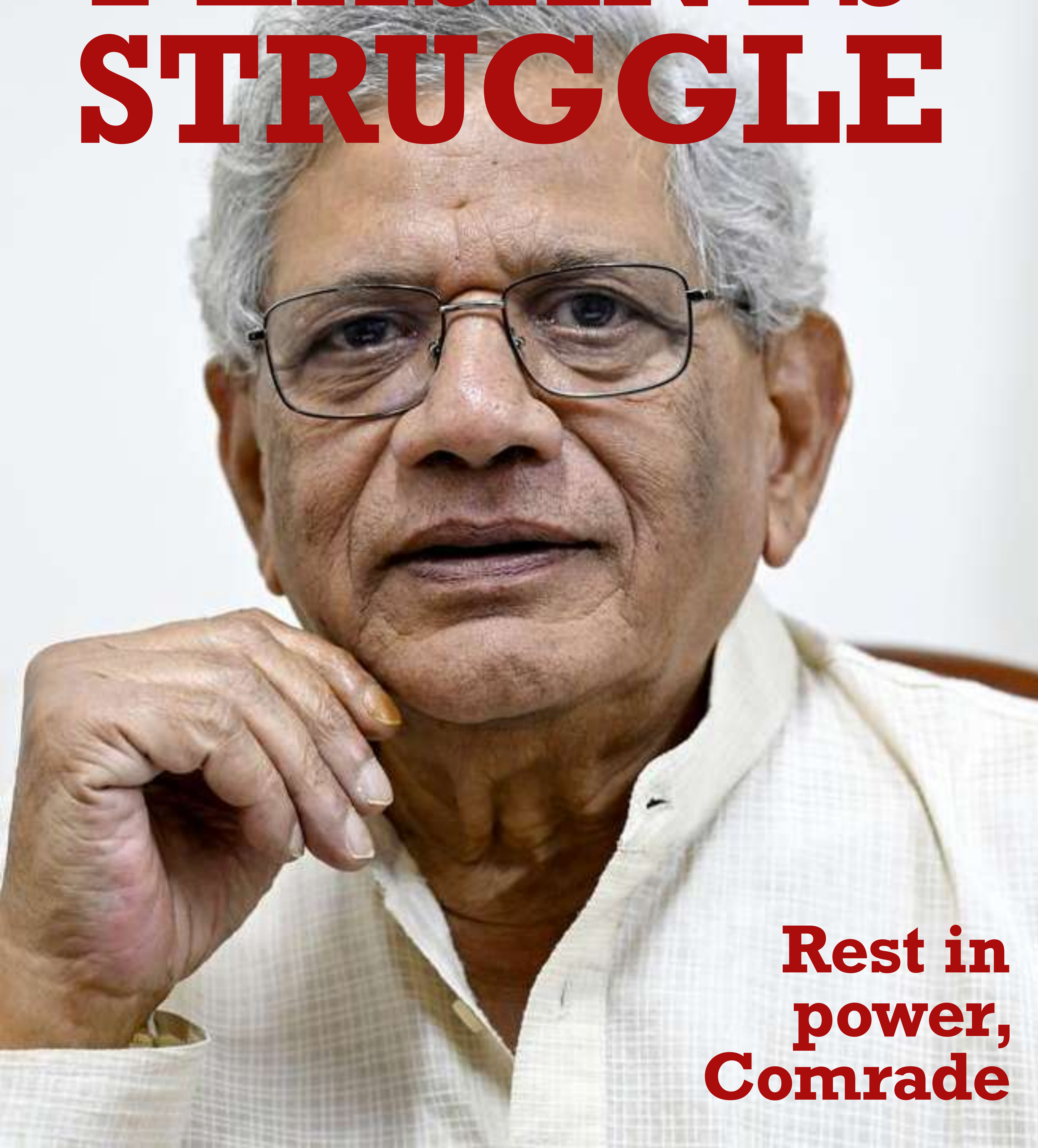


# PEASANTS' STRUGGLE



**Rest in  
power,  
Comrade**



AIKS-AIAWU joint march to Parliament against Central government's inaction on wild animal attacks on farmers.



AIKS in Bhadra (Rajasthan) takes out demonstration on the issue of pending insurance claims by farmers.



# PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

The Journal of AIKS

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# Editorial

The 107<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Bolshevik revolution was on 7<sup>th</sup> November. The revolutionary anti-imperialist spirit unleashed by the great October Revolution played a significant role in the formation of the AIKS in 1936. Comrade Lenin, the chief architect of the Bolshevik Revolution was an ardent supporter of the “awakening” of the Indian peasantry and working class against the “age old plunder of India” by the British Empire. Com. Lenin’s insightful theorisation on the intrinsic revolutionary traits of the peasantry informed the understanding of the AIKS in the patriotic freedom struggle as well as the on-going protracted struggle against imperialist driven Neoliberal economic policies.

The genocidal war waged on Palestine and Lebanon by the Zionist Israel actively abetted by US imperialism is reiterating that “the triumph of imperialism leads to the annihilation of civilisation”. Palestinian people are resisting the depredations of imperialism in the most heroic manner but there is need for world-wide solidarity and active support to the Palestinian cause to which we are also committed.

Trump won the presidential race in the US elections by artfully channelising the widespread discontent against the Biden regime. This is going to lead to a further rightward shift, attacks on the working people as well as a racist anti-immigrant drive. NATO’s eastward expansion executed by US imperialism and the resultant war in Ukraine is decimating Germany’s industry and working class. Many European countries are also seeing growing unemployment, poverty even as a miniscule section is profiteering at their expense. The severe crisis due to the failure of neoliberalism, which intensely adds on to the sharpening of the general crisis, is creating the material basis for the rise of fascistic Political forces in Europe. The Kazan summit of the BRICS countries raised counters against the imperialist camp on the questions of dollar hegemony, undemocratic governance of World Bank and IMF etc. However, without eliminating the hegemony of global finance, the survival of the peasantry cannot be ensured.

It is important to note that the draconian farm laws were drafted by the RSS-BJP led Union government on behalf of global finance and their domestic lackeys. The Hindutva dispensation which failed to fully corporatise and centralise agriculture via the route of the farm bills are manoeuvring for a backdoor entry. Clandestine operations are executed by several ministries to achieve this. The increasing communal polarisation the BJP-RSS is creating after the election results is also aimed at promoting corporate interests. The peasant movement needs to be extremely vigilant about this and be ready for befitting counter offensive.

Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) is organising “warning rallies” across over 500 districts on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024, marking the anniversary of the legendary ‘*Delhi Chalo*’ movement by farmers and General Strike by workers that took place on the same day in 2020. The rallies will be organised jointly with the Joint Platform of the Central Trade Unions and the platform of Agricultural Workers’ Unions. This massive movement of the working people will be a warning to the Modi government which violated the promises given to SKM regarding the legal guarantee of MSP, debt relief, the repeal of the Electricity Amendment Bill and other demands. It is indispensable for the revolutionary peasant movement to fight the ascendancy of international finance and the Neoliberal paradigm that strengthen its hegemony. Class unity of the working people is crucial to eliminate the stranglehold of the sinister anti-farmer Corporate Hindutva project.

Two towering leaders of the Left and the ardent supporters of the peasantry—comrades Sitaram Yechury and Buddhadev Bhattacharya—passed away recently. Comrade Yechury played a stellar role in formulating ideological positions that advanced the cause of agrarian revolution further. Comrade Bhattacharya had a significant role in initiating pro farmer agrarian reforms in West Bengal. Comrade MM Lawrence a legendary leader of the working class and Comrade Pushpan who was a living martyr of the Koothupparamba firing also passed away. The memories of these leaders will act as a catalyst in our future struggles.



## Comrade Yechury: An Embodiment of 'Study & Struggle'

Dr ASHOK DHAWALE  
(National President, AIKS)



A few weeks ago, none of us could ever have imagined that such a sad day would come so suddenly. Sitaram Yechury's passing on September 12, 2024 has created a deep void in all the left, democratic and secular forces in India. This is clear from the avalanche of condolence messages, tributes, articles, memoirs and editorials that have appeared in both the mainstream media and the social media since then—most of them from his friends and comrades, but also some from his adversaries and opponents.

### *LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION*

I have had the honour and privilege of knowing Sitaram from our SFI days, 45 years ago in 1979. The SFI 3<sup>rd</sup> All India Conference at Patna held the same year was my first. I had joined the Party first, and then the SFI, a year before in 1978. In that conference, Prakash Karat and Subhash Chakravarty were relieved as president and general secretary, and were replaced by MA Baby and Nepal Deb Bhattacharya respectively. Along with them were Saifuddin Choudhury as one of the vice presidents, Sitaram Yechury as one of the joint secretaries, and Sohail Hashmi as treasurer. Little did I know then that the task of hosting the next 4<sup>th</sup> All India Conference of the SFI at Mumbai in 1981 would fall on our shoulders!

The strategic ground floor corner of 22, Vithal Bhai Patel House in New Delhi used to be the SFI central office those days. Along with the above new central office bearers, I nostalgically remember meeting and chatting with two more extraordinary SFI leaders—Safdar Hashmi and Ashoklata Jain, both of whom are sadly no more. I also remember sometimes helping Sitaram in the editing and proof-reading of *Student Struggle*. In the 5<sup>th</sup> SFI All India Conference at Dum Dum in 1984, Sitaram was elected president and I was elected one of the vice presidents.

The veteran leader of the Party and CITU, BT Ranadive used to be the Party-in-charge of Maharashtra for several years. Two years after his demise in 1990, the Politburo gave that responsibility to its then youngest member, Sitaram Yechury. Sitaram ably carried it out for over two decades till he was elected general secretary of the CPI(M) in 2015. He never restricted himself to just attending state committee meetings. There was almost no district in this large state which he did not visit, some many times, on the occasion of some major struggle, some large public meeting, some big convention, or some study camp. As state secretary of the Party and even before, I used to accompany him on many of these visits. That led to even more closeness. Numerous are my memories of so many memorable struggles of those days. But alas, for reasons of space, they will have to wait for some other time.

#### *SHARP THINKER, STAUNCH FIGHTER*

It is on the basis of this long and close association with Sitaram that I can say that all through his life he was an excellent embodiment of the famous SFI slogan of *Study and Struggle*. Karl Marx, in his youth, made the celebrated assertion, “Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” As a sharp thinker and a staunch fighter, Sitaram used his entire life and all his powers not only to interpret the world and our country, but also to try and change both. And he did this, always accurately applying the compass of Marxism-Leninism, which he had tried to master, and to which he was committed to the core. As he used to say in his innumerable speeches, “Yes, we certainly need to change India for the better. But for that, we will first have to save India.”

Sitaram joined the battle at an early age, in his early twenties. He helped to strengthen the SFI in the newly-started Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), was jailed during the Emergency, was the

only person to date who was elected president of the JNUSU three times successively in a year, and he read out a students’ chargesheet about authoritarianism in the Emergency against former prime minister Indira Gandhi, demanding her resignation as Chancellor of JNU in her very presence. She later gave in to the students’ demand and resigned. Then there was the famous Delhi Rally of the SFI and DYFI on September 15, 1981, around the slogan which is even more valid today, *Education for All, Jobs for All*; and many other student struggles.



