of workers as the migrants have left. The shopkeepers, small home and individual businesses have and are suffering. The lower and the middle class has started feeling the pinch. The EMIs are like the vetal on the back of the Vikramaditya! The young and the middle aged middle class youth also needs jobs now.

So the song of circa 1971-2 AD

“आग चहू बाजूनी लागली संसारा, सवालाचा जबाब दे रं देशाच्या सरकारा!” has become even more relevant almost 50 years later! We must demand answers from this government. We must prevail it to turn back on selling of assets of the public sector, intervene with investments across the spectrum to create assets to build a real Atmanirbhar India not a FDI centric phony sold out India. We immediately demand:

Urban MNREGA for semi urban and urban areas including all metros.

Dignified and secure employment

to all the educated and the undereducated unemployed based on skilled sets and experience.

Immediate Direct transfer of sustenance allowance till employed.

Dovetailing the Urban and Rural MNREGA to create tangible national assets in the service of the masses at large like hospitals, water supply, housing, drainage and irrigation. Use the skills of the migrant workers by paying higher than minimum wages in the rural MNREGA. □

## Tribute to Fallen Soldiers

CPIML organized a countrywide day of mourning on 22 June to pay tribute to the brave soldiers who fell in the Galwan Valley. The party has condemned the misleading and contradictory statements made by the Prime Minister and his party and government. The government has no right to keep the country in the dark.

Homage meetings for the martyred soldiers were organized in all the states in Party offices as well as open places wherever it was feasible in the lockdown. People joined to pay tributes to the fallen soldiers and to ask the government as to why it is hiding the truth from the people about how and where the soldiers were killed.

Hundreds of activists from several districts of Tamil Nadu observed Mourning Day. They criticised Modi Government's diplomatic failure leading to such an impasse and deaths of many soldiers.

### CPIML Leaders Meet Families of Fallen Soldiers

CPIML leaders including former MLA Rameshwar Prasad, MLA Sudama Prasad, Madhuri Gupta, Rakesh Manjhi and Rajesh Gupta visited Taranagar village in Bihata (Patna District) on 17 June and paid tributes to Jawan Sunil Kumar who fell at the India-

China border at Galwan. They met and spoke with the bereaved family. Jawan Sunil Kumar's father is Shri Vasudev Sah. Another brother Anil Kumar was also in the Army and is now living in the village after retirement. Martyr Sunil Kumar leaves behind 3 children—a daughter and two sons. The entire village is plunged in grief.

Also on 17 June, CPIML CC member Raju Yadav, RYA State President Ajit Kushwaha, AISA leader Kamlesh Yadav, Shahnawaz Khan, Pappu Kumar and other youth leaders visited martyr Chandan Yadav's native Gyanpura village in Jagdishpur (Bhojpur), paid tributes to the fallen soldier and attended his final journey and last rites.

CPIML Samastipur District Secretary Umesh Kumar met the family of fallen Jawan Aman Kumar in Samastipur and paid tributes to him.





# Notes on Migrant Workers: Key Issues and Urgent Tasks

*Dipankar Bhattacharya*

**M**obility and migration have all along been central to the formation and growth of the working class. From villages to towns, from towns to cities and metropolises - workers have all along been moving and relocating themselves as workers. There are also patterns and levels of migration that can be classified according to distance and duration: inter-district, inter-state and inter-country migration, seasonal and longer-term migration, and so on. But in spite of the pervasive presence of migrant workers, they have remained largely invisible. We have noticed their presence during moments of major economic disruption (demonetization or economic recession for instance) or social conflict (when migrant workers have faced major parochial violence in their areas of work). But it took Modi's thoroughly unplanned and punitive lockdown to unlock the suppressed social reality of migrant workers in India. They have now erupted as an explosive phenomenon in the face of the Modi government and all its empty rhetoric of rapid development and good governance. While the process of migration went unnoticed, it was the reverse migration that shook up the whole country.

## Cruel Regime

The exodus exposed the unplanned and cruel nature of the lockdown like nothing else. The fault lines of the corporate model of development are now out in the open. On a more fundamental level, it has unmasked the true

face of the state. It was clear that when the government announced the lockdown and gave us the 'stay at home, work from home' mantra, it spared no thought about those large numbers of Indians who had neither home (certainly not of a kind where distancing and other hygienic protocols could be followed) nor work (certainly not of the kind that could be done from home). If this was callous enough, what followed after it became clear that workers were desperate to return was outright cruel and barbaric. It took the government more than a month to decide on running trains to transport workers and now the trains have become a major scam with railway officials themselves acknowledging 80 deaths on Shramik Special trains. Total number of lockdown deaths in India, as recorded till May 30, has crossed seven hundred and migrant workers account for many of these deaths.

## Judicial Apathy

If the executive fails to discharge its responsibilities, in a democracy one expects the judiciary to play a corrective role. In India, governmental cruelty, callousness and rank incompetence has found its match in judicial apathy and acquiescence. When the first petition on the issue of migrant workers came up before the Supreme Court, the government denied that there were migrants on the roads. The whole issue was rather attributed to fake news and fear-mongering and the apex court accepted the government version.

When the question of payment of lockdown period wages came up, the Chief Justice wondered why the workers needed wages when they were getting free food. Eventually after two months the Supreme Court claimed to take suo moto cognizance and asked the government to arrange free transport for migrant workers when hundreds of thousands of them have already reached home braving so many obstacles and so much insecurity and repression, pain and humiliation, and in so many cases, paying a heavy price with their own lives. The dominant media paid little attention to the whole crisis, but the few journalists who did have been dubbed 'vultures' by the government before the apex court.

## Left at the Mercy of the Contagion

Migrant workers wanted to return home, but in many cases they now find themselves in quarantine centres which are so utterly mismanaged and underequipped that they can only be called detention camps or torture chambers by another name. Migrant workers cramped in overcrowded tenements in Covid-stricken cities like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Delhi NCR or Bengaluru have always been among the most vulnerable social groups in India in the face of the Covid-19 epidemic, and instead of ensuring their return before the lockdown or during the early stages, they have been forced to return at a time when the epidemic is clearly spreading quite rapidly. This has

exposed the migrant workers and their families not only to greater risk of the epidemic but also to social distrust and divisions and increased emotional stress in their own villages and neighbourhoods.

## Slavery Packaged as Aatmnirbharta

The disruption caused by the combined impact of the epidemic and the coercive and unplanned lockdown is not going to be something temporary and limited. By all indications, the exit from the lockdown is going to be protracted and messy. The economy was already in a slowdown mode before the lockdown, now even the government admits to a massive decline. It is an absolute contraction of the economy and the scale of resumption of the economy after the lockdown pause button is restarted is certainly going to be affected. The situation is going to get worse because of the economic direction being pursued by the Modi government. Instead of moving towards increased state intervention, public expenditure and large-scale cash and food transfer to the needy to boost public demand and hence the economy, the government has chosen to treat this crisis as an opportunity to further liberalise the economy and appease capital by dismantling and suspending labour laws and diluting relevant environmental and factory regulations. All this is being fraudulently packaged as “Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan”, a campaign for India’s self-reliance.

## Question of Relief and Employment

This macroeconomic scenario poses a big question mark for the future of the migrant workers. It is difficult to say how many of them

will be able to return to their places of work and pick up the thread of life from where they had left it before the lockdown. Can we think of their possible economic reintegration/reaccommodation in their areas and states of origin? The lack of job opportunities and basic wages in their own areas/states that prompted them to migrate to other states and cities in search of a better living is still very much there. That can change only with local economic changes – revival and reopening of sick and closed industries, formation of a new chain of agro-based and other labour-intensive small and medium units and big factories or service chains with better employment and income prospects. Speaking in the short-term, this must be complemented by an improved and more effective NREGA framework (with increased duration and scope for work and better wages), launching of employment guarantee act for the urban unemployed, massive expansion in public works (with building of government hospitals and schools and colleges as the main priority), provision of unemployment benefits/allowance and more effective entrepreneurial assistance to promote self-employment.

## Vanguards of Rural Society

The return of the migrant worker is also full of new potentials and challenges for the working class movement and the agenda of progressive social transformation. Generally speaking, the migrant workers can be treated as the vanguard sections of rural society. Many of them played a leading role in struggles against feudal oppression and for social justice

before migrating to cities in search of livelihood. Many are young educated people who have moved out of the villages as the rural economy could not guarantee them gainful employment. Then there are many without any land holding or effective role in the agricultural/rural economy. While in the cities they have been exposed to the trappings of urban life and new technology, they have often not found their social bearings and the vibrant environment of progressive politics that they had in the villages. The insecurity of their fledgling/precarious urban existence and pressures of work often compel them to stay away from any class organization or class politics. The sweeping economic and political changes of the last few years – marked by relentless assault of neoliberal policies, spread of rightwing ideas, aggressive rise of the communal fascist forces and the changing character of the dominant media and the social media space dominated by fake and twisted news and communal hyper-nationalist propaganda – have profoundly coloured their political choice and the migrant workers became a powerful vehicle of the Modi victories in 2014 and 2019. This time round these workers are coming back as a deeply disillusioned lot – abandoned by the state, looted by the economy and humiliated by the dominant society. It is both a huge potential and challenge to channelise this disillusionment into new political energy and consciousness.

## A Crime Committed by the State Demands Justice

The migrant workers have never really figured prominently as a key category of workers even for

the Left trade union movement. In times of acute insecurity, Left trade unions and parties, especially back home, have of course intervened in favour of class unity and in defence of the basic interests and survival of migrant workers, but that has not meant much in terms of a sustained improvement in their living and working conditions and bargaining power. The issues of housing, health and education of migrant

workers' families and various rights of migrant workers as citizens (like possession of ration card and voter card) have often remain unaddressed and unachieved. Now that the phenomenon of migrant workers has belatedly claimed the attention of the country, we must make sure that this recognition does not dissipate with some empty gestures of sympathy, rather translates into tangible

rights and improvements/gains for migrant workers. The injustice and insult experienced by the migrant workers must neither be glorified as 'sacrifice for the nation' or trivialized as a passing inconvenience, it must be recognized as a crime committed by the state to a key contingent of India's working class and must be corrected by securing justice for the migrant workers. ■

## Impact of Agri-Reform Ordinances on Agrarian Economy

*Dr Sukhpal Singh*

Union Government has taken a 'historic step', though only time will tell whether it's historic in the right sense of the word. The government at the Centre claims the reforms through three Ordinances it has promulgated have the potential of bringing about a revolutionary change in the lot of the farming community.

The specified aim of the first ordinance - The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020 - is to promote competition in the agricultural sector; augment farmers income; taking care of consumers while liberalizing the regulatory system. The purpose of the second ordinance - The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020 - is to provide freedom of choice to the farmers for selling their produce which would fetch remunerative prices through promotion of competition in the agricultural trade. The third one - Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance-2020 envisages strengthening farmers

by providing a national level system so that they are able to protect their interests vis-à-vis corporate firms, processors, wholesale traders, exporters and agri-services.

Actually, the first Ordinance which supersedes the Essential Commodities Act-1955, is expected to give rise to hoarding and higher prices of commodities for consumers. Though it's being claimed that other Ordinances would ensure freedom to farmers to sell their produce anywhere and to anybody yet this would actually make them dependent on the agri-business companies. The dissolution of the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act would mean end of the regulated market system and income to the state Mandi Board. The loss suffered thus would seriously impact funding of various developmental works and road network system connecting villages with mandis located in urban areas. Ultimately, this would irreparably affect the entire system of rural development. Not only the destruction of farming sector or federal structure of the country, it is

feared that these Ordinances would also undermine some constitutional rights of the states.

The promulgation of these Ordinances is being sought to be justified on the basis of an inaccurate perception being tossed around for long that development of the country is possible only by shifting a vast majority of population from agriculture to urban occupations. Its hidden agenda is to let corporate sector gain control of agriculture and all its related ventures including processing of produce, future trading and foreign trading in a manner which suits its interests.

These Ordinances have sounded the death bell of the time tested institutions related to agricultural marketing such as Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission (CACP), Food Corporation of India (FCI), and the state mandi boards. It must be recalled as to why, in the first place, these institutions were set up. Before taking institutional steps for marketing and storage of the increased agricultural production under the Green Revolution model, the farmers and consumers used

to be exploited in the mandis. The CACP, FCI and Mandi Boards in the states were set up to protect farmers and consumers from this rampant system of exploitation. With the APMC Act in place, the produce started to be purchased in regulated mandis. The government agencies started procuring wheat and rice in Punjab and Haryana at Minimum Support Price (MSP). This is why the income of farmers of these two states is higher than their counterparts in other states. On the other hand, Bihar has already experimented by doing away with the control over the Mandi System and opening it up for the private traders to bargain and purchase at will. The result has been devastating for the peasants. The traders always had the greater bargaining power against the individual peasants whom they managed to force to sell at lower prices.

In fact, Multi-National Companies (MNCs) want to strengthen their grip on the Indian agriculture. For this reason, free trade was aggressively emphasized upon in the 1990s through the policies of globalization and privatization. Since then, directives are being issued from various platforms to check the subsidies in the agricultural sector. The ministerial meeting of World Trade Organisation (WTO) held in 2013 at Bali (Indonesia) allows the market support to farm sector only up to 2017 under Peace Clause. After this, Indian government is attempting to comply with the restrictions imposed by the WTO. That's why many alternative steps like PM-KISAN, PM-ASHA, BhavantarBhugtanYojana, KALIA etc. have been taken by the government for dodging the market support.

