

PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

JULY-AUGUST 2023



AIKS Rally at Palghar, Maharashtra



AIKS Dharna at Greater Noida, Delhi NCR



Joint Assembly March of AIKS, GMP and AIAWU at Agartala, Tripura



SKM State Convention at Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh



Tamil Nadu Sugarcane Farmers Federation Protest at Madurai National Co-operative Sugar Mill

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Editorial

Today our country is going through an unprecedented communal-casteist polarisation, where hatred and violence are being incited by the RSS-BJP in power. Manipur, which has been burning for the last three months, is the worst victim of this politics. The heinous sexual violence against women there has stunned the country. The Supreme Court has deplored the “complete breakdown of law and order and the constitutional machinery” in Manipur. It is no accident that both the central and state governments are headed by the BJP.

Horrible stories of communal incidents are coming from different states. The most shocking is the example of Chetan Singh, a Railway Police Force constable who killed his senior and three other passengers in a train when it was near Palghar in Maharashtra. All three passengers were Muslims. A video showed that the man specifically mentioned that Muslims were being led by Pakistan, and if they wanted to live in India they should vote for Modi and Yogi. This deep hatred is a result of the poisonous brainwashing by the Sangh Parivar. Communal riots have been incited in Haryana. Creating a communal narrative on the Uniform Civil Code is also another diabolical move towards polarised divisive politics by the RSS-BJP, setting their agenda for the upcoming elections. The country is sitting on the time bomb of communalism.

The authoritarian Modi-led BJP government is curtailing the right of state governments and distorting the federal values of our Constitution. This can be seen glaringly in the case of Delhi where the BJP union government has brought an ordinance for undermining the authority of the state government on its bureaucracy. The last few months have witnessed growing concerns about media freedom and censorship in the country. Several instances of alleged media suppression have come to light, where critical voices were silenced or punished for expressing dissent. The government’s control over media narratives and its influence on editorial decisions raise questions about the state of press freedom in the country. The BJP is shamelessly using the ED, CBI, IT etc to threaten the opposition leaders and split their parties. The split in the Shiv Sena and in the NCP were both rooted in fear, corruption, and immorality.

However, the emerging unity of opposition parties against the Modi-led NDA regime in the name of I.N.D.I.A is a positive development and raises hopes of ending this anti-people, pro-corporate, anti-national government once and for all. But this must be accompanied by massive joint struggles on peoples’ issues like price rise, unemployment, and myriad issues of peasants and workers, youth and women, along with an intense political campaign against communalism. In this light, the first-ever national convention of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Central Trade Unions (CTUs) on 24 August 2023 in Delhi, and the struggle call that it is expected to give is a historic step in the direction of forging worker-peasant unity.

This issue of ‘Peasant Struggle’ has articles touching on some of these issues, and it also takes stock of the inspiring peasant struggles being unleashed by the AIKS across the country.

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SKM AND CTUs PLAN HISTORIC UNITED KISAN MAZDOOR MOVEMENT

- Hannan Mollah

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) led the longest and largest 380-day long Kisan Movement against the Modi-led BJP government's anti-farmer policies and achieved an unprecedented and historic victory. It forced the government to withdraw the three black farm laws. But the government failed to address the other demands of the struggle. The Ministry of Agriculture gave written assurances to consider other demands like MSP, Electricity Bill, false cases, assistance to martyrs' families, and justice for the Lakhimpuri Kheri killings. On the basis of these written assurances, the movement was suspended, not withdrawn. But the Modi government betrayed its written assurances. Hence the national meeting of the SKM decided to resume the movement.

SKM Gears up for Struggle

A large protest meeting was held at Jind to warn the government but the government decided not to respond. A massive SKM rally was then held at the Ramlila Maidan in Delhi in March 2023 and a memorandum was given to the Ministry of Agriculture with a warning that if the government continued its betrayal, farmers would go in for a bigger struggle. Letters were written to the President of India along with warning letters to Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs asking them to change their attitude towards farmers' issues. The

SKM decided to organise a struggle on the streets. The focus of the movement would be changed. Earlier, it was a Delhi centric gherao of the capital. But now the movement would be expanded to the whole of India, in each state. For that purpose it was decided to hold state-level conventions of the SKM. To guide the struggle in a better way, the SKM constituted its National Coordination Committee (NCC) with 35 members from all over the country, representing around five hundred of its constituents and a secretariat to streamline its day-to-day activities.