#### *SWORN ENEMY OF IMPERIALISM*

In the international sphere, the fight against imperialism was an article of faith with Sitaram. Our generation grew up with the deadly US war against Vietnam, and the valiant and eventually victorious resistance of the Vietnamese people led by Ho Chi Minh and the Communists. We were inspired by the defiant building of socialist Cuba by Communists led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and the shattering martyrdom of the latter at the hands of US henchmen. We were also witness to the India-Pakistan war for the liberation of Bangladesh, during which the US threatened to send its Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal to browbeat India. These events were accompanied by the horrendous fascist massacres of tens of thousands of Communists and democrats in Indonesia and Chile, and the hated apartheid regime in South Africa which kept Nelson Mandela and so many other heroes in jail for decades. No sensitive youth in those days could have remained immune to all these events.

Later, of course, there came the series of catastrophic wars launched by US imperialism, and supported by European imperialism, against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yugoslavia and numerous countries in Africa. These wars collectively massacred millions of people.

Even today, the imperialist-Zionist nexus continues its year-long genocide of the Palestinian people, killing tens of thousands of children, women and men. All this is apart from the unprecedented socio-economic exploitation of the world and of its environment by imperialist finance capital and neoliberalism, and its agencies like the IMF, WB, WTO and MNCs. In both words and deeds, Sitaram fought against these evils, putting his expertise in economics to good use.

In between all these events, world socialism received a big blow from 1989 to 1991, in the form of collapse of socialism first in the countries of Eastern Europe, and then in the Soviet Union itself. With the fall of the countervailing socialist force that had successfully challenged imperialism for nearly 75 years, imperialism became much more aggressive in the military, economic, political, and ideological spheres. Imperialist pen-pushers began their chorus of "Marxism is drowned, Socialism is finished". Many Communist Parties in the world were demoralised by these events. Some of them even went to the extent of dropping the word "Communist" from their names! Among the honourable exceptions to this was the CPI(M).

At such an intensely critical time, the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPI(M) was held in 1992 at Chennai in Tamil Nadu. Based on Marxism-Leninism, the collective leadership of the Party made an accurate analysis of all these cataclysmic events. It came to the firm conclusion that the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was not because of Marxism, but, on the contrary, because of deviations from Marxism. A seminal resolution titled *On Certain Ideological Issues* was prepared by the Central Committee, and after thorough discussion in the Party Congress, it was adopted. The comrade who placed and piloted this crucial resolution in the Party Congress was the then 40-year-old Sitaram Yechury!

### DEFENDING THE IDEA OF INDIA

The above international developments and the changing situation in the country resulted in India being attacked from the early 1990s by two grave onslaughts. The first was the neoliberal and pro-imperialist economic policies that were inaugurated by the then Congress government led by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. After that, all successive central governments and all non-Left state governments implemented the same basic policies. In the last 10 years, the Modi-Shah-

led BJP-RSS government is taking forward the same pro-corporate and anti-people policies with much greater speed and vigour. Sitaram Yechury, with his expertise in economics, ideologically analysed and politically attacked these new economic policies based on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG).

The other menace was an old one. It also began gaining ominous strength from the early 1990s. That was the scourge of communalism led by the RSS-VHP-BJP under the garb of Hindutva. Its other inseparable ideological underpinning was the reactionary 2000-year-old text called the *Manusmriti*. The RSS drew inspiration from the fascist dictatorships of Germany and Italy under Hitler and Mussolini. In class terms, it was a servile slave of imperialism and neoliberalism, crony capitalism and feudalism. And it considered Communists as its mortal enemy, with valid historical reasons. These sentiments were reciprocated by the Communists.

The conspiratorial demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya by the RSS-led Sangh Parivar on December 6, 1992, and the acquiescence of the then Congress regime at the Centre, was a watershed moment in the history of India. This event prompted the legendary Communist leader Jyoti Basu to directly castigate the RSS-BJP as being "barbarian". The very next year in 1993, Sitaram wrote and N Ram of Frontline published a small but very influential pamphlet titled *What is this Hindu Rashtra?* In this pamphlet Sitaram mercilessly dissected, exposed and demolished the communal, casteist and fascist arguments of the second RSS chief MS Golwalkar, which were made in his 1939 book titled *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*.

The die had been cast. After that there was no turning back. Sitaram spent the last 30-odd years of his life in strongly and consistently defending the Idea of India, the principle of Unity in Diversity, and the fundamental tenets of India's Constitution, one of the main architects of which was Dr BR Ambedkar. These basic tenets were Sovereignty, Democracy, Secularism, Federalism, and Socio-economic Justice. Sitaram, and the collective leadership of the CPI(M), fought this struggle to the hilt. As he often used to say, the struggle against economic exploitation and against social oppression is indivisible, and must be waged together.

## BUILDING THE UPA

The growing menace of the RSS-BJP combine was underlined when it came to central power from 1998 to 2004, although not with a clear majority. The need to forge the unity of the Left, democratic, and secular forces gained even more urgency. Under the leadership of veteran Communist leader Harkishan Singh Surjeet, who mentored Sitaram Yechury and others, the initially successful UPA-1 experiment of bringing together all anti-RSS-BJP forces began.

When the UPA came to power in 2004, a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) was prepared. Sitara-

-m had a key role in framing it. It was during the UPA-1 regime that, under pressure of the Left, several pro-people measures were taken, like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Forest Rights Act (FRA), the Right to Information Act (RTI), the Food Security Act (FSA), the Right to Education Act (RTE), the partial Loan Waiver to the Peasantry, and a partial brake on the Privatisation of Public Sector Units.

But it must not for a moment be forgotten that all this became possible not just through good intentions and individual efforts, but because the Left had a formidable combined strength of 61 MPs, and the CPI(M) on its own had 43 MPs, in the Lok Sabha from 2004 to 2009. The Left then had also won the three state governments of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura.

Our independent strength is one crucial area where all of us have collectively fallen short in the recent past. Overcoming this weakness is the topmost priority for us in the years ahead.





Sitaram utilised his 12-year stint in the Rajya Sabha from 2005 to 2017 effectively to focus on the real and burning problems of all sections of the working people. The first four years were spent as part of the UPA-1 coalition, the next five in an adversarial relationship with the UPA-2, and the last three in total political opposition to the BJP-NDA regime. His excellently argued speeches in the Rajya Sabha on a wide variety of topics laid out the CPI(M) and Left line on all these issues, and they were highly appreciated even by his political opponents.

### *SUPPORT TO PEASANT STRUGGLES*

Sitaram's and the Party's interventions in the extra-parliamentary sphere were no less significant. I particularly remember his role in the joint peasant struggle against the Land Acquisition Ordinance in 2015, and in the united peasant-worker struggle against the three Farm Laws in 2020-21. In the first, it was he who took the lead in mobilising most opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha against Modi's Land Acquisition Ordinance. The struggle of the peasantry under the leadership of the Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA) outside parliament, and the struggle within the Rajya Sabha in parliament, made the BJP regime see the writing on the wall, and Modi had to let the Land Ordinance lapse. In the iconic year-long Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) struggle against the Farm Laws, Sitaram mobilised large sections of the opposition to support the Bharat Bandhs and other SKM struggle calls. His support to the anti-CAA Shaheen Bagh struggle, the women wrestlers' struggle, etc. was also very significant.

In Maharashtra, Sitaram played a major role in two other peasant struggles. One was the massive joint Left-led peasant struggle against the MahaMumbai SEZ, under which 45 villages with 50,000 peasants were to be uprooted from 30,000 hectares of land. This land in Raigad district, adjoining Mumbai, was to be handed over to Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries. The joint struggle was initiated by the AIKS in 2007, and it resulted in victory five years later in 2012, when as a result of unrelenting and bitter peasant resistance, the MahaMumbai SEZ had to be de-notified! Sitaram effectively raised this issue in Parliament and mobilised opposition to it even w-

-ithin the UPA. And the other struggle was, of course, the iconic 50,000-strong AIKS-led Kisan Long March from Nashik to Mumbai in 2018. Sitaram kept constant track of the week-long march, and was there to greet it on its last day of victory in Mumbai.

### *FORGING THE INDIA BLOC*

During the last year of his life in 2023-24, he was among those instrumental in forging the INDIA bloc of Left and secular parties against the BJP-NDA combine. Since one of the national meetings of the INDIA bloc was held in Mumbai in August 2023, the CPI(M) Politburo deputed me to be with Sitaram in that meeting. There I saw for myself his valuable interventions and also the high esteem in which he was held by all the partners of that bloc. The INDIA bloc came within striking distance of its aim of ousting the BJP-NDA from power in the Lok Sabha polls of 2024. The presence of almost all the top leaders of the INDIA bloc to bid him farewell in Delhi, and their speeches in the condolence meetings all over the country, were a testimony to his work.

Many have described Sitaram's personal qualities—erudition, accessibility, simplicity, humility, sensitivity, friendship, and so on. While all that was true, it was also true that he never compromised on his core principles, and his integrity. While naturally concentrating on current challenges, Sitaram never forgot the true aim of a Communist Party—the overthrow of feudalism and capitalism and their replacement by socialism. He challenged the ruling class slogan of '*There Is No Alternative*' (TINA) to capitalism, with '*Socialism Is The Alternative*' (SITA), with a disarming smile, since SITA was also the short form of his own name!

Sitaram often used to say that to be a good Communist, you must be a good human being. He was both. And that is his legacy that we must all strive to carry forward with determination! ■



# Com. Sitaram Yechury: Five Decades of Indelible Commitment to Socialism & Liberation of Masses

Dr VIJOO KRISHNAN  
(General Secretary, AIKS)



Comrade Sitaram Yechury, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has been one of the most recognised faces of the organised Left in India. In the last decade he has also been one of the most vocal opponents of the corporate-communal and authoritarian regime at the helm. Starting his political activism through the students' movement in 1974 in the Students' Federation of India, the next five decades of his life was one of an indelible commitment to socialism and the liberation of the masses.

It was in the turbulent years of the 1970s that his political ideas were sharpened. The humiliating defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam, the general anti-imperialist surge, the international solidarity with the resistance in Chile, the Palestinian Liberation Movement, the anti-Apartheid movement and heroic resistance of the Cuban people had all undoubtedly inspired the youth of his times. In the heydays of the authoritarian Emergency imposed by the Indira Gandhi led Congress Government he went underground organising resistance eventually being arrested in 1975. After the Emergency, he was elected as the President of the JNU Students' Union thrice during a single academic year 1977-78, a distinction only he holds, which is testimony to his popularity as well as the strong presence of the Students' Federation of India which he helped to build on the campus. He went on to be the All India President of the SFI between 1984-86. At a relatively young age of 32 he was inducted into the Central Committee of the CPI-M in 1984 and the next year into the newly formed Central Secretariat. He was elected to the Politburo in 1992 at the fourteenth Party Congress.