In line with this, the MSP of crops is not being enhanced in accordance

with the recommendations of the various Commissions and Committees. Shanta Kumar Committee concluded that only 6 percent Indian farmers are getting the benefit of MSP. It also recommended to do away with the FCI. Even the National Commission on Farmers in its report, popularly known as Swaminathan Report, recommended that the MSP should be given to the farmers based on total cost of production (C2) plus 50% margin. Later, Ramesh Chand Committee recommendations also included more costs in the MSP such as wages of the head of farmer family as skilled labour; capital interest of full season instead of prevailing half season; actual land rent, mandi expenses including transport cost from farm to mandi as well as managerial costs. But the successive governments at the Centre overlooked the recommendations of its own Commissions/Committees. Instead of C2, the governments preferred considering lower costs (A2+FL) and have since tried to show that farmers are already being given higher prices for their produce. This motive is clear again in fixing the current MSP.

Will such Ordinances really help improve the lot of farmers promising so-called doubling of incomes?

Instead of making the existing marketing system more efficient, the reverse has been done. Needless to say, the agricultural marketing system of Punjab is one of the best in the world. It was required to be improved further by ensuring MSP and procurement of all the crops. There are around 7000 regulated mandis across the country. The experts say their number should be increased to 42,000. Unfortunately, instead of increasing their number and efficiency, efforts have been made to do away with them through

the ill-timed and ill-conceived measures.

The upcoming concept of agricultural reforms through these ordinances is not a new one. In many developed countries, this path of reforms devastated peasantry and pushed them to the labour market as wage-labourers. These ordinances would pave way for the entry of the big profit-driven corporate entities into our agricultural sector. Already such trading entities have seriously harmed the farmers' interests even in the developed nations by gaining firm control over the agricultural sector. Despite the fact that huge subsidies are being provided to the farmers of these nations, they have become debt-ridden and have been committing suicides. A large number of farmers are being led into a situation in which they are left with no option but to quit farming.

After personally meeting and studying farmers' conditions in USA, Australia and other developed nations, it is observed that these farmers are placed at subsistence level of earnings; the bigger share is devoured by the agri-business companies. These companies find contract farming more profitable as leasing-land is cheaper than the purchasing due to lower land rents.

For long, such companies have been gazing to make dominance over our agricultural sector because of lower land rents, cheaper wages and vast consumer market of the country. They would even be willing to provide slightly higher wages and land rents for reaping good returns from large scale farming in the long-run. These companies would be in a position to gain access to a vast consumer market in India by establishing a firm control over its agri-business. Globally, agri-business is considered the second most profitable business after pharmaceuticals.

The issue here is not of farm reforms but of handing agricultural sector to the private companies. In the beginning, it's likely that there may be some increase in the incomes of farmers and farm labour but all this, in the long-run, most likely would create possibilities of disintegrating farmers' social structure and financial network. The need of the hour is to save

the peasantry which is indebted, depeasantized and killing self. The examples of the initial phases of the farmer-centric agricultural reforms in Russia and China reveal that no migration from rural to urban centres or to foreign lands happened yet economic lot of farmers improved and presented conditions for a honourable quality of life in the countryside.

We need to evolve 'Own Indigenous Model' based on our resources, skill, culture and requirements for the balanced growth of our economy. □

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## Protect Reservations and Social Justice

*Kavita Krishnan*

Oral observations by a Supreme Court bench that reservations for oppressed and backward classes are not a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution, have once again strengthened apprehensions of concerted moves to weaken social justice provisions. The SC bench made the observations while refusing to entertain a petition filed by all political parties from Tamil Nadu seeking 50% OBC reservation in the all-India NEET seats surrendered by states. Subsequently, the TN parties have withdrawn their petitions from the Supreme Court and petitioned the Madras High Court instead.

In February, the Supreme Court had overturned a judgement by the Uttarakhand HC regarding reservations in promotions, stating that reservations are not a fundamental right and decisions in this regard are a prerogative of governments. Many Constitutional experts have rightly pointed out that this claim is misleading and inaccurate. Article 16(1) of the Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to equality of opportunity to all citizens and protects from discrimination. In a landmark judgement in 1976, the

Supreme Court held that Article 16(4), which allows the State to provide reservations to persons of oppressed and backward communities, was not an exception to the equality guaranteed by Article 16 (1), but a "facet" and "emphatic restatement" of it.

Social inequality and discrimination against members of oppressed and backward castes continue to be widespread in Indian society. While reservations on their own cannot correct systemic inequality, they have proved to be a crucial measure to correct widespread biases which prevent members of oppressed and backward communities from accessing education and jobs.

In the past few years, there have been several ominous signs that reservations - the primary social justice policy in India - are under threat. The RSS, the parent organisation of the ruling BJP which informs all its policy positions, has historically been hostile to caste-based reservations. RSS founder Golwalkar, in his Bunch of Thoughts, held the demand for SC/ST reservations to be communal and anti-national. Periodically, RSS leaders have called for a review of the policy of reservations,

while BJP leaders have spoken of amending the Constitution which protects the rights of citizens, and of oppressed communities and minorities in India.

In the past six years of the Modi regime, a series of government decisions have served to dilute the scope and legitimacy of reservations. The University Grants Commission notification dated 5th May, 2016, in the name of regulating student-teacher ratio, has resulted in massive seat-cuts and the virtual decimation of reservations in M.Phil/PhD admissions in Universities. The HRD Ministry declared a large number of educational institutions to be 'Autonomous'. Such "Autonomous" institutions, as well as 'Institutions of Eminence' are divested of the requirement to fulfil reservations in admissions and faculty appointments. Seen in tandem with such measures, the series of Supreme Court judgements seeking to restrict and dilute rather than protect the Constitutional provisions of reservations are even more worrying. In March 2018, a Supreme Court ruling sought to render the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act toothless, while in February 2019, another Supreme Court ruling imposing the 13-point

roster in teaching positions in institutions of higher education, threatened to wipe out reservations in faculty appointments. In both cases, massive protests across the country forced the Government to intervene and introduce legal provisions to overrule the court's orders.

Now, the SC's rulings and oral observations seeking to establish that SC/ST/OBC reservations are not a fundamental right, again render the status of reservations precarious. SC/ST/OBC reservations which are a proven social justice measure, need to be protected from the perpetual

sword of uncertainty hanging over its head. All democratic sections of society must therefore come together to ensure that Parliament acts to place all laws relating to reservations, in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, thus placing reservations beyond legal challenge. □

## Foil the BJP-JDU Plot to Steal the Bihar Elections

*Dipankar Bhattacharya*

India's Home Minister Amit Shah, who remained invisible for most of India's prolonged lockdown so far, addressed a digital rally for Bihar on 7 June. Though Shah called it only a 'Jan Samvad' or 'communication with the people', for all purposes it inaugurated the BJP's poll campaign for the Assembly elections due later this year. The rally was also part of the Modi government's mega campaign to celebrate the sixth anniversary of Modi's prime ministership and pat its own back in the name of what it calls the Modi success story of combating the Covid19 pandemic. While Amit Shah held his virtual rally, Nitish Kumar also launched his campaign on the same day by holding digital interaction with JDU leaders and activists. In other words, both the Union Home Minister and Bihar Chief Minister were addressing the people not in their official capacities but as leaders of their respective parties.

Let us now look at the situation in Bihar. Like all other states in India, Bihar too is reeling under the twin blows of the epidemic and the lockdown. The Covid19 challenge is particularly tough in Bihar because

of the crisis-ridden state of the healthcare system in the state, but it is the lockdown which has hit Bihar really hard. Bihar perhaps accounts for the biggest contingent of migrant workers in India and with the central and state governments paying no attention to the plight of the migrant workers, migrant workers from Bihar find themselves left to their own devices – whether walking or cycling back home, or travelling in the scandalous Shramik Specials or, on arrival, being trapped in torture chambers masquerading as quarantine centres.

Additionally, Bihar under lockdown is also experiencing a heightened wave of crime against opposition activists, Dalits, Muslims, other oppressed social groups and women, and in most of these reported cases of crime, the feudal-communal-criminal nexus has the active patronage of the ruling BJP-JDU combine. The main accused in the Gopalganj triple murder case is none other than JDU MLA Amarendra Pandey, but instead of arresting him and dismissing him from the Assembly, the Nitish government is busy filing cases against CPI(ML) leaders who visited the massacre site to

speak to the local people. In the Madhubani Dalit murder case that followed, BJP leader Arun Kumar Jha is the main accused.

The people of Bihar have been vocal on all these issues all through the period of the lockdown. In fact, the digital rallies of Amit Shah and Nitish Kumar were also greeted with statewide cries of condemnation. Be it the issue of ration and relief for the starving, facilities in quarantine centres, safe return of stranded workers and students, PPE and pandemic pay for scheme workers and Corona warriors, income support for lockdown-hit workers and peasants, and loan waivers for women belonging to self help groups, microfinance schemes and livelihood mission, there have been continuing mass protests within the lockdown restrictions. Bihar has truly turned 'stay at home' into a powerful assertion of the spirit of 'protest from home'.

Predictably enough, Amit Shah and Nitish Kumar remained conspicuously silent about these burning issues that are haunting Bihar. One can see the glee in their faces as they have smelled an opportunity in the crisis. Senior

BJP leader and Nitish Kumar's deputy, Sushil Modi has been hinting for last two weeks that Bihar may have digital elections this time with voters not having to reach polling booths to cast their votes. Amit Shah says DBT has put an end to scams, Sushil Modi says digital polling will put an end to booth capturing as there will be no polling booths! These claims and suggestions are not just utterly untrue, they are thoroughly mischievous and ominous.

Actually, DBT or direct benefit transfer exists only in budget speeches and election rallies. In real life, now when India is demanding DBT for all common Indian households – monthly cash transfer of Rs 7,500 to all families outside the IT bracket for six months to support income and boost mass consumption and demand has emerged as a key suggestion to combat the present crisis – the government is only promising loans for some enterprises. And scams have not stopped, they have only grown bigger. The Srijan scam has been way bigger than the fodder scam, the difference lies only in smarter scam management! Now we do not have probes, and when inconvenient truths start emerging, whistle blowers and RTI activists are routinely eliminated, cases and judges are swiftly transferred and media is manipulated and headlines managed. The system of EVMs and VVPATs, which according to the BJP stopped booth capturing and other electoral malpractices, has been suffering from a major crisis of credibility and transparency. And now the BJP wants to make the elections even murkier by turning elections into a digital exercise that can only be much less credible and participatory and hence hugely



more dubious and undemocratic.

The signals are loud and clear. The forces which used to capture booths and stop the poor from voting till a few decades ago, which hijacked the mandate after the last Assembly elections, are now plotting to steal the elections themselves. The BJP-JDU government in Bihar knows very well that it is up against massive anger of the people over its chronic non-performance and serial acts of betrayal and failure. From Muzaffarpur shelter home rapes and Srijan scam to communal violence and serial killings of Dalits

and other activists and brutal repression of popular agitations of various sections of Bihar workers and women, to the ongoing 'corona war' on the people, the Nitish-Modi government has been thoroughly exposed as perhaps Bihar's cruelest and most anti-poor regime.

If the regime thinks it can steal the elections by keeping the people unprepared and excluded, it is the responsibility of Bihar's irrepressible democratic spirit and glorious legacy of people's movements to prove the regime wrong. □

# Working Class Gears Up Against Modi Govt.'s Renewed Attacks

Coal and Defence Workers Prepare for Strikes. All-India Protest Day on 3rd July by CTUOs

*Rajiv Dimri*

Utilizing the crisis of Corona pandemic, as an opportunity, Modi govt. has launched an aggressive campaign to push for its unfinished, pending agenda of reforms. With sadist Modi hell bent on turning this huge health crisis facing the nation into an opportunity for his corporate friends, Modi govt. has embarked upon the path of wholesale privatization and complete opening of the entire Indian economy including the most sensitive and strategic sectors, and on the other hand snatching of labour rights and creating an army of slave labour. From Indian railways, Defence, Banks, Power, Mining, etc. to many new sectors like Space science, Atomic energy have been put on sale.

The main objective behind the whole exercise of opening up of the economy, and the real meaning of turning the crisis into an opportunity was made explicitly clear by PM Modi while launching the auction of 41 coal mines for commercial mining on 18 June, 2020. He said 'it marks the beginning of the unlocking of the country's coal sector from the "lockdown of decades"'. It is a known fact that coal sector has been a nationalized sector for many decades after being taken away from the clutches of private hands. It is this nationalized character of coal sector, its ownership in the hands of the state that he refers to as "lockdown", and now aims to do away with it.

In fact, coal privatisation gives us only a glimpse of the government's overall economic plan. By describing privatisation as unlocking and nationalisation as "lockdown", Modi is advocating a complete shift of natural resources from any kind of popular control and parliamentary accountability to corporate plunder.

Offered for the public consumption again in the façade of self-reliant India, the project of commercialization of mining will cover 5 states- Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Odisha, M.P. and Maharashtra with 16,979 million tonnes total capacity of 41 mines and the annual production capacity of nearly one third of country's total output. Any company registered in India will be eligible for bidding and there will be no restrictions on sale or utilisation of coal. Govt. has promised all help to private miners in land acquisition for coal blocks. Already, after the launch of auction, issues and concerns relating to forcible acquisition of land, displacement, employment to the local and destruction of environment have risen. Many coal mines proposed for auction are located in bio-diversity rich forest areas of central India with many in protected forests. Gram sabhas in Hasdeo Arand in Sarguja region of Chattisgarh have opposed auction of 5 coal blocks in this region. Jharkhand govt. has also moved SC on 20 June against this move of commercial mining. The other concerned state govts. particularly the non-BJP ones must also oppose this move. This move of central govt. must become an explosive issue for the common people of these states and the whole of India, and not just the workers of coal sector.