Accordingly, SKM state conventions have been held so far in Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. The time table has been set for the completion of these conventions by the end of August. Already the dates have been finalized for conventions in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tripura, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Odisha. The rest of the states would be decided soon. The main task of the convention is to elect a state-level coordination committee, finalise a state-level charter of demands, concretely plan out the SKM actions from August to November,



and plan state-level padayatras or jathas in September/October to propagate the charter of demands and explain to the farmers the anti-farmer policies of the Modi government at the centre and of various state governments, especially led by the BJP. The charter of demands would contain the central demands of the SKM and the burning demands of the concerned state.

After this intensive campaign, there may be national level Jathas to expose the Modi government's corporate communal fascistic character and all its conspiracies against the Constitution, democracy, secularism, and social justice, and also against dalits, tribals, women, minorities, and the poor. Its economic crimes to destroy public sector units, and to sell off the country to corporates like Adani and Ambani, would be exposed. The burning issues of price rise, unemployment, education, and health policies, would also be taken up. The BJP-RSS conspiracy to communalize the society and to divide and polarise it for their narrow electoral purposes would be fought. Public opinion against the Modi government's criminal activities and pro-corporate policies would be mobilised. The building of crony capitalism in the country, compromising our sovereignty through collaboration with imperialist powers undermining our independence, would also be exposed.

After an intense nationwide campaign, the SKM has decided to organise Mahapadavs from 26th to 28th November, mobilising thousands of peasants in massive 75-hour dharna-gherao protests in every state capital. This struggle would lead to a concerted anti-BJP atmosphere. The slogan would be "Modi Hatao, Bharat Bachao" and "Save Constitution, Save India".

Towards Worker-Peasant Unity

In the course of the Kisan struggle, a very positive development emerged which would further strengthen and democratise the movement - this was the emerging worker-peasant unity. The two main producing classes - peasants and workers - were facing savage attacks by the pro-corporate, anti-people government. Both the classes were fighting against those attacks independently, without joining hands. Sometimes, they extended formal support through press statements, and some solidarity activities were held. But we needed joint activities to defeat the enemy.

On the same day that the Kisan movement gave its clarion call for "Chalo Delhi", the working class also took forward its own struggle and declared an All India Strike on 26th November 2020. SKM was fighting against the three black farm laws; the Trade Unions were fighting against the four black labour codes. In the course of the struggle, the Central Trade Unions (CTUs) extended unconditional support to the SKM movement and its demands. Workers physically participated in all SKM calls for rallies, protests, Rasta Rokos and Bharat Bandhs. Thus, the struggle took on a wider shape in the whole country. Peasants also supported workers' struggles against the four labour codes, and against the sale of the country's PSUs. To give this joint struggle more cohesion, the CTUs invited SKM leaders to their national convention and the main leaders of the SKM extended support to their national convention at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

Then it was decided to hold joint meetings of SKM and CTUs for the first time in our history. The national leaders of farmers and workers started exchanging opinions to understand each other, extended support to

each other and decided to have some joint action programmes. Support and solidarity actions were then converted into joint calls for action. In the last joint meeting, it was decided to hold joint protests on 9th August 2023. “Corporate Hatao, Desh Bachao, Corporate Hatao, Khet Bachao” was the joint slogan which would be raised all over India on Quit India day. Workers and peasants would mobilise in their districts and blocks jointly.

Both class platforms then would mobilise workers and peasants on 15th August 2023, the culmination of the 75th year of Indian Independence. They would jointly explain what independence meant to the toiling masses, what were the valuable lessons of our freedom struggle, what we could achieve and what we could not. The betrayal of the freedom struggle by the RSS would be exposed, along with the fact of the BJP government destroying all the gains that we achieved through struggles. These joint activities would bring workers and peasants close to each other ideologically and politically. The CTUs also decided to join the 26-28th November state capitals gherao programme. It would now be a joint struggle programme of peasants and workers. All state leaders of SKM and CTUs would plan joint programmes in their respective areas.