His induction into the PB was at a time of intense debate world over about the future of socialism and when in the wake of the collapse of Soviet Union there was talk of 'end of history' and triumph of liberalism. It was also at a time when the political right-wing under the leadership of the fascist RSS was on the ascendancy in India. He, along with the collective leadership, steered the CPI-M with an ideological clarity that could break the demoralisation and inspire hope in the cadre. His writings in this period on imperialism, the neoliberal economic policies, the communal forces as well as the Hindutva ideology are of great relevance. In the era of coalition politics in India, he played a significant role in formulating policies and the Common Minimum Programme especially when the first UPA Government was formed. During the first tenure of the UPA Government, the strength of the Left could be leveraged to ensure implementation of progressive legislations like the MGNREGA, Forest Rights Act, Right to Information Act etc.

As a Parliamentarian for 12 years, he came to be seen as one of the most effective voices against the communal-corporate BJP regime and also on many occasions put the Government in the dock. On issues of the working class, the peasantry and oppressed people he was an inspiring presence both in the Parliament as well as on the streets. In particular, his role during the protests against the Land Acquisition Ordinance, rallying the opposition parties in support of the farmers during the historic struggle that eventually forced the Narendra Modi led BJP Government to apologise and withdraw the three pro-corporate Farm Acts is notable. His role in building resistance to the divisive Citizenship Amendment Act, in defence of the Constitution, secularism, rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, federal rights of States, civil liberties, rights of the oppressed also won him wide respect. On the privatisation of public assets, food security, perils of demonetisation, the GST and such matters as well as against the corporate cronyism his was a strong voice. He was also an excellent educator of the masses preparing them ideologically to counter imperialism, fascism and the neoliberal trajectory of capitalist development. The clarity of thought on the need to combine class struggle also with the struggle against untouchability, social oppression and discrimination will also stand out. His wide interaction with the international Communist movement as well as world leaders was well recognised and often quoted is his role after the anti-monarchy struggle in Nepal and in the democratic transition including coordination with different Communist Parties there.

His insights into the emerging contradictions in the agrarian sector with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies helped in developing a correct anti-corporate stance of the movement without losing sight of the fact that the unity must have the landless, agricultural workers and poor peasants as the core around which the broadest unity has to be built to meet the objective of defeating a common enemy. He often stressed on the Party Programme's assertion that the agrarian revolution is the axis of the people's democratic revolution and the importance of strong worker-peasant unity. Comrade Sitaram also consistently connected the rise of the Hindutva fascist forces in India with the ascendancy and the hegemony of global finance while reiterating that only the worker-peasant alliance can resist and defeat these divisive fascist forces.

On a personal note, I have had a three-decade long association with him. It was in 1995 as a student of Jawaharlal Nehru University that I first met him at a Public Meeting organised by Students' Federation of India. In my decade long stay in the University, there have been countless occasions where he has enthralled audiences with his speeches having an astute mix of a reportage on political developments, anecdotes from his wide experiences, cultural and literary references, humour and sharpness. In elections after elections to the JNU Students' Union, he was the most sought-after speaker for the last General Body Meeting, which usually was the crescendo of the election campaign that gives a decisive push in favour of the organised left; invariably it always saw the biggest crowd. In many ways we could predict the sequence of what he would speak: beginning with a question whether the audience wanted him to speak in English or Hindi or his mother tongue Telugu, a multi-linguist that he was, he would venture into narrating his experiences in the Students' Movement, his being elected thrice as President of the Union to stress how democracy functioned in JNU, the repression of the Congress imposed Emergency, how he read out to Indira Gandhi the demand of the JNU Students' Union asking her to step down as the Chancellor of the University which she continued to hold even after her defeat in the 1977 elections, quoting something from PG Wodehouse, evoking memories of having been resident of Ganga Hostel, which then was a Boys Hostel, countering the TINA to Capitalism argument with '*Socialism Is The Alternative*' referring smilingly to the acronym SITA and so on. This was only a build-up to attract new listeners to the more substantive issues that were to follow later on. A s-

-harp critique of caste oppression and communal politics would follow as also would the analysis of world developments, imperialist aggression and the national political scenario. This last section of speech dealing with contemporary issues in a comprehensive manner would be the most insightful and set the tone and tenor for the Presidential debate as well as leave a mark on the voters. His ability to convey in a simple and attractive manner even while dealing with complex issues, whether in speech or in writings is particularly noteworthy.

He was a person of exceptional academic credentials and had to quit his PhD due to the fast-changing political developments immediately after the Emergency. I fondly remember his insistence that I should complete my PhD and not give it up midway like him and many other fellow comrades; I actually managed to complete it. Ever since I quit my teaching job and became a whole-timer working in the Party and in the All India Kisan Sabha there have been many occasions when we have interacted on issues, regarding course of the movement and also for building wider consensus. There have also been occasions when he would consult or bring to notice issues that merited our response. In the last three decades, despite at times being on opposite sides of different debates, he always maintained a warm demeanour and also played a role in shaping my ideas.

My last interaction with him was at the behest of the Naga people regarding the progress of the Peace Process and he had assured that he would play a role to bring the opposition Parties to write to the Prime Minister questioning his tall claims that he had resolved the matter; it remained an unfinished task.

Adieu, Dear Comrade. Red Salute, Comrade Sitaram! ■

# Sitaram Yechury's RS Speech on Quit India's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: 'We don't want a Hindu Pakistan'

transcribed by  
SHUBHOJEET DEY



Sir, the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Quit India Movement is a very solemn occasion. When we recollect, not only the history but also the purpose and what was it that made it a successful movement, if you look into the history sir, there was a reference to Satara, the independent state in Maharashtra. The leader of that independent state was Nana Patil, who was a member of the [undivided] Communist Party of India, who came into this House [Rajya Sabha] and the other House [Lok Sabha]. Yes, Subhash Chandra Bose's Rani Jhansi Regiment was led by Lakshmi Seghal, who was a member of the CPI(M) and a candidate for Presidency that we had put up. So let us not try to appropriate this history. We go to the Cellular Jail [in Andaman & Nicobar Islands] today, 80% of the names that are written there in the marble are Communists, from Bengal or the un-divided Punjab. Kalpana Dutt, of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, is another example. Sir, history is there for all of us to see.

You have Shankar Dayal Sharma *ji*, our honourable President of India, who on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Quit India Movement, there was a midnight session [in the Parliament]. In those days we would have sessions to commemorate our history and learn, not to launch some project or the other like the GST. On that occasion, what did he say? I am quoting from the speech he made: "After large-scale strikes in Kanpur, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad, a dispatch from Delhi dated September 5, 1942, to the secretary of state in London reported about the Communist Party of India, the behaviour of many of its members, proves what always has been clear, namely that it is composed of anti-British revolutionaries." Need anything more be said?

What I am saying is that this movement had its one singular point—of course, the leadership was with the Indian National Congress, the Communists were all there in the AICC [All India Congress Committee]. The first time a resolution for 'Complete Independence' was moved, was in the Ahmedabad session of the AICC in 1921 and it was moved by whom? It was on behalf of the Co-

-mmunist Party of India. Who were the two people who moved it? Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Swami Kumaranand—a Maulana and a Swami moves a resolution on behalf of the Communist Party of India asking for 'Complete Independence'. Mahatma Gandhi did not accept it then but finally in the Lahore AICC Session of 1929, the 'Poorna Swaraj' slogan was given. This is the history.

When we remember the Quit India Movement, we must remember its uniqueness of unity in diversity. *Agar Bharat Chodho Andolan ke baare mein baat ho rahi hai, toh uski ek khasiyat ko dhyaan mein rakhna hai, wo hai apni sanjhi virasat. Aur ye sanjhi virasat desh ke logon ki hai, Hindu Musalman, Dalit Brahmin, jo bhi hai, ye sab iqattha hue hai aur LoP jab zikar kar rahe the* [the uniqueness of the Quit India Movement was in its sense of shared heritage—a heritage common to Hindus and Muslims, to Dalits and Brahmins. Now the Leader of Opposition was mentioning...] that in 1857, there was a British Chronicler called Edward Lowe, he was chronicling what was happening in India in 1857. In the Chronicle, what does he write, sir? "If the infantilised Rajput, the bigoted Brahmin, if the pig-eater and the pig-hater, cow-eater and the cow-worshipper, if all of them come together, there is no future for the British in India." We achieved our Independence because of that unity, sir. Today if you are paying homage to all those who created that history and made India independent, for which all of us are proud; AK Gopalan hoisted the national flag in the Vellore jail in Tamil Nadu on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947; the uniqueness of this combined history of ours is this unity.

Today, we are observing the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary [of the Quit India Movement] and looking to the future. The Honourable Prime Minister said outside in his 'Mann Ki Baat', there he said from 1942 to 1947, these were the crucial years, so from 2017 to 2022 let us achieve those objectives. Now sir, what is that objective?

In 1947, we became independent, we are all proud, we are all children of independent India, we have i-

-nherited that Indian nationhood. But in those 5 years [between 1942 and 1947], we also saw the nation being vivisected, we saw the partition of India, we saw the communal polarisation that unfortunately led to the partition of India, aided by the British. So, if you are alluding to those five years, there is an ominous sign, it's a very dark cloud, the silver lining is here [gestures drawing a line].

—Law Minister Ravi Shankar interrupts—

Why is my honourable friend and minister getting so excited, I don't know. It is the honourable Prime Minister who said that communalism must Quit India, I am talking of that communalism. It is our Prime Minister of India and your leader who said communalism must Quit India. I am saying, are we doing anything to make it quit? That is the resolve I am talking of. That is why I am reminding [the House] of the other factors that led to the Partition of this subcontinent. *Waha pe Pakistan ban gaya, yaha pe Hindustan ek dharmnishpeksh Jantatra ka Gantatra bana. Wo humare samvidhan ki buniyad hai. Aaj iss gantatra ko hume barkaraar rakhna hai, mazboot karna hai, toh woh humara lakshya hona chahiye aage ke liye* [While a Pakistan was created there, here the secular democratic republic of Hindustan was created. This secular democracy is the foundation of our Constitution. Today, we have to defend this republic, we have to strengthen it when moving forward.]

What is the meaning of observing the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Quit India Movement? What you have to quit today are these economic policies that are increasing unemployment, that are increasing poverty, that are increasing the divide between the rich and the poor, creating these two Indias, where in these last three years; when Dr Manmohan Singh was the Prime Minister, we used to have a lot of discussion here, how we are creating two Indias, one for the poor, one for the rich. About 49% of the GDP in 2014 was held, as I said, by 1% of the Indian population. Today, what is the situation? Nearly 60% of the GDP is in the hands of 1% of the population. Is this the India of the dreams when the country became independent in 1947? Is this the India where the youth power, which is the biggest in the world,

—Speaker rings the bell—

Sir, the British also used to ring many bells but Gandhi *ji* never used to stop. Till they Quit India, he did not stop. Sir, my point is that if today we give the call of Quit India on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary,

it is these neoliberal economic policies that are impoverishing the mass of my people, it is this communalism that is dividing my country.

Please understand, what should be the resolve? It is not only by recollecting the memory of the past, that's very good, we can recollect. We can also apportion blame. We can also say who did what. But the question is, are we going to move forward? Or are we going to look backward? *Ab aap bhavishya ke ujaale mein jayenge, ya bhoot ke andhere mein jayenge? Bhoot ke andar jaane ki jo vichardhara hai usko hume bahishkar karne ki zarurat hai. Bina bahishkar kiye, hum bhavishya ke ujaale mein nahi jaa sakte. Isiliye meri ek hi baat hai sir.* [The question is whether you want to move towards the bright light of the future or the darkness of the past? The ideology that pushes people to the darkness of the past must be condemned. Without such condemnation, we cannot move towards the bright future].