Along with coal, another strategically sensitive sector like defence has also been thrown open for corporatization of ordnance factories and 74% FDI (up from 49%) in manufacturing which can, in effect, lead to its takeover by foreign capital. Opposing the corporatisation move, Defence workers had organised a historic 5 days strike in the beginning of this year.

But the working class is not taking these attacks lying low. It is getting

battle-ready to fight back Modi Govt.'s renewed attacks. Coal workers have decided to go on 3 days strike on 2-3-4 July against commercialization of mining and privatization of coal sector along with 100 percent FDI. The strike notice has been given jointly on 18 June by the federations and unions of coal sector including AICCTU affiliated Coal Mines Worker' Union, preceding which three-day protest demonstrations were held on 9-11 June. Defence workers are also conducting strike ballot for deciding on an indefinite strike against corporatization of ordnance factories and privatization of Defence sector as a whole along with 74% FDI. Last August, within three months of Modi's 2019 victory, defence employees had organised a highly successful and inspiring five-day strike from 20 to 24 August.

Both these strike calls of coal and defence workers have received full support and solidarity from central trade unions and Left parties. Workers of various sectors like Railways, Electricity, BHEL are already protesting govt.'s moves of privatization. Followed by the well attended 22nd May country-wide protest, the joint platform of 10 central trade union organisations (CTUOs) has declared an All-India Protest Day on 3rd July. After organizing a series of country-wide protest programmes, AICCTU has launched a fortnightly 'Campaign for Justice to Workers' from 10 to 26 June.

Expressing solidarity and full support to the coal strike and ongoing strike ballot in Defence and ongoing struggles of working class, CPI-ML calls upon various sections of toiling people and civil society to rally in support of these struggles. Let us strengthen and intensify our struggle to build a real self-reliant India, the Peoples' India. □



# SHGs and Microfinance Companies: Legalised Usury in the Name of 'Self-Reliance'

Kumar Parvez

Rural society in Bihar has seen a big change in recent times, and rural women have an important role in this change. ASHA workers, Rasoiyas, Anganwadi Sevikas-Sahayikas, Jeevikas and other sections of working women have changed the structure of rural life. Earlier, they used to have no work other than work in the fields, but now they are engaged in other work also. Their organizations and movements are mostly led by Left organizations, but unfortunately the Jeevika SHG has only a single organization and that is the BJP-run

BMS. According to one estimate, more than 3 crore women in Bihar are associated with SHGs. JDU had made a strong place for itself amongst rural women through the SHG Jeevika.

Women working in SHGs face many kinds of problems just like ASHAs and Rasoiyas, and the lockdown has further worsened their situation. It is said that micro-finance companies and private banks help to strengthen rural economy but the lockdown has exposed the shallowness of these claims. Group loans given by these

private companies are not making rural women self-reliant; on the contrary, they are now caught in a new kind of debt-trap in addition to the moneylender's trap. There are reports from several villages in West Champaran to show that whatever little the migrant workers were able to bring back home has also been plundered by these companies.

The Corona relief package announced by the Central government is nothing but a cruel joke on women working with SHGs. They have got no exemptions; they



Bhojpur, Bihar

have only been given a one-year time period during which they need not pay loan installments. But given the terrible crisis caused by the Lockdown, how can these women repay the loans after one year? Clearly, the noose around their neck is being further tightened. The Bihar government had announced that they would give each family 4 masks. The work of making these masks should have been given to the SHGs but all SHGs did not get this work. Even those who got the work find that their masks are not being procured. The masks are purchased at Rs 9 per piece but the Mukhiya, in cahoots with the administration, prepares a bill for Rs 20. If this kind of employment was genuinely given to the women, their condition would have improved a little.

Keeping loan waivers as the central point, the Swayam Sahayata Samooh Sangharsh Samiti affiliated to AIPWA is organising SHG women in Bihar. On 29 May countrywide protests were organized for a 6 point charter of demands: loan waivers including micro-finance company loans; each SHG or clusters of SHGs should be given employment according to their skills; the government should ensure procurement of products made by SHGs; interest free loans for SHGs; Rs 15000 per month for Jeevika workers.

Women working in SHGs gave extensive support to this call and participated in the protests at Patna, Bhagalpur, Jamui, Eastern Champaran, Siwan, Muzaffarpur, Gopalganj, Bhojpur, Katihar and many other Districts. A rural

convention was also organised in East Champaran on the day of the protest. Protests were also held at 92 places in Patna, 27 places in Jamui, 11 places in Nawada, 28 places in West Champaran, 25 places in Muzaffarpur, 45 villages in 12 Blocks in Bhojpur, and 20 places in Arwal. Protests were also held at Gaya city and many rural parts of the district.

After the program on 29 May, Panchayat level meetings were organized between 5 and 15 June in hundreds of villages to form Sangharsh Samitis at Panchayat, Block and District levels. A convention was also organized at Dhanrua on 18 June for loan waivers.

Sangharsh Samitis submitted memorandums at Block HQs on 24 June. AIPWA activists are helping



Women in Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi protesting against Microfinance companies' exploitation

SHG member women in preparing loan waiver applications and taking stock of the gravity of the debt situation at village level.

### Case Study of a Village

More than 900 families live in **Behra village** in Sikta Block of West Champaran District. Women from about 400 of the poorest of these families have taken group loans from micro-finance companies and private banks amounting to Rs 3 crore 29 lakhs. But nobody has been able to make a livelihood through these loan amounts so far. The money got spent for essential home expenses in times of need. If there had been no Lockdown, more than Rs 60 lakhs would have had to be paid to private companies as installments during these 3 months. These companies have now come knocking on doors to demand the money. The burden of debt is constantly growing. The families have no income. Family members who are migrant workers and could have helped repay the loans, are no longer in a position to do so

because of the lockdown. In order to repay the loans, many women are forced to join with women of other groups and borrow from other banks and companies. Thus women from 400 families have joined with many groups and have taken loans equaling the number of 1079 women and are constantly laden with the pressure of debt as a result. In Behra village alone, there are 10 micro-finance companies to whom the village owes Rs 3 crore 29 lakhs. These companies loan the money at an average interest of 11% to 14%, but as they go on they actually collect an interest of up to 36% (that is, Rs 3 per month as interest on Rs 100). After strong protests by the village women, the bank personnel are now not coming home to demand the money, but they have filed a case against women associated with the SHGs.

At one time the people of the village were bowed down by private usurers' debts. In addition, to-day they are burdened with company debts which are nothing more than modern time legalized usury.

Things have come to such a pass that sometimes if one member of a group is unable to repay the loan, the other members of the group come to their home to force the debt ridden members sell their household belongings. Bank personnel threaten women who are unable to repay loans with lawsuits and cases, black listing of Aadhaar card and bank accounts, and banning all government benefits and subsidies.

Thus, it is a very important task to ensure that SHG women are saved from the debt-trap of micro-finance companies. The issue of loan waivers for them is a very just demand raised by AIPWA and the Sangharsh Samiti. In addition, serious consideration must be given for the employment and livelihood of these women. If the women fail to start a means of livelihood with the loan money or if the government fails to guarantee procurement of the products made by the women, the loan money will be spent for day to day household expenses and they will never be able to come out of the debt-trap. □

## Agitation against Microfinance Companies in Punjab

**E**ven before the government announced the unlock plans, the women of Malwa area of Punjab had started coming out to oppose the highhandedness of the recovery agents of microfinance companies. These women, mostly dalits, had taken cash loans ranging between Rs 15000 to Rs 75000. The companies are charging exorbitant interest rates of the order of 26 percent per annum. The modus operandi of these shady companies is uniformly based upon formation of self help groups of 10 to 20 women who are then given a group loan of a lump sum amount which is divided amongst them and comes down to Rs 25000 per head.

When they cannot pay full instalment amounts, they are encouraged to take a larger loan of Rs 35000 each which is given to them after adjusting the principal and interest amount of previous loan. This in effect makes it the same old method of private moneylenders to trap the peasantry into the debt trap. The additional factor is that each woman is under tremendous social pressure from the rest of the group members to pay back the instalments on time because of the threat that if they default, the whole group will be debarred from future loans. Now, while organizing the agitation, this sense of group and the experience of the group leaders

is proving helpful in many places.

According to Bhagwant Singh Samaon, state president of Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, who has been leading the movement since its inception, the phenomenon has been going on for last twelve years on smaller scales, but following the 2014 RBI policy of giving licence to the Non Banking Financial Companies in the name of extending the financial network to the poorer sections, the trend has gained momentum. Though, the number of companies actually licensed by RBI under its policy is yet unknown, large number of companies are active on the ground and the legality of many of these companies is also suspect.



The number of women, rural as well as urban, trapped in this net is huge, maybe as high as 90 per cent.

The issue came to a boil as sources of income dried up during lockdown but the company agents

insisted on payment of their due instalments. As the news of clashes in many villages began to spread, thousands of women in the districts Mansa, Barnala, Sangrur, Moga and Bathinda of Punjab and the adjoining Fatehabad district of Haryana rose in protest. Massive protests of women were organized at Budhlada, Mansa, Barnala, Bathinda. Our party realized the gravity of the issues and took the initiative of organizing and uniting the protests into an agitation and framing concrete demands to take the agitation forward.

In many places the women have successfully gheraoed the company officials and their goons while trying to threaten women into paying instalments. We have so far organized more than a dozen rallies at circle levels which have been attended by more than 5000 women

in spite of the lockdown restrictions and difficulties. In Majha region, Com. Vijay Sohar has reported that about 30 villages have been organized so far and a rally of 400 participants was organized at Dharival in Gurdaspur district.

Now under pressure of the agitation many district magistrates have announced a ban of forced collection of instalments citing an RBI notification, but the agitation has keeps growing around larger demands, with many more organizations also joining the agitation.

The main demands of the agitation are:

1. Complete loan waiver for all women.
2. Compensation of Rs. 10,000 per month for lockdown period for all poor families. □

## 'Freedom from Debt' Campaign Catches On in Villages of Hooghly District

*Sajal Adhikari*

In 2006 Bangladeshi banker and social entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus got the Nobel Peace Prize for his pioneering role in promoting microcredit and microfinance. He got the award jointly with the Grameen Bank he had founded in October 1983. The idea was to free rural women from the tentacles of usury by giving them small loans and helping them with collective entrepreneurship. Since then Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) have emerged as a major lending vehicle among rural women across the developing world. And today these MFIs are functioning like a cruel moneylending network trapping women in tentacles of renewed usury. The demand for freedom from debt is therefore fast emerging as the biggest rallying point among

indebted rural women. In several pockets of Hooghly district, the demand has turned into a powerful debt cancellation campaign drawing hundreds and thousands of women in demonstrations despite the ongoing lockdown restrictions.

The MFIs provide easy credit to rural women organized as self-help groups. Women usually hand over the credit to men in the families to fund agriculture or small trade, house construction or to meet routine consumption needs or emergency expenses. The MFIs have a very high recovery rate because of collective group pressure, even though the borrowers often to take fresh loans to service their current debts and thus land into a debt trap.

Let us look at a few examples to understand the nature of the problem.

Asma Begum of Dadpur has taken a loan of INR 40,000 from Bandhan (the leading MFI in the district) to be repaid in 18 months. She has to pay a monthly instalment of INR 3,024 which works out to a total interest payment of INR14,432 over the principal amount in 18 months. She also has to take a mandatory life insurance premium of INR 2,500. The annual interest rate is as high as 24%. Rehana Sultana of Goaljod has loaned INR100,000 from Bandhan. She has to pay INR 1150 every week for two years. Tumpa Patra of Akhna village has taken loans worth INR 30,000 from Ujjivan, INR 30,000 from Samasta, INR 35,000 from Village, INR 18,000 from SKS, INR 40,000 from Bandhan and she has to pay weekly instalments to repay all her loans.

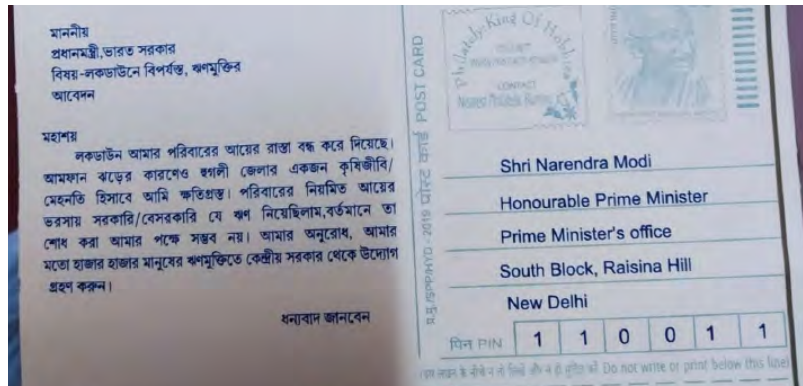
The lockdown has suddenly disrupted this cycle. The incomes from various sources, including remittances from migrant workers working in cities, on the basis of which these MFI borrowers used to pay their weekly or monthly instalments, have all dried up. The Supreme Court did announce a three-month moratorium on payment of EMIs during the lockdown period, but the borrowers will have to apply for it and in many cases they just did not get this information and the MFIs are continuing to coerce them for loan repayment.

Against this backdrop, the call for freedom from debt or debt cancellation had an electrifying effect on the borrowing women. At the initiative of the All India Agricultural and Rural Labour Association, a debt cancellation committee (DCC) has been formed and it is organizing village level meetings. Keeping the lockdown restrictions and the Covid19 situation in mind, the demonstration in Polba-Dadpur block was supposed to have been attended by only two representatives from every SHG, yet more than 3,000 women turned up in the demonstration. The DCC has asked all borrowers to fill up forms with their loan details and some thirty thousand forms have already been deposited to the committee. A memorandum backed by this data base is being submitted to the finance ministries of state and central governments. Postcards are being sent to the Chief Minister and Prime Minister.