Another historic decision was taken by SKM-CTUs to hold a joint worker-peasant national convention on 24th August 2023 at Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi. This would be a remarkable milestone in the struggle of workers and peasants in India after independence. Over five thousand workers, peasants, and agricultural workers delegates would participate in this historic joint convention. In the convention, the importance of worker-peasant unity would be explained.

A joint charter of demands would be formulated and a joint resolution on our united purpose and understanding of the situation in the country would be adopted. On the basis of that, a massive long term joint campaign would be conducted in the whole country to raise the political and ideological consciousness of the workers and peasants along with the need for their unity.

Another joint platform, Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA), in which the AIKS is a leading constituent, decided to build struggles against corporates capturing forest and tribal lands. We identified 85 such places in the country where in the name of mining and other projects, tribal lands are being captured. BAA decided to build a struggle for protecting “Jal, Jungle, Jameen” from such corporate loot which is being fully supported by the Modi government. The government passed amendments to the forest conservation act to facilitate snatching of forest land. BAA decided to oppose it. We will hold a national convention of tribal organisations to plan the struggle.

The coming days are very crucial as the Modi government will intensify its attack against the people, and will impose even more savage anti-farmer, anti-worker and anti-poor policies, to protect and advance its crony capitalists. The communal division would be used to divide and polarize people and weaken democratic unity, as seen in the terrible recent events in Manipur. AIKS has already taken up some independent programmes in the fight against all these attacks and has decided to build up strong independent and joint struggles all over the country. All our units at the state, district, tehsil/block, and village levels will mobilise in full strength to make all these programmes of struggle a great success. □

DIABOLIC AGENDA OF ‘DOUBLE-ENGINE’ BJP GOVERNMENT SOWS DISCORD, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION IN MANIPUR

- Dr. Vijoo Krishnan

The abject and criminal failure of the BJP led Union Government and the Manipur State Government in maintaining peace, law and order in Manipur has exposed the diabolic face of the BJP-RSS and their strategy of “divide and rule”. The State has been burning since May with clashes between the Kukis and the Meiteis. It took a shocking video of two Kuki women from Kangpokpi district being paraded naked and nation-wide protests for the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to break his silence on the Manipur situation. One of the women was gang-raped and the two women were subjected to sexual assault even as they were being paraded naked. More shock was to come when the BJP Chief Minister callously stated that there were hundreds of such incidents that occurred in the State.

The BJP-RSS is complicit in the entire sequence of developments in Manipur and culpable of creating an atmosphere of discord. Unofficial figures suggest that over 200 people have lost their lives in this conflict; and nearly a lakh people have been displaced and are forced to live as refugees in sub-human conditions in camps. Many have also fled to the neighbouring States and Myanmar to escape attacks and are

living in precarious conditions there. No concrete steps worth the name have been taken to establish peace and mitigate the sufferings of people. Rather, the ‘Double-Engine’ seems to have derailed, it has an indifferent, insensitive approach to the human tragedy that their politics of hate and active connivance has brought the State to.

It is said that emperor Nero fiddled when Rome burnt, but even his deeds will pale into insignificance in front of his present-day incarnation with an almost similar sounding name NaMo. Violence is going on unabated and steps by the two Governments have not yet helped in bringing about normalcy, reconciliation and harmony between communities. Ironically, while the BJP-RSS have been running a high-pitched campaign that Narendra Modi is working to bring peace between Russia and Ukraine, his Government has failed miserably to establish peace in Manipur and cannot escape blame for the civil



war kind of situation in the State.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah spent weeks in the election campaign in Karnataka and maintained a callous approach to the crisis. Amit Shah visited the State only after 26 days of violence, destruction and death. There are allegations that the BJP-led State Government is guilty of fomenting the conflict and the Sangh Parivar has a role in driving a wedge between communities. The support extended to private militia of the communally charged sections of the Meitei like the Arambai Tenggol has added fuel to the fire. The Meitei Leepun, an organization of Meiteis and its leader Pramot Singh who describes Manipur as “the last outpost of the purest form of *Sanatana Dharma of Hinduism*” are also seen by the Kukis as having patronage of the State BJP Government and the Sangh Parivar.