During the period of INA trials and RIN [Royal Indian Navy] mutiny, there was a song, sir, which all of us have grown up with, and I think we should re-sing that song and make that resolve: *Mandir Masjid Gurudware mein baat diya bhagwaan ko // Dharti Baati, Sagar Baata, Mat Baaton Insaan ko.* [God has been split in temples, mosques and Gurudwara; our land and oceans have been divided too; I plead to you, don't divide humans].

Sir! The movement forward should be the strengthening of the secular democratic republic of India and not, not the creation of a Hindu Pakistan in India. That is what we have to work towards.

Quit Neoliberal Reforms, Quit Communalism! Thank you. ■

# Remembering Comrade Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's Life & Legacy

PRABHAT PATNAIK  
(Economist)



**B**uddhadeb Bhattacharya came from a conservative family. Sukanta Bhattacharya the renowned revolutionary poet of Bengal, who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty, was his uncle, but the family disapproved of Sukanta's politics, as indeed they would have of Buddha's. Buddha's politicisation came from a different source, the Bengal of his youth which was not only intellectually and culturally vibrant, but also had a remarkable legacy of Communism that had been inherited largely by the CPI(M) after the split. Harry Pollitt, the British Communist leader, had reportedly said after a visit to India that he would give his right-hand for a Communist Party like India's. Its cadres were dedicated, disciplined, austere, untouched by corruption and firmly ensconced within the rich intellectual and cultural ethos around it; and this was even more true of Bengal. Besides, India, especially Bengal, had an obvious unfinished task at the time of independence which was to carry forward the democratic revolution by instituting land reforms; the Communists alone could accomplish this. Lenin had theorised about such a conjuncture and the Communists were clear about this task.

This clarity of vision and their organisational strength gave the Communists in West Bengal an amazing appeal that drew Buddha and numerous young persons of his generation to Communism. In fact, starting from the fifties the Communists appeared to be an irresistible force in West Bengal which could be kept away from power only through ruthless repression. Not surprisingly, a lull in repression after the Emergency allowed the Left Front to come to power in the state in 1977; and Buddha who had been a prominent student and youth leader and State Secretary of the Democratic Youth Federation of India was inducted at the age of 33 into Jyoti Basu's cabinet, one of five young men that Pramode Dasgupta the State secretary of the CPI(M) had been preparing to take over responsibilities from the older generation.

Buddha spent more than half of his adult life, of sixty-two years, as a minister in the Left front government, first as Minister of Culture, then as Home Minister and finally as Chief Minister. There were just two breaks in his ministerial tenure, but both were extremely brief, which prevented him from indulging his taste for creative writing; he did write a play during one of these interludes which was also staged in Kolkata, but his ministerial responsibilities were to prevent him from writing more. This however also means that his life, its highs and lows, became inseparable from the history of Left Front rule.

The Left Front government of which Buddha was an important part played a stellar role in carrying out the unfinished task of West Bengal's democratic revolution. Operation Barga, under which sharecroppers, till then legally unrecognised, got registered and hence could claim credit from banks for carrying out cultivation; the insistence that whoever sowed the crop could alone reap the harvest; the distribution of ceiling-surplus land to the landless; and the resurrection of the panchayat system that produced a vivacious grassroots politics, were some of the achievements of Left Front rule which not only reduced the power of the *jotedars* and reinvigorated participatory democracy, but also contributed greatly to West Bengal's economic growth. Indeed, for the decade of the nineties West Bengal became the top-ranking state in terms of agricultural growth in India.

Once this phase was over, the Left Front government was less clear about what it should do next. The need for industrialisation was obvious, but how should industrialisation be accomplished? Should West Bengal follow the conventional route of enticing capitalists to set up units in the state? Or should it form cooperatives in agriculture both to maintain the tempo of agricultural growth and also to start a range of industries that would be owned by the peasants at large? Or should it set up industrial units in the public sector? While the last of these was ruled out because of fiscal constraints, Buddha as Chief Minister opted for the first. His decision may have been prompted by a sense of pragmatism; it may have been influenced by China's remarkable success while following this conventional route; and it may have been clinched by the interest s-





-hown by the Tatas in establishing a small-car manufacturing plant in West Bengal. But whatever the reason, the Left Front government's attempt to acquire land from peasants for this project started a process of alienation of the peasantry from it that eventually led to its defeat, and to Buddha's withdrawal from active politics. Meanwhile, of course, the party had grown too flabby during the long years of Left Front rule; it was no longer the party for which Harry Pollitt would have given his right hand.

This is not to say that after the initial years the Left Front's contributions were insignificant. It did pioneer the idea of autonomous councils within the state as a counter to statehood demands, just as the Left had pioneered the idea of states being formed on linguistic lines. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, in whose formation Buddha as Home Minister had a direct role, was a product of this idea. Many states in India at present, including West Bengal, are again facing statehood demands from various internal resident groups. The framework of the Council provides scope for adjusting the devolution of resources and powers in a manner that can obviate the need for any separate state; exploring this would be a testimony to Buddha's legacy.

Buddha's life had been one of exemplary simplicity and austerity. Totally free of airs, he lived, in a manner resembling one's image of a Communist, in a two-roomed apartment that needed urgent repairs. He had been ailing for quite some time, because of which he had asked to be relieved from membership of the Politburo of the CPI(M). One may agree or disagree with Buddha but one cannot quarrel with the fact that he was a truly noble and outstanding figure in the political landscape of West Bengal. ■



## Reverse Corporate Policies, Protect Livelihood of Working People: Gear up for Joint Struggle on 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 2024

P KRISHNAPRASAD  
*(Finance Secretary, AIKS)*



**T**he working people are facing mounting distress under neo-liberal regimes. The peasantry is denied remunerative prices for crops against rising costs of production, workers get far below minimum wage against drudgery and people are neck-deep in indebtedness, unemployment, distress migration and price rise.

In contrast, the corporate forces—that own and control the means of production- have been amassing enormous profits by exploiting working people. They make unbridled primitive accumulation of capital through fervently appropriating natural resources, including land, water, forest and minerals, with the explicit support from the main ruling class party—the BJP.

The ruling class parties—both in power and in opposition—are under the grip of the mighty International Finance Capital-Monopoly Capital (IFC-MC) combine. They are also under pressure due to the growing struggles and mass movements by farmers, workers and other social sections, hence those especially in opposition—to some extent, are compelled to support the cause of the working people.

The anger of the working people, manifested during the 18th Lok Sabha election as a decisive setback to BJP, losing its single-party majority, which it enjoyed during the two previous elections. BJP is forced to depend on allies to remain in power. In Haryana, despite winning, vote share of the NDA declined from 46.3% to 39.9% between the Lok Sabha and Assembly election.

However, the NDA-3 Government is steadfast in pushing pro-corporate policies. The Union Budget 2024-25

introduced Digital Agriculture Mission (DAM), aiming to corporatise Indian agriculture, digitalise farmland and crops to facilitate contract farming and altering the cropping pattern to suit the corporate market requirements. DAM will further enable corporate domination on agro-processing, value addition, trade, procurement and food market. It will jeopardise India's food security. The Union Budget trespasses on State list of subjects including agriculture, land, cooperation and industry.

BJP—the main ruling class party—is taking recourse to such extreme neo-liberal reforms in the context of the deepening systemic crisis of world capitalism. The severe crisis and lingering decline in the rate of profit force the corporate houses to intensify assaults on working people. Farmers are denied remunerative prices for their crops and workers, their minimum wage not only in India but across the world.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) dictates the Government of India not to enact MSP law to ensure income @ C2+50% with guaranteed procurement for all crops and strengthening the Public Distribution System. The corporate logic is MSP and PDS distort the market. They want to impose the neo-liberal reforms on farmers, workers and the entire working people including petty traders and non-monopoly capitalist producers.

Imperialism also forcefully drags the working people into destructive wars as we witness in Palestine, Lebanon and other hundreds of conflict spots. Identity politics is being used to divide the working people along race, caste, regional and religious lines.

IFC-MC alliance with alacrity dominates on India's economy, especially agriculture and labour. The policy of large-scale privatisation of the public sector and the contractualisation of labour epitomise this growing assault on the people. The workers and trade unions are forced to resist such policies and intensify struggles. This reveals the intensifying contradiction between the Imperialism and the working people in India.

Another important area of growing contradiction is the series of attacks on the federal rights and powers of the State Governments. The implementation of Goods and Services Taxes (GST) in 2017 had denied taxation rights of the state governments, centralising financial and administrative power into the hands of the Union Government to serve the corporate interests. This has left state governments

severely resource-starved, forcing them to rely on external loans even for basic obligations like paying salaries and pensions. The formation of the Union Cooperative Ministry in 2019 and now the declaration of the National Cooperation Policy were similar steps.

The decision to impose 'One Nation One Election' policy explicitly challenges the federal principles, undermining the autonomy of States to elect their government independent of the election to form the Union Government. The Kerala State Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution against this policy.

These repeated assaults on federal rights have the potential to dangerously weaken the integrity of the Indian Union, historically unified through the great struggle for independence against British colonialism and founded on the principles of federalism, democracy, secularism and economic autonomy of various nationalities.

The phenomenon of distress migration due to agrarian crisis—peasants and rural workers forced to join the mushrooming reserve army of migrant workers—severely impacts the livelihoods and rights of the workers in the manufacturing and service sectors. The four Labour Codes intend to impose eternal slavery on workers who have been denied minimum wage and social security, including pensions, stripping them of a life with dignity.

Workers cannot protect their livelihood either in agriculture or in sectors of manufacturing and services until and unless a strong and widespread worker-peasant unity is built across the country, forging a larger people's unity in the anti-corporate struggle.

The task ahead is to strengthen issue-based unity into formidable worker-peasant unity and then expand it as a larger people's unity by rallying all other social sections also against the corporate loot and communal threats. This is the lesson from the history of struggles including the historic farmers' struggle at Delhi borders.

Currently, the unity is limited to coordination among Kisan organisations and Trade Unions. Expanding it to the entire masses of the peasantry and the workers up to the villages and the workplaces is crucial. That only will enable us to gather strength to build worker-peasant unity against corporate exploitation.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTU) have jointly decided to work collectively in this direction. Identifying concrete policy demands to build massive struggles helped us to intensify the contradictions at the national level. Similarly, mass struggles on concrete local demands will help to deepen local contradictions. Workers and peasants are giving an ultimatum to the NDA-3 Government, either implement key demands—including MSP and Minimum Wage, within a reasonable period or face nationwide, indefinite mass struggles.

***SKM and CTU will jointly conduct massive worker-peasant protests in districts, on 26 November 2024 that marks the fourth anniversary of the historic farmers' march to Delhi and the All India General Strike of workers against 3 farm acts and 4 labour codes.*** Widespread campaigns including *Padayatra* and *cycle jatha* are being organised in villages. Call has been given to all social sections including students, youth, women, traders and petty producers to join this struggle.