The DCC has come out with three basic arguments in support of the demand for cancellation of debts: (i) with no flow of income, there can be no repayment, (ii) when the government routinely writes off big corporate loans and announces bailout packages for big borrowers, why should microcredit borrowers be treated differently,

and (iii) the SHGs have always been prompt and regular in repaying their debts, but since the government announced lockdown has stopped all incomes, the responsibility for loan repayment should also be borne by the government. The movement is spreading like wildfire in the villages of Hooghly. Many

peasant households in Hooghly district have also been affected badly by the crop damage caused by Cyclone Amphan. Women from these aggrieved peasant families are joining hands with the MFI-indebted women and a broader unity is being forged through the freedom from debt campaign. □



At a protest against Microfinance companies in Hooghly district of West Bengal, (Above) Post cards are sent by affected people to the PM demanding loan waiver.

## Tamilnadu: Women Protest against Harassment by MFI Agents

In Tamil Nadu, women are protesting across the state against harassment by MFI agents in the name of loan recovery. On 29 May protests were held in Vizhupuram, Pudukkottai and Madurai districts. In several places where AIPWA and AIARLA have an organizational

presence women activists argued with the agents. Heated exchanges took place. In some places the agents had to retreat in the face of the opposition by women.

Subsequently, AIPWA and AIARLA units complained to the district authorities regarding

the harassment from the MFIs, demanding action against MFIs under the usury prohibition act (Tamilnadu Prohibition of Exorbitant Interest Act, 2003).

Following this, district collectors of Thanjavur and Madurai issued public statement in the media warning the MFIs acting against the RBI directions. Publicity and protests on this issue are going on in several districts. □

## MFI Coercion and Debt-Trap in Assam

*Arup Mahanta*

The microfinance institutions (MFIs) are playing havoc in rural Assam. Some twenty MFIs led by the notorious Bandhan Bank have trapped millions of women in growing indebtedness, and the women are now being subjected to tremendous distress and humiliation in the name of loan recovery. The MFIs are functioning like moneylenders – they pay very little interest on deposits and charge high interests on loans. The current rate of interest charged by Bandhan is 17.95%.

Women below the age of 60 have to form self help groups comprising 7 to 40 members to become eligible for loans. Male members of their families, husbands, sons or brothers have to stand guarantors. The maximum loan amount currently is INR 100,000. Loans have to be repaid on a weekly basis. While loans are advanced individually, the recovery is ensured collectively. If any woman fails to repay her weekly instalment she has to face the pressure of her entire group and her valuable documents (bank passbooks, ATM cards, ration cards) are taken away, to be returned only after full repayment.

Stories of women selling their valuable family belongings to

repay loans are now widespread in Assam. Like the typical usurer, the MFIs advance fresh loans and deduct the recovery amounts. Surveys show that 99% women borrowers have got two loans, 95% have got three loans, 70% have got four loans and 50% are forced to borrow from private moneylenders to repay their original loans.

In Assam, almost 70% rural households are officially identified as landless and/or below poverty line. They require loans to meet their regular monthly consumption needs. Conditions are similar in tea garden areas as well. Loans thus keep piling up in almost every household, and almost all selfhelp group members and MFI borrowers thus end up accumulating sizable debt burdens.

Since early 2020 Assam has

been witnessing a spontaneous agitation of women borrowers demanding freedom from this debt burden. More than two years ago, CPI(ML) and allied mass organisations, AIARLA and AIPWA launched a 'freedom from debt' campaign in Dalangghat block of Nagaon district. A conference was held on 15 October 2017 and a survey was done to assess the scale and dimensions of the problem. Thousands of women joined the March 8 International Women's Day rally on this issue. A week later, 12 organisations came together in a convention convened by AIARLA in Guwahati Press Club on March 14 to launch a joint platform for cancellation of rural debts. Two statewide protest days have been observed since then on 27 April and 1 June. □



# Baghjan Fire: A Case of Systematic Plunder of Natural Resources and Human Rights

*On 10 June a team of eight activists and students led by CPIML Central Committee member, Balindra Saikia visited Baghjan, the site of the oil blowout on 27 May 2020, followed by a fire in the same oil well on 9 June 2020. The team along with Balindra Saikia comprised Bitupon Bakolial, Secretary of Dibrugarh District committee of CPIML; Lopamudra Tamuli, Suraj Mahali and Vishal Kaul, comrades of AISA; Noihrit Gogoi, Urnisha Swargari and, a student of Tezpur Medical college, Anisha Gogoi. The fact finding mission conversed with the local people, activists and members of the civil society. This team also inspected the site and the relief camps in the affected region. Here is a brief account based on findings.*

The oil well in Tinsukia's Baghjan caught fire on 9 June. The next day we started our journey towards Baghjan from Rajgarh. As we crossed the Guijan police post on our motorcycles and drew closer to the mighty Brahmaputra, we could hear a sound which seemed like the clanking of a 1000 fallen pipes. The sounds intensified as we drew closer. Now we could clearly see the huge fire that was erupting from the well and the sound just went on intensifying. As we crossed the bridge above Maguri Motapung swamp, the sight became heart-wrenching and we could also begin to feel the extreme heat. From almost 200 metres from the fire, it was quite clear to us that the temperature was far too high and it would not be wise to stay this close to the fire for a longer period.

Our thoughts ran back to the news of the previous night. Tekhaswar gohain and Durlabh Gogoi, two workers of OIL (Oil India Limited) who were found dead in the swamps, how painful their deaths must have been! Should they not be honoured as martyrs?

To reach Baghjan one has to go through Doomdooma. For their own convenience, OIL has built a bridge across Maguri swamp at Notungaon. The gas blowout took place on 27 May 2020. The residents of Notun Gaon started an agitation

demanding the preservation of Dibrusoukhua National Park and a complete shut down of all the mining activities practised in close proximity of the National Park. It is absolutely unlawful and also condemnable at the same time. It is pertinent to note that Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) has also previously protested against the seismic survey conducted by OIL.

On the seventh day of the blowout the protesting locals of Notun Gaon were directed by the local administration to shift to relief camps. The administration did not even arrange any medical care to attend to the growing complaints of respiratory trouble, headache, dizziness, all caused by the contaminated surrounding. The administration assured them that they would be provided with adequate ration and that arrangements for a discussion with the District Commissioner regarding their demands would be made. The villagers sent away their children to their relatives' places. But to their utter dismay even after spending 14 days in the relief camps, they were not even provided with a single round of ration by the administration. And the day the meeting with the Commissioner was scheduled was the 9th of June 2020, the day the fire broke out.

And even after that the

administration could provide the locals of Notun Gaon with just one ordinary three-layered mask and some animal food for their domesticated animals and poultry. We were shocked to know about these sad realities from Nitumoni Chetiya, Dipanjali and Popy Gharfoliya and Haren gogoi as they narrated their stories with moist and saddened eyes. After the incident of 9 June 2020, the Green cover of the Dibru Soukhua national Park has been completely ravaged. Almost everything at a radius of 500 m has been burnt and turned into ashes. The leaves of the trees at a distance of 2 km has turned into some shade of crimson and a layer of thick condensate had settled above the leaves. Not a single individual from either OIL or John Energy, the company responsible for carrying out the drilling operation, was present in the site. Nor was there any security personnel. However, on our way back from the well we managed to have a small conversation with a few men of the Assam police. They told us that their IC could merely save his life the other day. They have been present there from the day of the blowout (27 May). They were the ones closest to the site and yet they were not even provided with a mask or any other safety equipment that is such a basic



The devastation caused by Baghjan fire

prerequisite for guarding such an inflammable area.

There are 20 oil wells in the region of Baghjan alone and it supplies gas to not only BCPL situated at Lepetkata, Dibrugarh but every other industry and tea factory in upper Assam. According to the statistics provided by OIL itself, if oil wells in Baghjan are closed then the entire BCPL has to be shut down. We met Niranto Gohain, a local environmentalist who has been working in Dibru Soukhua National Park for more than 30 years now and is acquainted with every nook and corner of the Park. He said that the damages were irreversible and that the already endangered Gangetic Dolphin would never be seen in the waters of Dibru again. The skin of the dolphin is extremely sensitive, Gohain said and even a

drop of the condensate oil is enough to take the life of the delicate mammal.

Maguri Motapung swamp has a mosaic of diverse lives, turtles, dolphins, anacondas and various species of fish. According to him the incident is drastically going to affect the lower parts of the Brahmaputra. As many as five villagers of Notun Gaon have already encountered untimely deaths. The reason behind that, Gohain suspects, is connected to the presence of condensates in the air. Gohain pointed out to us that OIL has been extracting gas from the region for 18 years now but not even once have they tried to organize any awareness drive to create a collective awareness among the people on how to act in or deal with such disaster situations.

Gohain and his comrades

submitted many petitions to concerned authorities for the safety of the Dibru Soukhua national park but instead of listening to their justified demands and concerns, OIL went ahead and gave the contract of drilling to a Gujarat-based private company "John Energy" whose credentials to carry out such an important task are quite suspect. Gohain has already submitted a PIL in Guwahati High Court regarding the recent incident of Baghjan. He further said that the accident could have been avoided if the government and OIL had taken appropriate measures in this regard. Because of the callous and irresponsible attitude of OIL authorities and the state government, today the biodiversity of the region is in grave danger. It was past 7 in the evening when we



returned from the site. The sun was setting and the sky was a strange colour of vibrant red because of the fire burning from the oil well. The fire is burning now in so many hearts, and we left the site hoping that this fire will some day lead to a new dawn.

Having spent the night at Shaheed Gangaram Kol's place, we started for Baghjan through Doomdooma at dawn. Amidst incessant drizzle, we reached Baghjan. At Jatiya Bidyalaya Baghjan we met with the office-bearers of Baghjan Milan Jyoti Sangha. On behalf of the Yuva Sangha, Prabin Bora, Pranjal Gogoi, Jintu Hazarika, Hemanta Moran, Monoj Hazarika, Satyajit Moran and others have long been protesting against the digging. They informed us that the digging had begun in 2002. At that time itself, they had protested and their comrades had been jailed. From 2002 to 2009, there had been several instances of police repression. The police used to call them at odd hours to the police station. The army would pick up people at 1 or 2 in the night and take them to the nearby camps. Alleging the protestors as being members of ULFA, they subjected them to physical and mental harassment. Monoj Hazarika had said that his father used to be a 'Gaon Burha' (village head) for the government, he was suspended from his position for a year because of Monoj's involvement in the protests.

The digging has continued with such tactics of intimidation and bribery. After 10 years of digging, the first public hearing took place in 2012 at the Baghjan Tea Estate playground. They said they had protested even then but their concerns fell on deaf ears. According to several members of Yuva Sangha, John Energy

is primarily responsible for the disaster. They say that this was due to the shoddy cementing job.

Over the last 6 years, there has been an increase in the number of pests. The birds that used to come earlier which fed on these pests do not come nowadays because of the noise from the rig. Almost 80% of the people of the region depend on fishing for their livelihood. They say that the disaster has happened right during the hatching period of the fish. They demand adequate compensation and cleansing of the waters of the Maguri Beel. There is a 50-meter embankment so that the Brahmaputra doesn't flood the adjoining villages in Baghjan during the monsoon. Due to the tremors felt every day, there is a risk of the embankment being breached which would result in serious inundation of Baghjan.

They all said they had been pushed back a hundred years by the fire. Each family had valuable trees in their yards which are all gone. Each of the 50 families whose houses have been burnt has suffered an estimated loss of around 20 lakhs. The land left burnt will not be conducive to agriculture. More than 2000 people had been shifted to the local Baghjan Dighol Torong ME school since the leak started on the 27th. People whose homes had been within 500 metres of the leaking oil-well were allowed to go there to tend to their domestic animals and livestock after giving a written undertaking that they would be responsible in case of any adversity.

On the day of the fire, these people were taken to the Kardoiguri shelter. The Sangha Members let us know that there was a public hearing on 12 March 2020 regarding the 7 oil-wells that were recently granted permission for digging by the BJP government. There were

protests then but to little avail.

After our conversation with the Sangha members we went to the nearby relief shelters. On our way, we saw huge pipes by the roadside used for the transportation of gas. There are a total of 20 wells inside the villages. On the day of the blow-out, around 7000 people from Baghjan, Deeghol Torong and Kaliyapani were taken to Kordoiguri, Bandarkhati, Jokaichuk and Diyamuli shelters. The people at the Bandarkhati shelter informed us that they had to come to the shelter on their own without any assistance or initiative by the concerned authorities. Several villagers along with the 50 families whose homes had been gutted had taken shelter in Kordoiguri.

We met Bornali Moran there. Their house was the nearest to the well. There were several red boil-like spots on her hands. They have been in the shelters without mosquito nets since the 9th. The fire has destroyed the livestock along with their home and the tea, bamboo and betel nut plantations. They had also protested against the construction of pipelines in 2012. They were met with police repression. Three people had been jailed. A member of the Yuva Sangha mentioned about the callous response of Chandramohan Patowary, the minister of industries when he had come to visit the Kordoiguri shelter. Asked about the fire, Patowary only said that there had been bigger fires in Russia, Iran, Tripura, etc. The locals then had to remind Patowary that he was a minister of the Assam government.