Although most reports suggest that the ethnic violence erupted as a result of the Kuki protests against the Manipur High Court order directing the State to consider the demand for inclusion of Meities in the Scheduled Tribe list within a month, the ground was prepared over time and differences simmering for long were used to polarize the State. The Hills and the Tribes had predominantly voted for the BJP in the last elections and many promises were made to them.

However, the Chief Minister started the infamous ‘Bulldozer Raj’ on the pretext of removing illegal encroachments in forest areas in the Hills. Sixteen houses were demolished in K.Songjang Village and such drives were planned in different parts of Churachandpur, without any consultation, alternative rehabilitation and resettlement policy. Those who protested against the move peacefully were also equated with the terrorists. The

Chief Minister over the last few years made repeated attempts to label Kukis as “Outsiders”, “Illegal immigrants from Myanmar”, “Encroachers”, “Foreigner Kuki” reducing indigenous people to a state of second-class citizens, while a narrative was developed terming them as “Narco-Terrorists” involved in poppy cultivation and drug business. A deliberate sinister move seemed to be afoot to create an insider-outsider divide. It is to be noted that Kukis were known for their brave fight against the British from the 1840s to the Anglo-Kuki War from 1917-19 against the move to forcibly recruit them during the First World War. Many of them were also part of the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

Places of worship, houses, shops and other establishments have been gutted or destroyed in many parts. There has been vandalism, arson and attacks on properties, churches and temples across the five valley districts and some hill districts like Churachandpur, Tengnoupal, Kangokpi etc. According to the Manipur Tribal Forum, Delhi (MTFD) more than 230 Churches (357 Churches or Church-related properties according to a report) have been either completely burnt down or destroyed partially. Of these more than 200 faced destruction in just two days. Most of those killed are the tribal Kukis or Zos who are Christians. There are also reports of destruction of a few sites considered sacred by the Meitei who are Hindus or adherents to the Sanamahi religion.

The deaths of Kukis and the destruction of their properties, villages, homes and churches far exceed the deaths of Meiteis, destruction of their properties, villages, homes and temples. About a thousand people have suffered grievous injuries. There have been reports of gang-rapes, burning of ambulances

with patients. More than 5000 homes and 200 villages cutting across community lines were destroyed. The deployment of over 40,000 personnel of the Army, Paramilitary-the CRPF and BSF, Sashastra Seema Bal, Assam Rifles etc., has not been able to fully contain the violence. Still attacks on far-flung villages are going on and gun-fighting is being reported. The severity of the situation can be gauged by the fact that even the residences of some Ministers and MLAs in high-security zones were totally destroyed in the violence. One can then understand the situation of the masses.

When the people of the State are in such dire straits, there are also reports that differences have arisen between Central Paramilitary Forces, especially the Assam Rifles and the State forces. Total confusion was prevailing for a considerable period about the imposition of Article 355 in the State; while the Governor confirmed its promulgation, the State Security Advisor to the Manipur Government denied it, though it is now under operation.

Both Kuki and Meitei groups are armed with sophisticated arms and ammunition in the possession of different militant groups that are signatories to the Suspension of Operation (SoO) Agreement, many are also armed with arms and ammunition snatched from State Police and Armed Forces. According to reports an alarming number of 1,600 weapons were looted when violence first erupted on 3 May 2023 and another 2,557 weapons were reported to have been looted on 27 and 28 May 2023, just before Amit Shah's belated visit. Almost the entire lot of them were reportedly from the police camps and armouries in the Meitei dominated valley. Other than sophisticated weapons such as assault rifles, grenades and mortar bombs were also looted. There are also allegations that most

weapons were given away to groups belonging to the same community as those deployed in the police camps. In some cases, the weapons were taken away after a huge mob surrounded police camps.