A remarkable mass action on streets with the objective to create a conducive environment to advance the anti-corporate struggles to new heights is crucial to protect people of India as it seeks to build massive people's movement in quest of alternative policies to replace the Neo-liberal capitalism.

*The 12-point major demands:*

- ➡ MSP @ C2+50% with Legally Guaranteed Procurement for all Crops.
- ➡ Repeal 4 Labour Codes; No Contractualisation or outsourcing of labour in any form.
- ➡ Implement National Minimum Wage of Rs. 26,000/month and pension @ Rs. 10,000/month, and Social Security benefits for all workers including organised, unorganised, scheme workers and contract workers and agriculture sector.
- ➡ Comprehensive Loan Waiver for farmers and agricultural workers to end Indebtedness and suicides; ensure credit facilities for farmers and workers at low interest rates.

- ➡ No Privatisation of Public Sector Undertakings and Public Services including Defense, Railways, Health, Education and Electricity.  
Scrap National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP).  
No prepaid Smart Meters, free power for agricultural pumps, 300 unit of free electricity to domestic users and shops;
- ➡ No Digital Agriculture Mission (DAM), National Cooperation Policy and ICAR Agreements with MNCs that encroach on rights of State Governments and facilitate Corporatisation of Agriculture.
- ➡ End indiscriminate land acquisition, Implement LARR Act 2013 and FRA.
- ➡ Guaranteed employment and job security for all. 200 days of work and Rs. 600/day as wage in the MGNREGS. Expand it to urban areas. Immediately withdraw the exclusion of families from MNREGA. Pay pending wages.
- ➡ Comprehensive public sector insurance scheme for crops and cattle, ensure crop insurance and all the schemes' benefits to the tenant farmers.
- ➡ Arrest price rise. Strengthen PDS. Ensure quality public health care and education to all. Rs. 10,000/month pension at the age of 60 years for all. Tax the super-rich for the resources.
- ➡ Strict laws to stop Communal division in the society and ensure their effective implementation. Uphold secularism as envisaged in the constitution.
- ➡ End violence against women and children through gender empowerment and fast track judicial system, end violence, social oppression and caste-communal discrimination against all marginalised sections including Dalits, tribal people and minorities. ■

# If Rasputin is Sown, Only the Likes of Ranga & Billa will Flourish

BADAL SAROJ  
(Joint Secretary, AIKS)



In 1978, long before the Nirbhaya case, a crime in Delhi shook the entire nation—the brutal murder of two teenage siblings, Geeta and Sanjay Chopra, in one of the safest areas in the city by two criminals named Ranga and Billa. Before the murder, both also sexually assaulted Geeta whom they had abducted for ransom. The children were the offspring of a naval officer. After two years of legal proceedings, the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence for Ranga and Billa, deeming it a "rarest of the rare" case. Since then, Ranga and Billa have become synonymous with such heinous acts of violence.

Lately, the "Ranga-Billa" menace seems to be spreading like the invasive 'congress grass' that came with American wheat in the 1950s. Let us look at two recent cases.

In September 2024, Govind Nat, the principal of a government primary school in Tornai village of Singwad taluka in Dahod district of Gujarat, reportedly raped one of his students inside the school. As per reports, when she tried to shout for help, he strangled her to death. A class one student, the girl was only 6 years old. Trusting the principal, the child's family had sent their daughter with him.

Yet another incident of rape of two girls inside their school premises came to light in Badlapur of Thane district in Maharashtra around the same time. The accused was an employee of the school. The girls were only 4 and 5 years old.

A common factor in both the cases is the political affiliation and ideological inclination of the accused. The accused in the Dahod rape and murder case, despite being a government employee, is a worker and organizer of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and works for the BJP in elections. There are pictures of him attending RSS ideological camps and posing with BJP leader and former state minister Arjun Singh.

The owner of the school, who was accused under non-bailable sections of the POCSO Act for not reporting the incident immediately and trying to hide it in the heinous case of Badlapur incident, also belongs to the same clan. Tushar Apte, the trustee of the school, is the president of the BJP Jan Kalyan Samiti, Ambernath. His brother is the city vice-president of the BJP. The trust's president Uday Kotwal also has similar close relations with RSS and BJP. Another member of the trust, Nandkishore Patidar, is a nominated member of the Maharashtra Management Committee of the BJP.

After BJP amending its party constitution, it is no secret who typically gets nominated from the party and who makes these nominations. These affiliations are not just namesake—the speciality of this clan is that it maintains relationships, supports its own people till the end, even if it means setting aside all sense of decency and shame and stopping to the lowest levels.

In the case of Kathua's Asifa, who was held hostage in the sanctum sanctorum of a temple, gang-raped and murdered, the court had sentenced the alleged priest and some policemen along with others. In the processions that followed in support of the criminals even ministers participated and tricolour and saffron flags were on display. The release of the criminals in the Bilkis Bano case on Independence Day, honouring them with flower garlands, *tika* and *laddoos*, and other similar incidents in Jharkhand and Hathras are examples of how this group has been celebrating and honouring rapists.

In both Badlapur and Dahod cases, the same is expected to happen. In fact, it is happening already.

In Badlapur, the Maharashtra government is mobilizing resources to protect the school owners affiliated with the BJP. Despite being named as accused, the president and secretary of the trust were not arrested. Even after the Mumbai High Court took *suo motu* cognizance of this incident and reprimanded the authorities twice, only a few days ago were they finally arrested, that too after thousands of citizens sat in protest on the railway tracks for an entire day, halting train traffic. To contain the public anger and protect their own, the police killed the accused employee in an encounter. The Mumbai High Court raised questions about it. Still, the attempts to cover up the case have not ceased; The special public prosecutor appointed in this case is none other than Ujjwal Nikam, the BJP candidate who lost to the INDIA bloc candidate in the recent Lok Sabha elections from Mumbai Central. To contest the elections, Nikam had resigned from all 25 special public prosecutor positions, but after losing, he was reinstated in all cases and assigned the 26th case against the BJP-affiliated accused as a prosecutor from within the BJP itself. The poet Amir Kazalbash might never have imagined that his couplet "the same city, the same plaintiff, the same judge..." would come to life in this manner.

Prime Minister Modi who often speaks about saving daughters and empowering women has been tight-lipped about these crimes including the Dahod incident in Gujarat, his home state. The honourable President of India who was "horrified" by women's oppression, also has not uttered a single word about these incidents. BJP MP Kangana Ranaut, who often laments the tarnishing of her womanhood, lives only a short distance from Badlapur, yet the cries of those girls have not reached her. Not a single spokesperson from the BJP or the RSS has spoken out against these heinous crimes committed by their own. This is not coincidence—it reflects the ethos and ideology of the group currently in power in India.



**Beti Bachao,  
Beti Padhao**

This is a period in Indian politics and society where figures akin to Rasputin are placed at the top, glorified, and their misdeeds portrayed as virtuous. Rasputin was the so-called holy man who, just before the revolution in 1915 in Russia, advised Tsar Nicholas II on spiritual matters and, due to his alleged closeness to the royal family, emerged as an unconstitutional power that influenced political decisions. His actions made him synonymous with power, debauchery, and lust in the lexicon of global politics. In India today, a similar wave of Rasputins has emerged, operating from top to bottom and across various sectors. The relationship between those in power and these Rasputins is one of mutual complementarity, a cooperative alliance of sorts.

In the BJP and RSS, which boast a full-fledged army of self-proclaimed saints, Gurmeet Ram Rahim is a favourite and an effective vote-winner for the party, especially in the context of the Haryana elections. The BJP considers this self-styled godman more useful for gathering votes than Modi himself, offering him unimaginable privileges under Indian law and openly displaying their affiliation without any pretence of distance.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim is neither spiritual nor religious. He was sentenced to 20 years of double imprisonment for the rape of two women from his ashram. Additionally, he received a life sentence for the murder of the brave journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati, who exposed his crimes. The practical implication of these sentences is that a convict should remain behind bars until their last breath. However, the BJP government considers him a star campaigner and brings him out of jail before every election. Over the past four years, this criminal has been released from jail 11 times on parole or furlough, nine of which were during election period. In February 2022, during the Punjab Assembly elections, he was released for 21 days; in June, for 30 days during the Haryana local body elections; and in October, for 40 days during the Adampur by-election. In 2023, he was granted furlough twice for the Haryana elections—40 days in January and 30 days in July—and again for 21 days in November for the Rajasthan Assembly elections. So far in 2024, he has already taken furlough three times: 50 days in January for the Lok Sabha elections, 21 days in August for the Haryana Assembly elections, and 20 days in September-October. In all these instances, he accomplished the tasks for

which he was released.

Ministers, legislators, MPs, and even chief ministers and central ministers seek his blessings, posing for photographs at his court and displaying images of themselves bowing at his feet next to hoardings of Lord Ram in their respective constituencies. Over the past two years, this individual has spent nine months and 12 days outside jail on the pretext of parole or furlough, with three months still remaining in the year.

Reports suggest that this Baba who runs a *dera* (sect) is highly influential in the districts of Sirsa, Fatehabad, Ambala, Kurukshetra, Panchkula and Hisar in Haryana. His clout also spreads over nearly half of the seats in Punjab. His power to convert blind faith into votes is such that, despite being convicted for the crimes of raping his own followers and murdering a journalist, the BJP has no shame in making him the flag-bearer of their election campaign. Legal challenges regarding these frequent political paroles have reached both the High Court and the Supreme Court. This time, under the court's directives, he was prohibited from staying outside Haryana and from making any political appeals by any means. Nevertheless, from Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh, he issued directives for voting for the BJP and exhorted each of his followers to bring at least five more voters to the polling station.

The jailer of the Sunaria jail, where he was imprisoned, was also given a BJP ticket. The camaraderie with Gurmeet Ram Rahim and the initiation received from him are part of a deal. His *dera*, *Dera Sacha Sauda*, used to be a sect that spoke of religious harmony; the three parts of its name symbolized that. After transforming the "*Sacha Sauda*" into a power deal with the BJP, the wave of paroles began; Prior to 2020, he received only a one-day parole to meet his hospitalized mother, and in 2021, just a 12-hour parole for the same reason.

Asaram, serving a sentence for similar crimes, is also currently out on parole, but his ability to sway votes is quite weak, so he does not enjoy the same privileges as Gurmeet. Otherwise, it is a habit of the BJP to shower paroles on the rapists and murderers from their own ranks. In the Bilkis Bano case, ten of the eleven convicted for the gang rape and murder of seven individuals, including a few months old infant, have been out on parole or temporary bail for over a thousand days. The elev-

-enth convict was out for 998 days. Among them, one accused, Ramesh Chandna, spent 1,576 days—essentially four years—out on parole and leave. Raju Bhai Soni was on leave for 1,348 days, while the criminal Jaswant was out for 1,169 days. After women leaders like Subhashini Ali from the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) knocked on the doors of the Supreme Court against their release, they were sent back to jail—but the paroles have resumed.

When such Rasputins are planted and nurtured, they will sprout poisonous weeds from Dahod to Hathras to Badlapur. These weeds can devour consciousness and sensitivity of the larger public, holding the cunning potential to create a society where atrocity could be equated with valour. It cannot be removed merely by cursing; it can only be eradicated by fighting it like a farmer. ■





# Withdraw National Tiger Conservation Commission Order

P SHANMUGHAM  
(Vice President, AIKS)



**O** rder of National Tiger Conservation Commission:  
In the name of protecting the environment and wildlife, the rulers are issuing various orders against the tribals, forest dwellers and farmers living in forests.