Similarly, minister Jogen Mohan had brushed aside allegations saying that the dolphins and fish in the Magur Matapung Beel did not die due to the OIL gasleak. As per received information, the

news of Durlav Gogoi's family and Tikheshwar Gogoi's family being compensated 1 crore and 60 lakhs respectively is also not true. These amounts are, in fact, the money that the two deceased would have received had they completed their services to retirement and nothing else.

The shelters do not have toilet facilities for women. The availability of mosquito nets is also disproportionately low. Several of the shelters are in an abysmal state and one is greeted by a shocking stench as one enters them. At Diyamul shelter, the people were planning to burn the effigy of Chandramohan Patowary. Manas Tamuli informed us that the company needs to spend 2 per cent of their profit on CSR. However, in the year 2012-13, OIL had spent only 1.41%. OIL has shown that this money has been spent on construction of roads. However, most of these roads are those that lead to the oil-wells. And yet OIL has spent 5 crores for the corporate office of Delhi that produces not a drop of oil. The disaster started with the award of the contract to John Energy in 2002 when the BJP was in power at the Centre, and now when it has struck the BJP is ruling

both at the Centre and in the state. But the regime is only interested in the plundering of resources and it is busy suppressing every democratic voice and inconvenient question to facilitate the plunder.

The whole matter needs an immediate and thorough investigation. Baghjan must not be left to turn into another Congo. How fair and wise is it to keep the people locked down in relief camps at a time when there is already a health emergency in the whole world? OIL should make immediate arrangements to shift the people to properly sanitised and protected guest houses and hotels, provide them with Rs 500 day in addition to other daily necessities. The government must also investigate the reasons behind the fire breakout at the site. The affected must be provided with a compensation of 20 lakhs. The government must immediately come out with an economic package after assessing the losses. The privatisation of the PSUs, especially in the strategic oil and gas sector must be halted immediately and policies and directives of sustainable development must be formulated and enforced more stringently. All urgent measures must be taken to



protect the environment!

It is shocking that the ruling party and senior ministers have all the time to campaign for the upcoming elections in upper Assam, but no time to listen to the pain and grievances of the people of Baghjan. Like in the case of Covid19, the state seems to have abdicated all its responsibilities in the case of the Baghjan fire too, leaving the affected people to fend for themselves. We do not have the words to condemn this apathy and irresponsibility of the state. The whole nation must today stand with the people of Baghjan! □



Balindra Saikia in conversation with Monuj Hazarika (L) and Bornali Moran (R)



# Amphan Relief Campaign: Let's Rebuild Bengal

*Madhurima Bakshi*

Cyclone Amphan, one of the deadliest storms over the Bay of Bengal struck hard on June 20 and devastated southern districts of West Bengal including South and North 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly along with parts of Orissa. The wreckage due to severe wind flow and rain fall took a heavy toll on lives, property, houses and trees. Amidst Corona outbreak, this ravage has rendered thousands homeless, destroyed crops, agricultural fields and fisheries, broke buildings and embankments, hit electricity and water supply. Despite such huge loss and sufferings, the Central Government failed to cooperate, refusing to declare it a 'National Disaster'. While the relief announcements from both the State and Central Governments were still stuck in bureaucratic formalities, corruption and irregularities, the common people of Bengal showed their determination by extending hands towards the affected victims. With the pledge to rebuild, rehabilitate and reconstruct Bengal, numerous initiatives have been observed from distributing ration, water, baby food, tarpaulins, clothes, medicines, sanitary napkins to arranging medical camps, pond renovation etc. Taking the Lockdown Relief work one step ahead, CPIML and mass organizations like AISA, RYA, AIPWA, AICCTU, Gana Sanskriti Parishad, AIPF, AIKM, AIARLA with help from few other organizations and individuals, came to the forefront to stand by the cyclone-affected areas and people.

## **South 24 Parganas**

Almost the entire district of South 24 Parganas has been devastated by the havoc wreaked by Cyclone Amphan which was even more destructive than

Cyclone Aila 10 years back. Relief efforts were conducted in Kultoli, Canning, Bakhrahat, Sundarban and Budgebudge with help from AISA, RYA, AIPWA, Forum for People's Health, PUCL, Arijit Mitra Smarok Committee and Jadavpur Commune.

Dakshin Budkhali is a remote village, 25 km away from Canning Subdivision situated on the west bank of river Matla, very close to the estuarine region. When the relief team reached to the village, it was bearing the signs of devastation everywhere. The earthen embankment on Matla river collapsed and water flooded out the agricultural lands and ponds leaving layers of saline water on them. This region is known for diverse vegetable production and intrusion of salty water on the croplands has made them unusable for at least 3 cropping seasons. The ponds were also contaminated by saline water. Extensive damage to the kuccha houses and collapsed trees were distinctly visible. Even after 20 days of the cyclone passed by, there

was no electricity. Villagers were furious with the local Panchayat members due to massive corruption in relief distribution. The relief team distributed ration kits with essentials like rice, potato, lentils, soybean, oil, biscuit, soap, detergent, candles along with tarpaulins, essential medicines and clothes among 150 extremely affected families.

Bally island in Gosaba Block is one of the numerous islands of Sundarban mangrove delta which faced the extreme severity at the foremost being the first line of defense. With broken embankments, shattered houses, submerged farmlands and destroyed fishery ponds, Cyclone Amphan left the people of the Sundarbans with no livelihood options, except being solely dependent on mangrove forests. Even leaves of the trees turned wilted and yellowish due to salt water fog during the cyclone. A section of people from Bally island working as construction laborers had got stranded in Kerala, Maharashtra and other states due to the unplanned Covid Lockdown.



Women gathered in the relief camp said they hardly have been given employment under job cards. Their lives are now at stake due to double blow of Lockdown and Cyclone. When our relief team reached the remote village in a ferry from Gadkhali, villagers showed how they had to repair the broken mud embankment with sand bags all by themselves to resist further ingress of salt water into the village. Ration kits, tarpaulins and other essentials were distributed among 200 extremely needy families of the village.

Bakhrat village in Bishnupur 2 Block is mostly dominated by poor marginalized people engaged as daily wage labourers. Kuccha houses have been partially or fully destroyed but yet to receive any compensation. Dry food items were distributed on emergency basis among the affected families suffering from both Lockdown and Amphan Cyclone.

Banshra Panchayet of Ghutiyari Sarif in Canning 1 Block is hugely deprived of government relief programmes. People mostly working in unorganized sectors have lost their jobs during lockdown and cyclone Amphan has further taken a heavy toll on their livelihoods. Essential ration have been distributed among 115 Amphan ravaged families. 4 quintals rice and 50 kg lentils were also provided to the local community kitchen along with 25 tarpaulins.

To stand beside the Amphan affected citizens of Sankijahan colony in Gopalgunj of Kultoli Block, approximately 120 km away from Kolkata, our relief team distributed rations, mosquito nets, clothes, medicines and sanitary napkins among 150 families. The entire Kultoli block, especially the villages adjacent to the river course has been suffering from the aftermath of Amphan. While fishery being the dominant livelihood for the villagers, most of the fishermen have no employment currently. Those lacking ration cards had no access to free ration as declared by the government. Even the homeless people received no tarpaulins or any kind of help from the local panchayat to rebuild their houses.

AIPWA comrades disbursed ration kits among 100 families in ward 3 and 9 in Pujali Municipality and Jamalpur area in Nischintipur Panchayat of Budgebudge. Life has been halted in this region as all the kuccha houses collapsed and there is hardly any livelihood option left. As learnt from the villagers, the Panchayat seems to be highly ignorant about allocating compensation to the affected people.

### ***North 24 Parganas***

Hasnabad block in Basirhat subdivision was one of the worst affected blocks where long stretches of the region got completely inundated as the mud embankments over river

Ichhamoti got collapsed. Thousands became homeless with no provision for livelihoods in the submerged villages. The situation got worse after the full moon high tide emerged just after the landfall of Amphan cyclone. On the day of relief distribution, our team could not even reach to the targeted area after waiting for 3 long hours as the entire road was completely under water. Many people had to swim to reach locations where relief was being distributed. The relief team distributed ration kits, water and sanitary napkins among 1100 families if Baliadanga, Joygram, Tiymari, Khan Pukur villages in two consecutive relief drives with the help of Nirman Sanskritik Sanstha and students of Jadavpur University.

River embankments in Minakha Block in North 24 Parganas were found to be completely destroyed. Ration items and essentials were distributed among 100 families of Uchildaha village and dry foods provided to 200 families in Uchildaha garh.

### ***Howrah & Kolkata***

A team of AISA and CPIML reached to Amphan ravaged Bagnan in Howrah and distributed relief materials to villagers of Bangalpur, Harop, Haturiya, Brindabanpur, Pipulyan and Monipara. Comrades had to carry the relief materials by themselves in Pipulyan village as the roads were completely



AISA, AIPWA and CPIML activists at relief camps in North and South 24 Parganas

collapsed till then.

Cyclone Amphan had ripped through the slums in urban region and left trails of severe destruction. Most of those slums live in extreme unhygienic condition with minimal access to sanitation and safe drinking water. In Arupara-Kamardanga slum area of Rajaramtala, AISA comrades distributed dry ration among 100 families. The area being congested has further risk of spreading dengue or other vector borne diseases due to water logging. The relief team also helped to sanitize the slum by spraying disinfectants. In Park

Circus slum, essential rations were provided to the extremely affected families. Ration and tarpaulins were also distributed in Ballyghat slum on the very next day of Amphan cyclone. AIPWA comrades arranged ration items for the Amphan affected citizens of Arupara.

Relief distribution among distressed families of Renia in Sonarpur Rajpur Municipality was done by AIPWA and local unit of CPIML.

Let us stand in this difficult time beside our citizens. Let us rebuild Bengal! ❑

## CPIML Team's Riot Relief Distribution Continues in Delhi!

*Ravi Rai*

The Delhi Government has not yet disbursed the full compensation amount to all riot victims in Delhi. Victims are awaiting justice in vain, as the Delhi police is continuing with its politically communal motivated inquiry and arrests of anti-CAA activists.

On 23 June, continuing with disbursal of rehabilitation funds for Delhi Riot victims collected through mass contributions, a Delhi CPIML team visited Shiv Vihar area to distribute the collected fund to some of the victims. It was good to know that some of those who had received relief from the CPIML earlier, have

used those amounts to buy sewing machines and handcarts, towards earning a livelihood.

The government package of compensation fund has not yet reached most of the victims. Relief given by any civil society organisation or party cannot replace government relief, or absolve the government of its responsibilities towards the affected. Secular civil society organisations have been reaching out with relief fund and materials to the best of their abilities. The Delhi government is yet to show its commitment to ensuring relief and rehabilitation to all those affected.

Compensation for riots, disasters, lockdowns are the rights of the citizens. The carnage was largely targeted against the Muslims. But many Hindu families have also suffered. The RSS-BJP and Delhi Police wants to continue with their communal agenda even after the riot. But we must know, communal hatred spares no one. It gets us divided, takes away all our rights and vanquishes the poor and underprivileged the most. CPIML continues to work to unite communities and people, around the demands to

1. Disburse compensation, ensure rehabilitation for all riot victims.

2. Ensure justice, stop biased and politically scripted witch-hunting of Muslims and anti-CAA activists by the Modi regime, book the real perpetrators of riot, including communal provocateurs like Kapil Mishra and others who publicly instigated violence against peaceful anti-CAA activists. ❑



Delhi CPIML Secretary with some of the affected people in Shiv Vihar



With new handcart, beginning the struggle to restart a living!

# Right to Employment Sacrificed at Altar of 'Austerity Measures' in Uttarakhand

*Indresh Maikhuri*

The Uttarakhand government has issued an order to stay recruitments in 2020-21. The logic behind this order is the old cliché that the government needs to curtail expenditure. But the truth of these so-called austerity measures is exposed by Principal Secretary Utpal Kumar Singh's letter of 10 June. In Point No. 2 he says new posts will not be created and appointment of workers on the basis of daily wage or contract will be wholly banned. But in Point No. 5 he says that no personal staff posts should be created for Advisors, Chairmen and Members of various Departments. The meaning is clear. There is no curb on decorative, influential and close-to-power posts like Advisor, Chairman etc. whose expenditure is enormous. These posts will remain in the name of 'accountability'. But workers and staff in government Departments will not be recruited as giving them salaries is a 'waste of money'!

The Uttarakhand government which talks of austerity is the same government that opposed collection of rent for residences allotted to former Chief Ministers. When the

High Court gave a verdict in favor of rent collection, the Uttarakhand government immediately passed a new law, which again was declared unconstitutional by the HC. Clearly, the government can go to any lengths for 'their own people' but considers it a waste of money to provide employment to the unemployed. Last year the Principal Secretary had issued orders that in cases where contract workers have petitioned for equal pay for equal work, strong arguments should be made against this. The letter issued on 10 June states that recruitment should be stopped and if workers are needed they should be arranged through outsourcing. Clearly, outside agencies will not follow any rules and regulations regarding workers' rights, and the weaker sections and youth seeking employment will be exploited.

Thus, the Trivendra Rawat government has made 2020 the 'year for unemployment'. But what happened in 2019 which was supposed to be 'the year for employment' as declared by the Uttarakhand government? On 18 September 2019 the Joint Secretary Personnel had asked all

the Departments to send details of vacant posts as per the new roster for requisitions to be sent to the Lok Sewa Ayog. All that had to be done was to attach 10% reservation for the economically backward in the earlier details. But this was not done, and the Upper Secretary Personnel had to send reminders to all the Departments on 7 November 2019. The Forest Guard Recruitment Exam held in 2019 after many years became notorious because of the paper being leaked in advance. No PCS exam has been conducted in Uttarakhand after 2017. About 56000 posts are lying vacant in government Departments.