Recently, letters dated 27.5.2024 and 19.6.2024 from the National Tiger Conservation Commission (NTCC), which is functioning under the purview of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, have created shocking and terrible vibrations among the peasants depending on hills & forests. Through the district collectors, the first letter asked the State Government to formulate a sketch for the eviction and resettlement of the "Occupiers" in the Tiger Sanctuaries. The second letter emphasises the time-bound completion of the resettlement work.

## *AFFECTED FAMILIES*

89,808 families belonging to Adivasi and agrarian communities have been identified in the survey driven by state authorities to evict from 848 villages living in the interior of the tiger reserves across the country. As per the above survey, 5 lakh people are under threat of eviction by forest officials. So far, 25,007 families out of 89808 have been evicted and resettled into 257 villages successfully due to the relentless threats by the government machinery.

After completing the first phase of eviction, the National Tiger Conservation Commission is insisting on the state government for immediate evacuation of 64,801 families from the remaining 591 villages. In the case of Manjolai Estate in Thirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu, the farming community has lived there since 1925. After tampering with the revenue documents for their administrative convenience, the forest department suddenly informed that the estate falls with Kalakkadu-Mundathurai Tiger Reserve. The eviction of people living there for nearly 100 years is against the Forest Rights Act 2006. All the rights provided in the Act should be guaranteed to those living in the forests and hills. The Act clearly says, "If wildlife and humans cannot live together, the government should not arbitrarily evict them without their consent. Similarly, section 38/B of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 also states that eviction can only be done with the people's consent. Therefore, the action of the Modi government is not only against the people but also against the law.

## *SANCTUARIES IN INDIA*

There are 55 sanctuaries across India. Tamil Nadu has five sanctuaries:

Mudumalai Tiger Sanctuary, Anamalai Tiger Reserve, Meghamalai Tiger Sanctuary and Sathyamangalam Tiger Sanctuary. The National Tiger Conservation Committee has identified 306 tigers in these sanctuaries. There are just seven tigers in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve.

## *JUDICIAL ORDER*

The Madurai Branch of Madras High Court—TN, on 29.10.2028, ordered the eviction of around 4,580 families from 81 villages, including tenured landholders in Meghamalai of Theni district in Tamil Nadu. It is an attitude of anarchy to evict farmers and tribals who have been living for many decades. The Tamil Nadu state government has put a hold on the implementation of the court order as the farming community has raised their voice against it under the banner of AIKS led by its leaders P Shanmugham (National Vice President) and T Kannan (State Vice President). In this regard, the TN Chapter of the AIKS delegation led by its national vice president, P Shanmugham, met the TN chief minister on 17.6.2022 and urged that the government file an appeal against the Madurai High Court order in the Supreme Court. However, it should be noted with concern that the Tamil Nadu Government has not appealed so far.

## *NEGLIGENCE OF RULERS*

Despite many provisions in the 2006 Act to issue ownership documents by giving *pattas*, the revenue authorities made a delay by negligence. So, the petitions provided by the beneficiaries demanding the *pattas* are piled up like a mountain in the revenue offices. The negligence in processing petitions for land *pattas* exacerbates the problem. Turtle speed response from ruling classes has contributed to the crisis, where people have lost their livelihood and have to leave their land.

## *ARE FORESTS FOR CORPORATES?*

Forest Rights Act 2006 clearly says that forests are owned by its own people. Unfortunately, however, Tiger and Elephant Conservationists argue that forests belong to wildlife. Shockingly, the traditional inhabitants of the forest will be evicted and handed over to corporate houses in the future.

A programme has been formulated and implemented in the name of Eco-Tourism. "Adivasis, get out! Corporates get in" has become the slogan of the rulers!

It is nothing but a conspiracy of the Modi government to pave the way for vast exploitation by corporate forest companies. In this context, during the previous regimes of Modi, the amendments to the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 were proposed in parliament on March 29 2023. After the law was passed, the "Forest Protection Amendment Act 2023" was published in the Union government gazette on August 4. In this Amendment Act, private companies have been given a green signal to exploit the forests' resources. 2023 amendments leave ample room for the government to allow corporates to enter India's forest lands with the extant 79.12 million hectares. They can easily be converted into private centres rather than biodiversity zones.

It is obvious that the rulers have no compassion for animals but to generate the income for corporate houses from forests. Instead of saying it directly, they pretend it is for tiger reserves. Governments must realise that the conservation of forest resources can only be achieved through people's participation and their survival in their traditional soil and not through the exclusion of the inhabitants.

## *WHO DESTROYS FORESTS?*

Urbanised civilization and industrialisation, in general, are actively initiating the destruction of the forests. Karl Marx quoted that the "measures taken to protect the forests and to produce them are comparatively very, very few". Almost 160 years later, the ruling class is still working on the same approach to nature/the union, and state governments are not making any efforts to implement the Forest Rights Act 2006, for which the people have been struggling and advocating for a long time.

On the contrary, several adverse initiatives were made, and orders were issued to paralyse this Act. Evicting people who depend on the forests is like throwing fish on the shore. Due to loss of livelihood and environmental change, people will be pushed towards their extinction.

## *EXPULSION IS NOT THE SOLUTION*

It is a fact that wildlife-human conflict causes many fatal casualties. On July 25 2024, the Minister of St-

-ate for Environment and Forests tabled some details in the parliament on human casualties due to wildlife attacks. In the year 2019-20, 49 people were killed; in 2020-21 (59), 2021-22 (110), and in the year 2022-23, 82 people were killed, and 628 tigers died during the same period. Wildlife animal-human conflict must be treated as an accident, for which total eviction is unacceptable. Road accidents kill many times more than this every year. So, can we say “No” to vehicular traffic? Or can it be ordered that no human being should walk on the roads? Survival is important; when casualties occur beyond that, the alternative and remedy is to provide adequate compensation and ensure security arrangements, not eviction.

### *WITHDRAW THE DISASTROUS ORDER*

Therefore, the National Tiger Conservation Commission must withdraw its order immediately. The state governments should establish a permanent solution by giving them *pattas* to protect their citizenship and livelihood without bowing to the compulsions of the Modi Raj. There can be no difference of opinion that wildlife should be protected; at the same time, evicting the people living in the forests is unacceptable.

In this context, a mass demonstration was held in Delhi on September 25 2024, on behalf of AIKS, with the participation of hundreds of peasants from all corners of India.

There is no history of growth of forests without Adivasis and forest dwellers.

Protection of biodiversity is not possible with the absence of forest dwellers.

We will protect the forests with the presence of its traditional people. ■



## SKM Convention of South Indian States Calls for Intensifying Struggles

TEEGALA SAGAR  
(Joint Secretary, AIKS)



**T**he Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) Convention of South Indian States was held in Gandhi Bhavan in Bangalore, Karnataka on 7th-8th October, 2024 in an enthusiastic atmosphere. More than 300 delegates from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu attended the meeting. The two-day meeting discussed the current political situation, the agricultural policies being undertaken by the Central Government, its impact on the farmers and formulated future plan of action. The steps to be undertaken to organise the SKM in various states were discussed in detail. The first session was welcomed by the Karnataka State Convenor of the Samyukta Horata Karnataka GC Bayya Reddy. In the first session, the members of the SKM National Secretariat, Darshan Pal and Sunilam placed the National perspective.

In the second session, the National General Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Vijoo Krishnan pointed out that the historic victory achieved under the leadership of SKM has inspired

all sections of the working people not just in India but also globally. The different protests by farmers in Europe and other parts also were inspired by the struggle of the working people in India. The Narendra Modi-led BJP Government's claim that the farmers' movement was limited to Punjab and Haryana was disproved by the pan-Indian spread of the movement, which reflected at the Convention also. The SKM-JPCTU call for the defeat of the anti-farmer, anti-worker BJP in different assembly elections as well as the parliamentary elections, ensured that the farmers voted against the BJP in rural areas. The reduced margin of the BJP in Parliament is a result of the defeat in over 159 predominantly rural seats he emphasised. He however, pointed out that the BJP led Union Government has not changed its stance despite the rebuff from the farmers noting that that Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and responsible for the death of 6 farmers in Mandsaur firing has been made the Agriculture Minister.



He called for building a strong movement in the Southern States, including workers and agricultural labour unions and for united struggles on National issues as well as the problems faced by the farmers in their respective States. He called upon the farmers in Southern States to play a key role in the nationwide agitation on 26<sup>th</sup> November. T Sagar from Telangana State, Omallur Sankaran from Kerala, K Balakrishnan from Tamil Nadu, Badagalapura Nagendra from Karnataka and Kesava Rao from Andhra Pradesh informed the meeting about the situation of the movements in their respective States.

One member from each of the organisations from the States expressed their views. About 68 suggestions were received from various organisations on this occasion for the consideration of the National Coordination Committee. In the concluding session, P Krishnaprasad, member of the National Secretariat of the SKM, called upon all to join hands with small and big organisations without any distinction to build a united movement across the country. He informed that if united movements are built, success will be achieved. EP Jayarajan, Valsan Panoli, T Yashwantha, Noor Sridhar, Perumal, Suryanarayana, Vadde Shobhanadeswara Rao, Vemulapalli Venkatramaiah, Pashya Padma and others participated in the Convention.

#### *FUTURE ACTIVITIES*

- ➔ SKM State Conventions should be held at the earliest.
- ➔ SKM constituents should coordinate with agricultural labour unions and involve them by raising their main demands.
- ➔ Along with the main demand of Minimum Support Price @ C2+50% and guaranteed procurement of crops at MSP, loan waiver for all eligible farmers, withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill, crop insurance through public sector companies, pension for farmers, comprehensive implementation of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, joint movement should be launched by combining the demands with the demands of the respective States.
- ➔ Large mobilisation of farmers and other sections in the protests on 26th November, 2024 at District Centres.

#### *RESOLUTIONS*

Forced land acquisition in violation of the Land Acquisition and Resettlement Act, 2013 in various States should be stopped. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 should be strictly implemented. State Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices by involving farmers' representatives should be set up so that MSP @ C2+50% is implemented as per the recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee.

The procurement of grain related to PDS, ICDS and other government schemes should be made directly from the farmers. The changes in Land Reform Acts and dilution of land ceiling in the States should be removed and the recommendations made to lease agricultural land to corporates should be withdrawn. Along with strengthening agricultural markets, the market tax and cess imposed by the States on farmers should be stopped. The exploitation of private moneylenders and microfinance institutions should be stopped. Interest-free loans should be provided to poor farmers, landless tenant farmers and agricultural workers.