Unemployment is at its peak in Uttarakhand. The HRD report prepared by the Uttarakhand government says that the unemployment rate for youths above Middle School education in 2004-05 was 9.8% and in 2017 it grew to 17.04%. But government jobs have now been ended in the name of 'austerity measures'! Our austere government may or may not have been able to provide employment in the 'Employment Year', but it certainly is providing unemployment in the 'Unemployment Year'! □

## Protest Against Racist, Communal, Casteist and Gender Oppression

World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) affiliate trade unions AICCTU, CITU, AITUC, AIUTUC, TUCC and UTUC held protests in Patna on 24 June 2020 in response to the WFTU call against racial discrimination in America and across the world including racial, communal, casteist and gender discrimination in India. The protest meeting in Patna was presided over by AICCTU leader Ranvijay Kumar

and addressed by leaders from various parties.

The speakers said that at this time when the Corona pandemic is a deep crisis for the whole world and protecting citizens should be the priority, we are witnessing state-protected racial violence and discrimination in America and persecution of minorities, women, dalits, adivasis, human rights activists in India have increased. Racial-communal-casteist hatred and violence is as big a disaster as the Corona crisis and the people must come forward to end it.

# Protest The Unconscionable Hike in Petrol and Diesel Prices

The Narendra Modi Government is cruelly using the pandemic as an opportunity to inflict even more economic hardships on the people who are already suffering from an economic crisis predating the pandemic, as well as the lockdown-induced disaster. The Modi regime has hiked fuel prices to pander to private energy corporates. For 20 consecutive days in the month of June, petrol and diesel prices were hiked continuously. Such a continuous assault of price hike is unprecedented. Ironically, in Delhi, Diesel which used to be much cheaper than petrol because of its importance in usage in agriculture, transport and other sectors which directly affect the common lives, has become costlier than petrol.

The CPIML has demanded:

- Stop the Privatization of Natural and National Resources.
- Withdraw Petrol Diesel Price Hike
- Immediately slash duties on petro products.

## In a first, diesel costlier than petrol in Delhi after 18 hikes in a row

The 18th daily increase in rates since oil companies on June 7 restarted revising prices in line with costs after ending an 82-day hiatus in rate revision, has taken diesel prices to fresh highs. Diesel now costs Rs. 79.88 per litre in Delhi as compared to petrol price of Rs. 79.76 a litre.

Written By PTI  
New Delhi | 14 minutes ago



**Immediately slash duties on petroleum products and reduce prices!**

# Roll Back Fuel Price Hikes



**Persecuted**  
**BY Modi Regime**



# Remembering The Emergency: During Modi's Undeclared Emergency

26 June marks the day that the Indira Gandhi regime declared the infamous Emergency in 1975 – placing Opposition leaders and activists in jail, suspending civil liberties (sadly with the Supreme Court failing to uphold the Constitution), clamping down on the freedom of press and protests, and unleashing violence against dissenters, minorities, and the poor.

What does it mean to remember the Emergency today? For the BJP, it is a day to paint the Congress party alone as authoritarian and anti-democratic. But as Indians look around them today, they can see a situation that is even worse than the Congress- and Indira-era Emergency.

Today, too, civil liberties activists and dissenters are being jailed without trial under draconian laws like UAPA and sedition, journalists who do their jobs and report facts that the government wishes to suppress, are being charged with crimes and harassed, and the police acts with impunity to brutalise and frame dissenters, the poor and minorities. What is even worse, the police actively backs lynch mobs and communal mobs and the politicians who incite violence – while framing all those who defend the Constitution as “criminals” and “anti-nationals”. And worst of all, the judiciary including the apex court looks the other way.

Recently, Jamia student and anti-CAA activist Safoora Zargar got bail after a concerted campaign which pointed out that Zargar was not only a political prisoner, unjustly jailed, but being pregnant, was being placed with her unborn child at risk during the pandemic. Even as Zargar’s release is a welcome victory, many other political prisoners continue to be denied bail. These include the Bhima Koregaon 11, of whom Varavara Rao, Anand Teltumbde, and Gautam Navlakha are especially vulnerable because of their advanced age and illnesses.

Along with the students and feminist anti-CAA activists who are already jailed by Delhi Police on false charges of participating in riots (while the real perpetrators go free), other activists including Umar Khalid, Harsh Mander, Yogendra Yadav, AISA activist Kawalpreet Kaur, and even DS Bindra whose “crime” was to arrange langars (community kitchens) for the protestors are being implicated in riot-related FIRs. Their peaceful speeches are being construed as “provocation”, the protests being conflated with riots, while BJP leaders and police officers who called for massacring of Muslims are not touched.

The latest journalist to be targeted is Supriya Sharma of the Scroll portal, against whom an FIR has been filed in Uttar Pradesh for reporting on hunger and distress of poor communities in PM Modi’s own constituency of Varanasi.

To meaningfully remember the Emergency in 2020, we must recommit ourselves to defending civil liberties and the Constitution today. We must defend the activists who not only resisted the Emergency but never stopped defending civil liberties even after the formal Emergency was lifted, and who held the Congress regimes accountable then and are being jailed for holding the Modi regime accountable now. We must stand up for the freedom of journalists to report, editors to edit, and citizens to protest without political persecution. We must work to free every single political prisoner.

# The Worldwide Uprising Against Systemic Racism: Lessons For India

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities and injustices of the capitalist system worldwide. And while the pandemic continues to rage, a worldwide protest has risen up against another systemic feature of capitalism – racism and brutal, biased, militarised policing. *Liberation* looks at the “Black Lives Matter” uprising against racism in the USA that has spread across the world, and what lessons it holds for India.

## I Can't Breathe

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 45 year-old Black man, was choked to death on a public street by a white Minneapolis police officer who placed his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes, ignoring Floyd's desperate pleas of “I can't breathe”. Two other police officers helped hold Floyd down. The police had been called to the scene by a store-owner who had said that Floyd “was awfully drunk and not in control of himself when he tried to pay (for a pack of cigarettes) with a counterfeit \$20 bill”.

The police initially hid the cause of Floyd's death, claiming he resisted arrest and that they called an ambulance after they saw that he “appeared to be suffering medical distress”.

But the truth came out because of footage recorded by a passerby - 17-year-old Darnella Frazier, a Black teenage girl - on her phone camera. The footage showed that Floyd was not struggling but was in fact begging to be allowed to breathe, and that the police officer only lifted his knee after Floyd fell unconscious.

The murder of George Floyd was only one of the latest in a long line of such killings of African-American and Black people by police officers and even by white civilians. On March 13, 2020, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African-American woman, was sleeping in her own bed in Louisville, Kentucky when police broke into her home without knocking. Taylor, an emergency medical technician who was an essential worker in the pandemic, died on being shot eight times by the police.

Not long ago, a white father and son duo armed with guns, pursued Ahmaud Arbery who was jogging, and shot him dead, claiming they thought he was a criminal. Arbery is one of many Black men and boys killed by white civilians who claim to have felt “threatened” by them. On May 25, 2020, the same day that Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, another incident in New York City's Central Park highlighted how racist white people deliberately weaponise the police against Black people. A white woman, asked by a Black birdwatcher in the park to leash her dog in keeping with park rules, called the police claiming she was being “threatened by an African-American man”. It was clear she knew that if the police were to come, the incident could cost the Black man his life.

Police in the US disproportionately stop Black drivers of cars, and in affluent neighbourhoods – assuming that they could not own or rent a nice car or house, and must have stolen the car or be planning to rob a house. Many of these confrontations have resulted in killings. One such killing – of

Philando Castile – was recorded on camera.

Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately overrepresented in US jails and prisons in the US.

But in spite of a huge number of such racist crimes and killings being caught on camera, the perpetrators have tended to enjoy full impunity and escape without any punishment.

The police officer who killed George Floyd had no less than 17 complaints against him in 20 years of service – yet he kept his job as a police officer with the right to wield deadly weapons. There have also been multiple complaints against at least one of his fellow officers who helped him as he killed Floyd.

## The Upsurge of Protests

Somehow, the video of George Floyd's murder blew the lid off the churning anger at systemic racism and police brutality. Here have been “Black Lives Matter” protests before this – but this time the protests are unprecedented and historic in scale and impact. Thousands of people in every single one of the US' 50 states came out on the streets in protest. They wore masks to avoid spreading Covid-19, but they refused to leave the streets, even as the police met the protests with tear gas, rubber bullets, batons, and more wanton displays of brutality and racism.

This time, the uprising is not just demanding that the police officers who killed George Floyd be arrested and charged with murder. It is demanding an end to “chokeholds” and “no knock warrants”, and other police reforms



– but that is not all. It is demanding that statues erected to those who waged a Civil War against the US to defend slavery, be taken down – and it is making the connections between slavery, followed by legally enshrined segregation/apartheid as well as lynchings, followed by covert denial of civil rights including voting rights, and today’s situation of racism enforced by the might of the police. While it is taking on the Trump regime’s racism and defence of white supremacy, it is refusing to allow the whole issue to be polarised between Republican vs Democrat; it is pointing out how Bill Clinton’s regime encouraged and strengthened the brutality, impunity and racism of the police, disguised under the rhetoric of “law and order” and “fighting crime.”

The movement, then, is challenging the entire system. It is seeking to get the knee of racism off the necks of black communities. It is demanding to “defund the police” and even

“abolish the police.” It is demanding that the money being poured into militarising the police, and brutally policing and incarcerating poor and black communities, be redirected towards caring for those poor and marginalised communities, and providing education, healthcare, childcare, dignified work, wages and pensions for all. It is arguing that investing in care rather than criminalisation and incarceration will in fact help to reduce and prevent crime. In the US, it is a mass movement demanding a radical break with the past, and revolutionary social and economic changes.

The movement has also spread worldwide. For the first time, there is a global movement demanding a reckoning with the history of slavery and colonialism which is the foundation for capitalism and for the balance of forces in the world today.

## The Legacy of Racism in The US

To quote Howard Zinn, “By 1800, 10 to 15 million blacks had been transported as slaves to the Americas, representing perhaps one-third of those originally seized in Africa. It is roughly estimated that Africa lost 50 million human beings to death and slavery in those centuries we call the beginnings of modern Western civilization, at the hands of slave traders and plantation owners in Western Europe and America, the countries deemed the most advanced in the world...Slavery grew as the plantation system grew.”

Slavery was eventually abolished in 1865, after two centuries of resistance by slaves, and after a Civil War in which the Southern slave-owning plantation states of the USA tried to secede to defend their right to continue to own slaves. But the formal end of slavery did not mean racial equality of the African-American or Black people in the US.

To quote from a petition in the Supreme Court of India seeking a law against lynchings, drafted by Ms Indira Jaising, “Between the American Civil War and the World War II, the US witnessed an era of racial subordination and segregation where thousands of African Americans were lynched on the basis of their race and color. Lynching in the US was a tool to reinforce the Jim Crow laws that enforced the principles of racial subordination and segregation by restricting civil liberties and civil rights of the African Americans which paved way for white supremacy or, in simple terms, imposed a post-slavery system of racial dominance.”

Lynchings continued well after World War II, and Blacks in the USA were systematically denied the right to vote, and Blacks were segregated from Whites in a formal apartheid system. Pretexts for lynching Black men and boys included claims that they were seeking to rape White women, or that they were thieves or criminals. Anti-miscegenation laws (that criminalized inter-racial sexual relationships and marriage) were declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court as late as 1967 – and it is a fact that in 1934, similar laws in Nazi Germany took the US racist laws as their inspiration.

It took a massive Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, by Black people and white allies, to demand an end to segregation, to integrate Black and White social and educational institutions, and to achieve the formal and substantive right to vote.

However, just as the legal abolition of slavery did not end racism, neither did the legal end to apartheid and segregation. The social and economic legacy of racism in the US are not mere fading scars of an old wound; that

legacy still runs in the blood and veins of the US state and global capitalist order.

That legacy locks black people in the US into unequal incomes, chronically poor neighbourhoods where schooling and healthcare and childcare are poor. The profiling and targeting by the police systematically jail or kill black men, robbing black families of fathers and making it harder for these men with criminal records to access dignified and secure jobs. The legacy of lynching can still be seen in the spate of incidents where white men and women claim to feel threatened by black boys and men, as an excuse to either kill them or call police to the scene.

## Demilitarise and Defund the Police

Black Lives Matter protestors have for some years now been pointing out the increasing militarisation of the US police forces. The police cracking down on the current protests can be seen wearing military-style camouflage uniforms, and wielding sniper and assault rifles, and other military weapons. The US Department of Defense, since the 1990s, has been reissuing millions of dollars worth of Army equipment to the police forces. An Amnesty International report noted that US police forces travel to Israel for training from Israeli military officers. This has encouraged and empowered the US police to feel and behave like an occupying army force, especially in poor and black neighbourhoods.

One of the key issues being raised by the protestors is that the police institution be dismantled and criminal justice be fundamentally reimaged and reshaped.

## Movement Achievements

The movement’s spread and impact have been unprecedented. In Minneapolis the movement forced authorities not only to arrest the police officers who killed Floyd but to charge them with murder instead of the mere manslaughter with which they had initially been charged. A U.S. judge ordered Seattle police to temporarily stop using tear gas, pepper spray on the protestors. The Minneapolis City Council voted to “dismantle” and “abolish” the city’s police department and replace it with a new system of public safety. At a rally, Lisa Bender, the Minneapolis city council president, said:

*In Minneapolis and in cities across the US, it is clear that our system of policing is not keeping our communities safe. Our efforts at incremental reform have failed, period. Our commitment is to do what’s necessary to keep every single member of our community safe and to tell the truth: that the Minneapolis police are not doing that. Our commitment is to end policing as we know it and to recreate systems of public safety that actually keep us safe.*

In Seattle, people occupied an area close to Capitol Hill (the government building) and termed it the “Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP)”. The sustained movement won significant victories including a ban on some of the most brutal police practices (such as the use of chokeholds and tear gas). After a shooting at the occupation site (it is not clear who fired the shots), Trump and the right-wing have been trying to characterise the CHOP as violent, and threatening to forcibly clear it. In response, the Socialist Alternative leader elected to Seattle’s City Council released a statement, declaring:

Many in the movement are concerned that the resources and attention required to maintain an ongoing overnight occupation at the CHOP could take away from a focus on getting organized to win the demands of the movement. This is a key moment to keep building our movement's power, and to win far-reaching change to stop racist policing and invest in our communities, such as:

- Defund the police through cutting the budget by at least 50%, and use these funds instead for social services.

- Immediately release all protestors, with all charges dropped.

- Transfer the East Precinct to permanent community control, through a City-funded community center, affordable housing, or and/or other community-driven initiatives.

- Establish an independent elected community oversight board, with full powers over the police, including hiring and firing.

- Immediately invest in 1,000 publicly-owned affordable homes in the Central District, and expansion of affordable housing and priority-hire jobs citywide, paid for by taxing big business, to address the ongoing crisis of racist gentrification.

Some of the leaders from the CHOP have themselves recently suggested that the protest should focus its activities on the hours between 8am and 8pm. Socialist Alternative and my Council office support that proposal. This can allow the daytime hours of the CHOP to continue to be a focal point for the movement and our demands.

This is a decision for the movement to make democratically.

A week ago, we won a historic victory, making Seattle the nation's first city to ban the use and purchase of chemical weapons and other barbaric "crowd control" weapons. We also won a ban on the use

of chokeholds by the police. Our movement succeeded in forcing Mayor Durkan and the establishment from ending the minimal existing federal oversight on Seattle police, keeping the consent decree in place. Rank-and-file members of the MLK King County Labor Council voted in a majority to expel the Seattle Police Officers Guild for their racist practices, because an injury to one is an injury to all.

There has been a tremendous show of solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement through workplace action: on June 12, a march and rally of over 60,000 included many workers walking off their job sites.

Occupation is an important tactic in the arsenal of movements, but it cannot by itself be a replacement for building our movement, including organized workplace action, for radical reforms and for a fundamentally different kind of society based on solidarity and equality.

## Trump Regime's Response

While the protests were largely peaceful, there were some early instances where angry protestors set fire to police vehicles or vented rage on stores. But the US President Trump branded the protestors as "thugs" and "looters", has unleashed the armed National Guard against them, and called for the military to be unleashed to "dominate" the streets. Pouring petroleum on the fires of tanger against the militarised police, Trump called for protestors to be shot dead, or arrested and jailed for at least a decade. On one occasion when he visited a church close to the White House, police unleashed tear gas and batons on unarmed, peaceful protestors.

Trump's slogan "when the

looting starts, the shooting starts" is reminiscent of instances in US history when workers striking for an 8-hour day or anti-racist protestors demanding civil liberties have been branded "looters", with newspapers and politicians calling for them to be shot. Across the world, the current protests and the Trump administration's crackdown on peaceful protestors has exposed the US democracy as fragile, and the US President Trump as a racist wannabe military dictator.

All over the US, statues and institutions erected during the Jim Crow era to leaders of the pro-slavery Confederate Army were brought down by protestors. Even some Republican leaders and the military establishment bowed to the public sentiment and supported the idea of renaming military bases that were named after Confederate generals (generals who had, after all, waged war against the US Army). Trump became one of few notorious Presidents in US history to openly defend Confederate monuments and symbols, which he described as "beautiful". But by doing so, he was also seeking to consolidate his racist base, in view of the Presidential elections due in November this year.

## Racism in India

In India, the BLM protests in the USA and globally have a resonance for more reasons than one.

In the first place, racism against Black people is especially virulent in India, but Indian political leaders deny racism. There have been a series of attacks on students, and women from African nations in Indian cities and towns – in Delhi (where an AAP Law Minister led a mob to attack Black women who were branded as sex workers and drug dealers), and where 3 Black men were attacked by a mob at Rajiv Chowk Metro Station; Noida

(where WhatsApp groups spread rumours branding Black people as cannibals and a mob violently attacked African students); in Goa (where Ministers have openly called for Black tourists to be evicted); Punjab (where an African student was brutally attacked and left in a coma by a mob); in Bangalore, where a Black woman was stripped and assaulted by a mob on a public street. The list could go on and on. Black people from various African nations – as well as Ambassadors and leaders of those nations – have raised the issues of daily, vile racist abuse as well as repeated discrimination and violence by Indians against Black people. After listening to US comedian Hasan Minhaj speak on the Asian and South Asian community's racism against Black people, West Indian cricketer Darren Sammy realised that the epithet used to him by his Indian IPL teammates - 'kalu' - was actually a racist anti-Black slur, one of many that exist in Indian languages.

In India, however, the introspection about racism which is happening in other countries, seems missing. The Indian cricketers called out by Darren Sammy responded by telling him they used the jibe "from a place of love" and not to demean him. The point about racist (and casteist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic) abuse is that the intention is not the issue. The history and context of the jibe make it racist. "Kalu" is the equivalent of the N word, a derogatory jibe against Black people. Indians have yet to recognise their own racism even when it stares them in the face.

Likewise, influential social media commentator Dhruv Rathee did a show on Black Lives Matter – only to hand out the advice that names like "Black Lives Matter" and "feminism"

are divisive because they "favour" Blacks and women respectively. Such judgements reflect a refusal to listen to, and learn from a historic movement. Instead, such influential people are choosing to speak the lives of the racists who counter "Black Lives Matter" with "All Lives Matter." If you say your house is on fire, I should not turn around and say – "But all houses matter." There is a need to say "Black Lives Matter" because right now, Black lives are treated as though they do not matter. "Black Lives Matter" does not mean "ONLY Black lives matter" - it means Recognise That Black Lives Matter Too. Likewise, to talk of a humanist movement instead of feminist or a Dalit movement would be to hide the fact that right now, we need a movement to change the fact that women and Dalits are treated as less than human. In India, many like to say "I do not see caste/race/gender/class etc, we only see humans." That is equivalent to saying, "I do not see your oppression on the basis of caste/race/gender/class, and I do not see my caste/race/gender/class privilege." Such statements perpetuate the oppression by denying it, by refusing to recognise it, and work to dismantle it. So those who say "I do not see caste" will oppose caste-based reservations. Those who say "I do not see gender" will oppose policies that seek to protect women's rights.

## Police Bias and Brutality in India

In India, it is useful to remember that the BJP leaders' slogan of "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro saalon ko" (shoot dead the traitors) is the twin of "when the looting starts, the shooting starts." Just as Trump is branding anti-racist protestors as looters and calling

for them to be massacred, the BJP and the Modi regime branded pro-democracy, anti-CAA protestors as "traitors" and called for them to be massacred and shot dead. In February 2020, when Trump was being feted by Modi in India, BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra were inciting mobs to attack and kill anti-CAA protestors and Muslim communities supporting those protests. The same Kapil Mishra has tweeted that the US should follow his example and realise that when the "wrong people" take over the streets, the "right people" must come out on the streets to stop them. The indication is clear: in the BJP's worldview, the African Americans, the persons of colour and anti-racists in the US, and the Muslims and anti-communal protestors in India, are "wrong people", while white supremacists in the US and cadres of communal fascist outfits in India are the "right people".

It is high time that the systemic communal, casteist, and class bias in India's policing and criminal justice systems is acknowledged. That bias is not new – independent India's history is littered with instances of massacres of Muslim, Sikh, and Christian minorities, Dalits, Adivasis, Kashmiris, Manipuris and Nagas by the police and armed forces, and massacres of Muslims and Dalits by communal and feudal organisations. Teargas, batons and bullets (and in the case of Kashmir, pellet guns) against peaceful protestors is common. Justice has been systematically denied in most of these instances, and the perpetrators of the massacres have enjoyed promotions and the seats of political power. African Americans and persons of colour form a disproportionate and overwhelming part of prison populations in the US – and the same is true of Dalits,

Adivasis, and Muslims in India. Muslims, dalits and tribals make up 53% of all prisoners in Indian jails. Torture, false charges, and fake encounters (custodial killings) by the police against these sections of people, who also overlap with the poorest of Indians, are the norm, not the exception.

In the past six years of the Modi regime, these systemic biases have become more blatant. Muslims have been lynched by communal mobs, and the police have protected the lynch mobs and dehumanised dying Muslims. Recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, a Dalit man in Betul, Madhya Pradesh, was beaten black and blue by the police. The police later tried to “apologise” to him, offering the excuse that they had mistaken him for a Muslim on account of his beard! During the anti-CAA protests, police blinded a Jamia Millia university student and maimed an AMU student, shot

Muslims in the eye, shot unarmed Muslims dead in UP and Karnataka, and systematically vandalised Muslim homes.

The police are now busy arresting activists of the anti-CAA protests while refusing even to charge the real perpetrators of violence. Those like advocate and activist Sudha Bharadwaj, who offered legal aid to adivasis in Chattisgarh facing arbitrary arrests and custodial atrocities by the police and armed forces, has been jailed by the Modi regime on false charges under the draconian UAPA law. Trump is calling for protestors to be jailed for a decade; anti-CAA activists in India are today being jailed during the Covid-19 pandemic under the UAPA, which allows for jail without trial or bail for long years. Kashmiris are likewise jailed without trial under the draconian PSA law for decades on end.

The videotape of police in Delhi

kicking Faizan who was dying from police-inflicted wounds, and forcing him to sing the national anthem (which had become a protest anthem and rallying cry of the anti-CAA movement), is no less revealing of police bias and brutality than that of the US police force choking George Floyd to death.

The ongoing people’s movement in the US is demanding justice for George Floyd and for all other African Americans murdered by racist police and civilians – and an end to the systemic racism and militarisation of the police and criminal justice system. While standing in solidarity with this revolutionary movement, we in India also demand a reckoning with the systemic biases and atrocities by the police and state machinery in India, which is being weaponised by the Modi regime against Muslim minorities and pro-democracy protestors. ■

## Churchill Must Fall

*Kalpana Wilson*

A recent article in the Guardian by the historian William Dalrymple calls for the removal of the statue of Robert Clive, once known as ‘Lord Vulture’ for his crimes in India, which stands outside the Foreign Office. Echoing similar thinking elsewhere in the liberal media Dalrymple opines that ‘...through education and atonement...we can finally begin to face up to what we have done and so begin the process of apologising for the many things we need to apologise for. Only then will we properly be able to move on, free from the heavy baggage of our imperial past’.

But to suggest that the removal of statues can free ‘us’ from ‘our’ past is precisely to forget who is pulling

them down already and why. When Black Lives Matter protestors pulled down the statue of Edward Colston, when a black protestor knelt on the neck of the statue for 8 minutes and 46 seconds symbolically recreating the actions of the police officer who murdered George Floyd, when the statue was thrown in the river as so many living breathing black men women and children were thrown overboard and drowned, this was not enabling ‘us’ to move on from, or even ‘come to terms’ with or ‘face up’ to, Britain’s long murderous history of enslavement of people and colonial plunder. These actions were not about creating a situation where ‘we’ British people (assumed to be white) can be ‘free’

from the past forever, or even as Dalrymple recommends, relegate it to a disturbing, guilt-inducing and cautionary history taught in schools, like that of the Nazis is taught in Germany. On the contrary, these actions are an expression of the knowledge that the violence of racialised imperialism is alive and well, and the resistance to it which has been there from the outset, is entering a new phase.

Just as the pulling down of Confederate statues in the southern US in the midst of protests against police violence is an expression of the continuities between the contemporary racialised police and prison system and racial slavery and is essential to an abolitionist practice

for today, the targeting of statues of slave traders and colonial white supremacists in Britain reflects that this wave of protests is connecting the horrors of police racism in North America, the UK and Europe with how the violence of race and white supremacy has been and remains today embedded in global structures of capital accumulation. 'Race' – a concept both invented and horrifically real in its effects - and capital were inseparable at their inception and remain so. These protests are about expressing deep pain but also simultaneously about fighting for a different world and this is why they are inspiring others across the world.


Of course it is essential to know -and to teach in schools - that not only cities like Bristol and London, Glasgow and Manchester, but the whole edifice of British capitalism was built upon the profits of slavery and colonialism. And as Guyanese Marxist thinker Walter Rodney's seminal 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' explained, it was built on reverse processes of impoverishment, extraction, the destruction of diverse livelihoods, thriving cities - and in some places pre-existing global centres of industrial production - creating unprecedented global inequalities. Colonialism also irrevocably changed relationships among those it colonized, producing new categories of gender, sexualities, class, community, and creating and entrenching the power of the classes who collaborate with imperialism, whom Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

But we also need to remember, that while the organized resistance of the enslaved (not white abolitionists) ended slavery, and multiple anti-colonial movements and struggles (not just elite-led 'non-violent' ones) drove out colonial rulers

from Africa and Asia, this edifice of British capitalism continues today to perpetuate itself through racialised processes of plunder, mass death and dehumanizing exploitation, which make up contemporary imperialism. Black Lives Matter protests in Britain connect the lives captured and stolen and thrown overboard by Colston's men with those drowned in the Mediterranean, with Joy Gardner who was bound and suffocated to death in front of her five-year-old son by those who police the racialised imperial borders. They connect those millions condemned to mass starvation deaths by Churchill with those burnt in the locked death traps which manufacture garments for global brands, with those whose lands are seized, poisoned and destroyed for corporate profit. They connect the white supremacist plunder of Southern Africa of Cecil Rhodes with the racialised devaluing of African lives by the World Bank which enforces continuing plunder through debt and neoliberal restructuring, by the WTO and the pharmaceutical corporations which denied millions of people in the continent access to HIV treatment, with those who were murdered by corporate callousness three years ago in Grenfell, and those who today are dying disproportionately from Covid-19.