#### *SPECIAL RESOLUTION ON PALESTINE*

The meeting strongly condemned the inhuman attacks being carried out by the Israeli government on Palestine. The Zionist Israeli government is responsible for the deaths of thousands of people including women and children. They have also bombarded schools and hospitals and not even allowed humanitarian assistance, food and medicines. The Convention demanded an immediate end to the war and a permanent ceasefire. It demanded that the Indian government suspend all arms supplies and trade agreements with Israel. The Convention also opposed the sending of thousands of Indian workers to Israel. It called for a boycott of all Israeli products and for a nationwide campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian people. ■

# Punjab State Agriculture Policy Draft 2024: Disastrous Corporate Role Ignored, Lack of Planned & Time-bound Solutions

Dr BALWINDER SINGH TIWANA

*(Former Head & Professor, Department of Economics, Punjabi University, Patiala)*



The draft of the Punjab State Agriculture Policy 2023/2024 is out. The urgency in bringing it out can be seen as a result of the great farmers' protest. This is the third draft in a row. The first was out in 2013 and the second in 2018. Many things are common in the three drafts, but in this new draft some recommendations and suggestions are different. We will discuss only the main points.

There is a recommendation for establishing 13 new Centres of Excellence regarding crops, livestock, machinery etc. The budget estimate for each Centre is suggested as Rs 12 crore, but there is no inclusion of this in the budget. There is also no evaluation of the already working centres. All research activities and administrative works are centered around Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, and Guru Angand Dev University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (GADVASU), Ludhiana. A governing body of 20 members is suggested with the Vice Chancellor of PAU as its chairman, who is mostly a political appointee in present times. In this governing body no place is given to representatives of farmers' and agricultural workers' unions. The structure of this body is of a highly bureaucratic type.

A suggestion has been made to provide legal guarantee of MSP (C2+50%). And the policy also suggests establishing 'State Agriculture Costs and Prices Commission'. Rather the suggestion is to discuss the issue of legal guarantee of MSP with the Central Government. So, there is no clarity about the ways and means to provide MSP. Another suggestion is to establish 'Price Stabilisation Fund' of Rs 1000 crore with 50% contribution by the State Government and 50% contribution by the Central Government. But till the Central Government agrees, which is most unlikely, nothing will happen about this suggestion.

Another recommendation is related to reforms in Tenancy Laws. The issue of verbal agreements for leased-in land is raised. So, the only concern for reforms is the registration of tenants. But in the study of suicides by farmers and agricultural workers by the Punjabi University, Patiala from 2000 to 2010 (in which this writer was also one of the members) it is found that one of the main causes of debt and suicides by farmers is leased-in land. When there is crop failure/loss of crop, all the burden is borne by the cultivator who is cultivating leased-in land, not by the owner of the land giving his/her land on lease. The owner takes all the rent from the cultivator. As the cultivation is very costly in the present circumstances, if all the burden must be borne by the cultivator (who is cultivating land on lease) when the crop has failed, then certainly he/she will be in distress/debt trap. We have to examine the changes in relations of production from share cropping (*bataae*). If the crop has failed/damaged then the cost or loss must be shared by both the owner and the cultivator.

Hence, there should be a law according to which if crop failure/damage occurs, then both the owner of the land and the cultivator who is cultivating the land on lease should jointly bear the loss. Secondly, the maximum rate of rent of leased-in land is presently varying between 60 to 70 per cent of gross produce. You can imagine what is left with the cultivator. It is naked exploitation. Further, MSP is also not solving this problem because if there is an increase in MSP, immediately there is an increase in rent almost equal to the monetary increase through MSP.

This draft is silent on Land Reforms and the attack of the corporate sector on farmers to grab their land through changes in the land ownership and acquisition laws. Global finance capital is continuously pressurising the Indian government, and the Indian government is pressurising the State governments to bring changes in the land ownership laws in favour of corporates. This is an important issue regarding farmers and agriculture in the present as well as coming days. This agriculture policy draft is totally mum on the dangers of this type of government policies.

In the light of the water crisis in Punjab, this draft is giving some suggestions about crop diversification so that area under paddy cultivation can be reduced. This type of suggestions has been given by various experts since the 1990s but nothing has happened. The draft contains no recommendation on how to compensate farmers for the loss of income due to this crop diversification. In the 2002 Johl report, it was suggested that Rs 12,500 per hectare (Rs 5,000 per acre in the year 2002) should be given to those farmers who agree not to plant rice and wheat (We do not agree with many suggestions and views given in the Johl report). There are many factors due to which income of farmers will reduce with crop diversification and there may be many problems even in the case of organic farming. There should be concrete recommendations for compensating this income loss and to tackle the problems.

The report highlights the issues relating to water and suggests various ways to tackle this problem, like adopting new techniques and saving water. Such issues had been already put in the public domain through various reports and publications. But no practical and viable solution has been found till date. This draft fixes the idealist target of saving 4 billion cubic meters of water per year, which seems at the very outset not practicable. There is no suggestion for big man-made lakes, like the experience of many countries.

In this draft the issue of power/electricity is raised but the draft puts all the farmers in a single basket. There is no critical evaluation of this policy or the policy of free 330 units. There is no category wise analysis showing agricultural electricity connections with small and marginal farmers and with big farmers. Data are available with PSPCL but these are ignored. Data can show how much subsidy small and marginal farmers are getting vis-a-vis big farmers. This policy draft also talks about quality of water which is a good thing but does not explain the reasons of water pollution particularly of rivers. The role of industries which are polluting river water is ignored and many times this issue is raised by people through protests. Absence of sewage treatment plants due to which this water is being polluted is fully ignored as the government is responsible for this. This report has also not mentioned about the excessive water consuming industries like cold drinks and beverages. The main culprit in the environmental crisis is the corporate lust of profits and wealth, which is insatiable.

This draft highlights the issue of agricultural research and education along with the high fees charged from students. And for this purpose, it is mentioned that the budget allocation for agriculture should be increased by the Central and State governments. But the suggestion is only for agriculture education, whereas the issue is very serious when we see the condition of all the public higher education institutions. Sixty six percent of the students of Punjab are studying in private institutions and the students and teachers are being exploited. More than 50 per cent posts are vacant in many public universities and government colleges. Only 0.59 per cent of the State budget is allocated for higher education in the year 2024-25. To fill the vacancies and for some infrastructure, only the issue of PAU and GADVASU has been raised, ignoring the other higher education institutions. The financial, academic and administrative conditions of higher education and health institutions have become very bad due to the New Economic Policies of 1991, but the draft does not criticise these policies.

The suicides by the farmers and agricultural workers of Punjab are mentioned, which is a serious concern. But the studies by Punjabi University, Patiala and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar are ignored deliberately. It is a positive recommendation for farmers and farm workers that in case of suicide by a farmer or farm worker due to debt Rs 10 lakh should be given as compensation, government job to the next kin of the victim, waiver of all institutional debt on family, and free education for the children of the family. But there is no mention of budget estimates and time-bound implementation of this scheme. It is also a good suggestion that Rs 5 lakh should be given to the farmer and farm worker in case of death in an accident that happens during agricultural activities, and if there is disability due to this type of accident then the appropriate compensation should be given on the basis of disability.

The suggestion regarding farm workers (word farm workers is used in this draft, not agricultural workers), is that the working days under MNREGA should be increased from 100 days to 200 days, but presently on an average only 38 days of work is being provided. There is no suggestion to assure the 100 days of work. And there is no mention about non-payment of unemployment allowance under MNREGA. Furth-



-er, the performance of the State government in the implementation of MNREGA is not critically evaluated.

In case of farm workers, this policy draft suggests that 1/3 of Panchayati land should be given to farm workers for cultivation but it should be under the integrated farming system through cooperatives. This condition is imposed only on farm workers, and not on others who are cultivating Panchayati land. Further, it should be noted that there is already a law in force in Punjab under which 1/3 of Panchayati land should be given to agricultural workers, but it is not being implemented by adopting various methods. In many villages, the agricultural workers unions have taken up this issue through strong, and sometimes violent struggles.

Another recommendation has been made on the basis of submissions by the AIKS, AIAWU and others regarding the payment of pension to marginal and small farmers and farm workers when they cross 60 years of age. But this draft is silent on how much pension should be given, whereas the above organisations have demanded Rs 10,000 per month. There is no time frame given in this agriculture policy draft to implement this pension provision.

Regarding borrowing by farmers from moneylenders and *arthias*, this draft suggests only the registration of these loan providers and provision of passbooks. There are no recommendations regarding the maximum rate of interest they can charge. The case of the Kerala Debt Commission in this regard is not mentioned. It is recommended that the institutional loan of farmers cultivating up to 5 acres of land and of farm workers should be waived off, but there is no discussion on the success or failure of the earlier loan waiver by the Congress government during 2017-18. Why did that fail? No policy is suggested in this draft.

In case of crop failure/loss the suggestion is to start the State's own crop insurance policy and for this purpose 0.1% of the value of crop procured should be collected and double of this amount should be contributed by the State government. To start this scheme, help from the Central government is recommended. It is obvious what will be the result.

In the whole report, the role of panchayats has not been even mentioned, leave alone being emphas-

-ised. The total dependence to solve the agricultural problems/agrarian crisis is on cooperatives and progressive farmers societies. In Punjab cooperatives are defunct or not performing well due to government intervention and negligence.

At the end, it must be said that this draft ignores the impact of WTO and corporates on agriculture and the various serious challenges before farmers and farm workers. This draft does not raise the issue of unemployment and international migration from Punjab. There are no budget estimates for implementing different recommendations. The recommendation to tax the very rich for resource mobilisation is missing.

This draft does not suggest the immediate measures to provide relief to farmers and agricultural workers. There is no proposal for short- and long-term planning to implement the policy and for the steps to be taken on year-to-year basis. This policy, as it is or after amendments, will not be implemented by the State government without the pressure and struggle by the farmers and agricultural workers unions. Hence, despite all its shortcomings, to get even the few pro-farmer and pro-farm workers recommendations of this policy draft implemented, the farm unions must be prepared for another massive movement. ■



## **AIKS-AIAWU Hold Dharna at Parliament Stop Evictions in the Name of Elephant Corridors, Tiger Reserves! End Restrictions on Cattle Trade!**

AIKS PRESS RELEASE



**A** All India Kisan Sabha and All India Agricultural Workers' Union hold a dharna at Parliament Street, New Delhi on September 25, 2024 with the slogans of Protect Life and Livelihood from Wild Animal and Stray Cattle Menace, Stop Evictions in the Name of Elephant Corridors, Tiger Reserves & Wildlife Protection and End Restriction on Cattle Trade. Hundreds of farmers from Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Telangana UP, Delhi and other states participated in *dharna*.

AIKS General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan inaugurated the dharna and AIKS President Ashok Dhawale, AIAWU General Secretary B Venkat, AIAWU Joint Secretary and Rajya Sabha Member V Sivadasan, AIKS Tamil Nadu Vice-President and Member of Lok Sabha R Sachithanatham were the main speakers of dharna, AIKS Vice-President Hannan Mollah, AIKS Finance Secretary P Krishnaprasad, Kerala Karshaka Sangham Secretary and AIKS Joint Secretary Valsan Panoli and leaders from different states addressed the *dharna*.

The Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change agreed to meet a delegation in coming days.

## *LOSS OF LIVES, LIVESTOCK & CROPS DUE TO WILD ANIMAL MENACE*

Wild animals are increasingly becoming a menace that can be ignored by farmers only at their own peril. In addition to this the increasing number of evictions in the name of Tiger Reserves, Elephant Corridors, National Wild Life Sanctuaries etc., are also going on in total violation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA Act). According to an RTI reply by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate 462 people have died in Jharkhand in human-elephant conflicts in a span of five years since 2017 and 133 in the last fiscal alone; Odisha lost 499 people, Assam and West Bengal recorded 385 and 358 casualties respectively in the five-year period. There have been 486 human deaths in Kerala, 421 human deaths in Maharashtra mostly killed by tigers from 2019 to 2024 on account of human-wildlife conflicts. The numbers from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change show that 2,853 humans have been killed since 2019 in conflict with elephants alone. At least 628 were killed in the calendar year 2023 alone—accounting for almost two deaths per day. In addition to loss of human lives, loss of livestock and crops has led to thousands of crores worth of losses.

The role of the Union Governments and most State Governments in dealing with this menace is insufficient and at best involves giving meager compensation. The Wildlife Protection Act and other forest related legislations are heavily loaded against the States. The Indira Gandhi-led Congress regime had centralised conservation laws, giving it an authoritarian streak, which has only been exacerbated by the present Narendra Modi-led BJP regime. Pro-farmer State Governments like the LDF Government in Kerala is constrained by these laws from acting effectively in defence of agriculture and people.

More than 3 million people living in around 200 Panchayats of Kerala are continuously facing wild animal attacks. According to the records of the Forest Department, more than 39,000 farmers have suffered crop damage. Animals like elephants, tigers, wild boars, monkeys, mountain squirrels, deer and peacocks enter the farms throughout day and night and destroy everything cultivated like bananas, coconuts, arecanut, paddy, tuber crops like tapioca, vegetables etc. Compensation for crop damage is not commensurate with the damage.

In Himachal Pradesh there have been consistent efforts against wild animal menace by building broad unity in the name of Kheti Bachao Sangharsh Samiti. According to data from 2010-11 78,791 hectares—approximately 12.6% of the total cultivable land is left fallow. About 71% of the State's 3,243 Panchayats (2,301) are affected by wildlife incursions, impacting around 80% of farming families, which amounts to approximately 800,000 individuals. Conservative estimates suggest that crop losses range from ₹300 to ₹450 crores, with horticultural losses accounting for approximately ₹75 to ₹100 crores and agricultural losses nearing ₹300 crores. Additionally, the fallow land resulting from wildlife menace contributes a loss exceeding ₹500 crores. The costs associated with watch and ward efforts further contribute to the crisis, amounting to around ₹1,200 crores, as approximately 500,000 to 600,000 individuals are involved in these activities for 150 to 200 days each year. In total, the estimated annual loss reaches a staggering ₹2,200 crores.

## *ATTACK ON CATTLE ECONOMY, STRAY CATTLE MENACE & MOUNTING LOSSES*

The ascendancy of the Hindutva fascistic elements and BJP coming to power in 2014 was accompanied with the rise of cow vigilante groups and attacks on Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis in the name of "*gauraksha*". Hindi heartland became the epicentre of politics based on "holy cow". In the last 10 years, Hindutva vigilante groups have executed several attacks on cattle farmers, traders and transporters and used it for political polarisation with a special target to reap electoral dividends. Simultaneously, there have been efforts to enforce restrictions on cattle trade in many States. This has disrupted the traditional cattle economy causing much hardship to cattle farmers. With the vigilante violence, local cattle markets, cattle fairs, licensed slaughterhouses, selling cattle hide to leather industry and export options are eliminated. This dimension of the agrarian crisis is forcing people to abandon unproductive cattle. Farmers do not have any other option other than abandoning cattle.

As per the 20<sup>th</sup> Livestock Census, 2019, there are more than 5 million stray cattle in India. With the state sponsored violence increasing, there will be a manifold increase in the number. This is mainly concentrated in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand,

Jharkhand are also facing this problem. In the agrarian belts of Western UP, certain studies suggest that stray cattle cause more than 30% damage to the crop. In many instances, stray cattle are also physically attacking farmers. The huge economic costs incurred by distress-stricken farmers to feed unproductive cattle are also leading to further problems.

#### *ARBITRARY IMPOSITION OF ELEPHANT CORRIDORS, TIGER RESERVES & MASSIVE EVICTIONS*

According to the “Elephant Corridors of India, 2023”, a report published by the Union Government of India, there are 150 elephant corridors in India. When compared to the Gajah Report of 2010, 62 new corridors have come up. Erratic methodologies and unscientific estimates will lead to more instances of human-wildlife conflict. The Report literally classified landscapes and habitats as corridors, bringing huge trouble to the peasantry, especially marginal and poor peasantry. In several parts of the country, forest bureaucracy and foreign funded elite conservation NGOs are collaborating with other vested interests to evict peasantry including tribal peasantry from the lands they are cultivating. All reactionary forces opposed to Forest Rights Act are also joining together to pursue their class agenda by evicting traditional forest dwellers. According to a Report published more than two decades ago, crops and property worth millions of rupees are damaged by elephants. Agricultural crops are damaged in an area of more than 1 million hectares of agricultural crops every year. It further takes into account an average family holding of one or two hectares of land and indicates that Human-Elephant Conflict could affect at least 5 lakh families. Nearly twenty-five years later, the area affected and the families undoubtedly are humongous.

While peasantry in all affected areas is facing serious issues, peasantry in Gudalur and Pandalur Taluks of Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu is facing a do-or-die situation. Tamil Nadu State government appointed Elephant Corridor Committee identified 42 corridors while the Union government appointed committee had only identified 20 corridors. None of these panels had meaningful representation of peasantry and working people. It was filled with bureaucrats and elite conservation NGO personnel. According to the draft Report, the Gudalur region has three additional elephant corridors and if implemented can affect 37,856 households in 46 villages. This will also result in the stringent regulation of the road traffic. Major chunk of affected people are peasantry and workers including tribals.

In the name of the Tiger Reserves, the ruling class is engaged in an all-out war against Adivasis, other traditional forest dwellers, poor and marginal peasantry. The Union government controlled National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the apex body to implement “Project Tiger” has become “delirious with power”, a phrase used by the legendary Kisan leader AK Gopalan to characterise inhuman and insensitive forest policies. As a matter of fact, NTCA is notorious in manipulating and downplaying the facts about villages within Tiger Reserves. In spite of the historical Forests Rights Act (FRA)—an Act enacted to rectify “historical injustice”—NTCA is engaging in a “fortress” model of forest conservation. Influenced by the militarised approach to forest conservation, the fortress model believes in conservation by exclusion and displacement. About 89,808 families (about 5 lakh people), mostly Adivasis and from agrarian communities have been identified for eviction from 848 villages inside tiger reserves across the country. Already 25,007 families have been evicted. Apart from playing lip-service to the FRA, Narendra Modi-led BJP regime is creating a conducive atmosphere for the ossification of the dubious propaganda that “coexistence is impossible”. At the same time, monopoly corporations are given a free hand to loot our huge forest resources at throw away prices. It is not without reason that AKG would ask “But for whom is forest conservation for?”

The subtle narrative created by NTCA operations is that FRA is not applicable inside Tiger Reserves. All kinds of torture and harassment are deployed by forest bureaucracy to suppress people. Internationally it is documented that physical assaults, intimidation, cold blooded murders through fake encounters, foisting a plethora of fake cases, sexual torture of men, women and children are all used for the “fulfilment” of the Project Tiger. International conservation agencies like World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) play an important part in sabotaging FRA and installing the software for a fortress model of anti-people conservation regime. Both agencies—with zero accountability to the people—have ugly and disproportionate clout in shaping forest policies across the globe. With their inherent racism and disregard for the “historical injustice” met to the India’s forest dependent people, these imperial stooges are the agent provocateurs in the state violence against poorest of the poor Indians. Contemporary journalistic investigations have exposed how WWF was pushing for draconian methods like “sterilisation programs” and “shoot at sight” as tools for conservation in third world countries including Ind-

-ia. The WWF links with fascists like Franco in Spain to green-wash and bolster their international image as conservators are also documented.

True to the track record of their “fortress” conservation, on June 19 2024, NTCA shot a letter to all Tiger States asking to relocate 591 villages comprising of 64801 families that are residing in the areas notified as core areas of the Tiger reserves. By manipulating section 38 (V)(4)(i) of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) 1972, NTCA has justified the potential massive eviction of people. However, NTCA is cleverly hiding the fact that the 2006 amendments to WLPA recognised the importance of balancing tiger conservation with the livelihood needs of Adivasi and forest-dependent communities. By ensuring the well-being and the livelihood of the local people, the law acknowledges the intricate relationship between forests and their inhabitants. To be precise, the law of the land is clear in creating inclusive Tiger conservation plans that not only safeguard tigers but also prioritise the agricultural, livelihood and developmental interests of forest dwelling communities. The intention of the NTCA is to violate law with a criminal intention to displace people and corporatise forest management. NTCA is downplaying ample evidence that genuine implementation of the forest rights results in a healthy forest habitat. Large corporate interests are clearly taking precedence over the livelihoods of millions of poor farmers, Adivasis, traditional forest dwellers and workers.

The systematic conversion of forest lands into commercial plantation for timber and also promotion of alien species including invasive species while simultaneous reduction in fruit trees, bamboo and other varieties which act as food and fodder for wild animals have also acted as a factor for the raiding of nearby human habitats. The Forest Department and faulty afforestation measures have compounded the problem by promoting eucalyptus, acacia, teak, mahogany, pine, African tulip and such varieties. In addition to leading to depleting water tables, the existing water bodies are also not protected or replenished. The criminal negligence of the Forest department is responsible for animals venturing out of forests in search of food and water.

In the context of this situation AIKS and AIAWU demand that the Union Government implement the following demands on a war-footing:

- ➔ Amend The Indian Forest Act 1927, The Wildlife Protection Act 1972, The Forest Conservation Act 1980 to ensure protection of human life, property and livelihood from wild life attack as well as for the protection and preservation of wild life. Enact a separate Law to Protect Lives and Livelihoods.
- ➔ Ensure that rights of States to declare vermin, sterilisation and other measures for controlling menace of Wild Animals including scientific culling are guaranteed.
- ➔ Stop arbitrary Elephant Corridors, Tiger Reserves, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Forced Evictions.
- ➔ Ensure Forest Rights and Community Forest Rights; Stop Violation of FRA and PESA.
- ➔ Stop restrictions on cattle trade; Purchase unproductive cattle at market rates. Ensure strong deterrent action on Cow Vigilante groups.
- ➔ Compensation of Rs. 1 crore and Government job to families of people killed by wild animals and Rs. 50 lakh for people suffering grievous injuries.
- ➔ Proper assessment of crop losses by involving Panchayats and Gram Sabhas and adequate compensation.
- ➔ Clear artificial commercial timber trees and invasive species in a phased manner; promote fruit trees, bamboo in forest areas.
- ➔ Build trenches, wire-mesh, electric fencing, and early warning system in hot-beds.
- ➔ Community watch under MGNREGA from dusk to dawn at Rs.1,000/day. ■



Greater Noida (UP) Kisan Sabha sit-in outside DM office over issue of 10% plot being returned to farmers suffering land acquisition.



AIKS in North Andaman Island demanding allotment of land to landless farmers.



**Adieu, Comrade Buddhadeb**  
**(1944–2024)**



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