A few on the left are suggesting that statues, and in particular Churchill's statue which has become such a bone of contention, are somehow a distraction. But it is the fact that protestors who are talking about police murders - and increasingly putting forward the critical structural demand of defunding the police and prisons - are also talking about statues which represent a history which continues to reproduce itself, which makes the significance of this political

moment inescapable. Churchill was the knowing perpetrator of the horror of the 1943 Bengal famine, (Clive's East India Company created the first in 1770, in which 10 million died) but he was also one particularly vile individual actor in an ongoing global system of surplus extraction and accumulation which still ensures that the working people of Eastern India are one disaster away from starvation, as Cyclone Amphan reminded us. The fact that Indian billionaire capitalists have been incorporated into the highest echelons of this system does not make it any less racialised. Newly powerful fascisms like Modi's Hindutva, which is simultaneously deeply colonial and rooted in its own much longer dehumanizing hierarchy of caste, only embed this racialisation deeper and add new layers to it.

And we cannot shy away from exposing the myth of Churchill on the grounds that he is too well-entrenched as an icon of Britishness – rather we have to confront head on that it is an imperialist, racist scion of the upper class - who also viscerally hated the working class in his own country and was hated in return - who encapsulates best what British nationalism means today. It cannot be re-appropriated or reframed – it must be replaced by the vibrant anti-racist, anti-imperialist, revolutionary abolitionist solidarities which are growing across the world. The draconian penalties proposed for the agents of history by both the Tories and a Labour Party now freshly embracing its own long imperial past under Keir Starmer only underline why all of us who believe in a different future must stand together and insist: **Rhodes Must Fall – Churchill Must Fall- Black Lives Matter!** 



# Obituary

## Gananath Patra

CPIML mourns the passing of veteran leader of the ML movement and various people's movements in Odisha, Comrade Gananath Patra. Comrade Gananath Patra passed away on June 6, in Rourkela after a long illness. He was 81.

Patra got his degree in chemistry from Ravenshaw College (now University) of Cuttack. In the late 1960s, he was a college teacher in Parlakhemundi of the undivided Ganjam district (now Gajapati). Parlakhemundi was a centre of the revolutionary peasant uprising that was fast spreading from Naxalbari to Srikakulam. Patra left his job and joined the Srikakulam movement. A close associate of Comrade Nagbhushan Patnaik, he was a Marxist thinker and writer, and tirelessly devoted to movements against land grab in Assam. He was committed to forging unity between the various people's movements in Assam.

Comrade Patra was a moving force in the Baliapal movement in the 1980s against the establishment of India's first missile test range in

Baliapal and Bhogari blocks of Balasore, (his home district). Comrade Patra was an effective organiser, helping to mobilise thousands including women and children against displacement and environmental devastation. He was also very active in the anti-liquor and land rights movement in Narayanpatna in Koraput district in the 1990s and 2000s. He was a mentor to the Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangathan – an organisation of adivasis and farmers resisting land grab that was falsely framed and harassed by the Government and police. After the police firing on protesting adivasis at Narayanpatna police station in 2009 (in which two adivasi youth were killed), Patra was jailed for two and a half years under a slew of charges ranging from the draconian (sedition) to the ridiculous (theft of a cow and a bicycle). He was falsely accused of being associated with the banned Maoist party. He was acquitted and released, but his health suffered as a result of his incarceration.

Comrade Gananath Patra's courage and conscience will continue to be an inspiration for all democratic and Left mass movements. Red Salute!

## Keshav Ram

Keshav Ram (47) passed away on 4 June in All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi. He was suffering from Covid-19. He has been an office bearer of Delhi's major transport sector union DTC Workers Unity Center and member of CPIML's Transport Sector committee. His contribution in building DTCWUC is unforgettable and he will be remembered always as very hard working and committed comrade. His live association with common DTC workers at the grassroots made him one of the pillars of the Union.

CPIML pays him tribute and condolences to his bereaved family.

Rad Salute to comrade Keshav Ram!

## Chandan Sarkar

Ranjeet Kumar Sarkar (fondly called Chandan da), passed away on 14 June after a long bout with brain cancer. He was 73. An advocate, he was a member of the CPIML's Alipurduar district committee in West Bengal. In the early 1990s he left CPIM to join Indian People's Front, and later joined the CPIML. He



Gananath Patra



Keshav Ram



Chandan Sarkar

remained active in various people's movements and campaigns right till the end. He contested elections for the West Bengal Assembly from CPIML once.

He is sorely missed and mourned by CPIML comrades as well as by all people's movements in West Bengal.

Red Salute to Comrade Chandan!

## Vidyanand Sahay

CPIML pays tributes to Vidyanand Sahay, well-known progressive cultural personality of Bihar, who passed away in Jamshedpur on 25 June 2020. He was a member of the Bihar State Committee of CPIML in 1996, and remained a member of the party till the end.

Born in a landowning family in Bhojpur, Sahay chose to ally himself with the struggle of dalit and landless poor. Active in his student life, he threw himself into the 1974 movement, later aligning with the Janata Dal and later the Samta Party. He was active in negotiations to secure a seat adjustment between the Samta Party and CPIML in 1995. But when Nitish Kumar, then leader of the Samta Party, went for an alliance with the BJP after the 1995 polls,

Sahay immediately cut himself off from the Samta Party, and joined the CPIML. He played an especially vital role in the campaign for justice for the victims of the 1996 Bathani Tola massacre committed by the feudal militia Ranveer Sena.

Stricken by cancer in 1999, he nevertheless continued to remain active in the party. He left Patna for Jamshedpur in 2002, and had lived and worked there ever since.

Red Salute to Comrade Vidyanand Sahay.

## Usha Ganguly

CPIML pays tribute to the legacy of veteran theatre person Usha Ganguly, who passed away on April 20 at the age of 75.

Born in Rajasthan, and trained as a Bharatanatyam dancer, Usha Ganguly made Kolkata the stage for her life in theatre, helping to nurture Hindi theatre in a city known for its vibrant Bengali theatre. She is known for the roles she performed as well as the plays she produced. Among her most memorable productions is Rudali, her 1992 Hindi play adapted from Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage, where she played the leading role of Himmat Mai. She founded the theatre group Rangakarmee, and wrote several plays, and also

translated and adapted a large number of international scripts. She was the only theatre director in India to have directed a play for a Pakistan theatre group called Ajoka Theatre under their Theatre for Peace project.

Warm tributes to Usha Ganguly.

## Kamal Lohani

CPIML pays tribute to Kamal Lohani, the noted Bangladeshi leftist, cultural activist and journalist who succumbed to Covid-19 at the age of 68.

As a student activist in the 1960s, Lohani was active in the movements against the authoritarian Ayub Khan regime of Pakistan. In 1967, he formed Kranti, a leftist cultural organisation. He was jailed several times, sharing jail life with Sheikh Mujibur Rehman and other freedom fighters.

During the Bangladesh Liberation War, Lohani came to Kolkata and worked as a journalist with the Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, reporting on the liberation struggle. So it turned out that in December 1971, the people of Bangladesh heard the declaration of their victory in a news bulletin read by Kamal Lohani.

Warm tributes to Kamal Lohani.



Vidyanand Sahay



Usha Ganguly



Kamal Lohani

# Tributes to Frontline Health and Sanitation Workers Who Fell To Covid-19

In India, the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases among frontline sanitation and healthcare workers and staff is 1073, among whom there have been 61 fatalities. The actual number of deaths could be much higher.

For instance, in Mumbai alone, over 1,500 frontline Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) workers were noted to be infected with Covid-19 till May 28, 25 of whom had succumbed to the virus. In April, a 52-year-old woman sanitation worker of the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) was suspected to have died of Covid-19. Her family said, "We were verbally told that she had contracted the coronavirus infection. She was only given a mask by EDMC to carry out her duties -- she did not even have gloves on." A woman teacher deputed on ration distribution duty in North Delhi area succumbed to Covid-19 in early May.

These courageous workers put their lives on the line to fight Covid-19. But saluting their courage does not mean that we forget how most of these deaths could have been avoided, had the Governments been less apathetic and callous. The Modi Government's failure to warn and prepare on time for the pandemic; and its failure to provide even proper PPE kits to frontline workers, and the chronically weak state of public healthcare in India, is responsible in large measure for many of these deaths.

Sister Kabita Dutta Majumder, 55, was on duty as the Ward Incharge Nursing Officer at Barasat District Hospital till she contracted high fever on 15 May. Refused treatment at many hospitals, she was eventually admitted to a private hospital in Barrackpore for ten days, where tests for Covid-19 showed negative. She was then brought to Kolkata for treatment at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital on 25 May, and passed away on 1 June. Posthumously, it was confirmed that she had Covid-19.

A 58-year-old sanitation supervisor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Shri Heera Lal, succumbed to Covid-19. Sanitation workers, most of whom are from dalit communities, even in normal times, are denied basic protective gear and are expected to handle hazardous and human waste by hand. During the pandemic, they are expected to keep working while being denied basic wages and rights, not to mention protective gear.

We pay tribute to all those frontline and essential workers who have fallen to Covid-19. Below, we list those names of the frontline worker victims that we do have, recognising that there may be many more whose names are not on this list. We salute each and every one of them, and demand better rights for frontline workers.

## Doctors

1. Dr Shatrughan Punjwani , Indore
2. Dr Om Prakash Chauhan, Indore
3. Dr Sanat Dalal, Indore
4. Dr Simon Hercules, Chennai
5. Dr John L Sailo Ryntathiang , Shillong
6. Dr Nizamuddin, Moradabad
7. Dr Laxminarayan Reddy Nellore
8. Anonymous Ayurvedic Govt doctor, Bulandshahar
9. Dr K M Ismail Hussain , Kurnool
10. Dr Shah Ashfaq, Govandi, Mumbai
11. Dr N L Hera, Itarsi
12. Dr Bimal Kanti Dasgupta , Kolkata
13. Dr Sisir Mondol , Kolkata
14. Dr Ranjit Singh ,Mumbai
15. Dr Abhay Agarwal, Bijnore, UP
16. Anonymous Dr, Jahangirpuri, Delhi
17. Dr Sunil Agarwal, Lucknow
18. Anonymous Dr, Amravati
19. Dr Om Saraf, Mumbai
20. Dr Anil Bahulekar ,Mumbai
21. Dr Sanjay Shelar ,Pune
22. Prof J N Pande , AIIMS
23. Dr B K Sharma ,Indore

24. Dr Aditya Upadhyay, Ahmedabad
25. Dr Kamlesh Tailor, Ahmedabad
26. Dr Ramesh Patel, Ahmedabad
27. Dr M A Ansari, Ahmedabad
28. Dr Chittaranjan Bhave, Mumbai
29. Dr Pankaj Shah,Ahmedabad
30. Dr Rajendra P Yadav, Delhi
31. Anonymous physician, Meerut
32. Dr Sunil Agarwal, Sitapur
33. Dr Vinod Raja , Chennai
34. Dr Abani Kumar Nag, Kolkata
35. Dr Ajay Joshi, Indore
36. Dr Mithilesh, Mu,mbai
37. Dr U K Ghose, Delhi
38. Anonymous physician, Hyderabad
39. Dr Parag Patil, Kalyan
40. Dr Asif Shaikh, Bhiwandi
41. Dr Yasmeen Gani, Bhiwandi
42. Dr Seeman Mullah Bhiwandi
43. Dr Hariah Kumar, Delhi
44. Dr Bhavesh Topiwala, Indore
45. Dr Shaukat Ali, Mumbai
46. Dr Ashwini P. Singh, Delhi
47. Dr Yasir Naseem, Delhi
48. Dr M Narayanan, Chennai

## Paramedics & other staff

1. Mr Vijay Chandel, Ward Boy, Ahmedabad
2. Ms Ambika, Staff nurse, Delhi
3. Mr Kheem Singh, Doctor's mess, AIIMS
4. Mr Heera Lal, Sanitation chief, AIIMS
5. Ms Joan Mary Prescilla, NS, Chennai
6. Ms Anita Mondal, Behrampur
7. Ms Kabita Dutta Majumder, Nurse, Kolkata
8. Mr Sukhdev Bag, Pharmacist, Kolkata
9. Mr. Bishnu Chatterjee, Optometrist, Siliguri
10. Mr. Devesh Sharma, Pharmacist, Hathras
11. Sister Raichel Joseph, Delhi
12. Mr Rakesh Jain, Technician, Delhi
13. Anonymous X-Ray technician, Delhi



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**26 JUNE MARKS THE INFAMOUS DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY.**  
**WE FOUGHT THE INDIRA REGIME'S EMERGENCY IN 1975 -**  
**WE WILL FIGHT THE MODI REGIME'S UNDECLARED EMERGENCY NOW!**  
**DEFEND CIVIL LIBERTIES, PRESS FREEDOMS, RIGHTS OF MINORITIES!**  
**FREE POLITICAL PRISONERS!**  
**STOP PERSECUTING ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS!**

**President Proclaims National Emergency**

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