The removal of P Doungel, a Kuki, from the post of the Director-General of Police (DGP), Manipur has only added to the allegations of a pro-Meitei bias. Allegations that the State forces have failed in their duty of protecting lives and properties of citizens and inaction on the part of Central forces are also rampant, coming from both the Kukis as well as the Meiteis. Clearly, a Civil War kind of situation has been created in Manipur for meeting vested political interests. The ground situation was brought out by Lt General (Retired) L Nishikanta Singh in a tweet "I am just an ordinary Indian from Manipur, living a retired life. The State is now 'stateless'. Life and property can be destroyed anytime by anyone just like in Libya, Lebanon, Nigeria, Syria, etc. It appears Manipur has been left to stew in its own juice. Is anyone listening?"

The corporate media has been selectively reporting in a biased manner to cover up the failure of the Prime Minister and Home Minister. Hence the ground realities of the situation and suffering are not making headlines even when thousands are losing their homes and becoming victims to this violence, which both the State and Union Governments, the so-called 'Double Engine Government' have failed to bring under control. Internet has been disrupted and the ground reality as well as the magnitude of the crisis is not coming out. With internet being disrupted and social media being closely monitored, individuals and organisations are unable to reach out to outside support groups and the public with information about the massive human rights violations taking place in Manipur. People are helpless

due to the communal polarization and high handedness of the ruling government and authorities. The condition of vulnerable groups like the aged, the sick, the handicapped, children and women are reported to be extremely precarious. Pregnant women, the sick and the aged are suffering in huge numbers due to lack of nutrition, medicine and medical support.

It is our duty to reach out with helping hands in solidarity with the people of Manipur. We cannot allow a situation where precious lives are lost. The people of Manipur are in need of our voice and support. Standing for Manipur is standing for our federal values, secular ethos and for the sake of our constitution and democracy. The BJP Governments at the Centre and State are compromising on unity and integrity of the region and should immediately desist from their polarising ‘divide and rule’ strategy. The prolonged curfews as well as internet ban must be withdrawn forthwith, free ration should be provided for all people, adequate medicines and medical assistance must be ensured and houses and establishments destroyed should be rebuilt. Fast-paced efforts to rehabilitate and resettle all those displaced must be initiated. A compensation of Rs 1 crore should be announced for all families that have lost their dear ones.

Steps should be taken to demilitarise the conflict zones and establish peace. So far only less than 20 per cent of the arms and ammunition looted has been recovered. The violent mobs representing both communities, including private armies as well as the Kuki militants, must be firmly dealt with, the ground rules of the Suspension of Operation Agreement signed by Kuki militants with the Government of India and State of Manipur must be abided by all parties. Unfortunately, the BJP

Governments at the Centre and State are talking of a National Registry of Citizenship and emphasizing the need to identify ‘illegal immigrants’ from Myanmar through biometric and iris impressions. This like in Assam could be a recipe for further persecution and exclusion of the Kukis who are spread across Bangladesh and Myanmar in addition to neighbouring States like Mizoram. The Home Minister had asked 15 days for establishing peace; months later, peace remains elusive. The Prime Minister suffers from lock-jaw when it comes to Manipur, which does not feature in his Mann Ki Baat or any public speeches.

An All Party delegation including representatives from organisations, civil society groups should visit the State and ascertain facts as well as monitor the road to establishment of normalcy. A Judicial Probe monitored by the Supreme Court to bring to book the perpetrators of violence and strong deterrent action must also be instituted.

On a personal note, I have had a long association with Manipur, having friends and students from different communities, the Meiteis, the Nagas and Kukis. Many have lost their homes and property and every day is spent in fear and a great sense of insecurity. I hope that peace and harmony will return at the earliest and all will unite to ensure the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, whatever be their identity, are brought before the law. More importantly, the wolves in sheep’s clothing whose polarising politics of hate and divide and rule brought the State to such a pass should be exposed, isolated and defeated. The ‘Double-Engine’ government of BJP-RSS has only sown discord, death and destruction in Manipur as elsewhere in India. It is our imperative to wave the red flag for unity, integrity, democracy, secularism and federalism. □

STOP LOOTING FARMERS TO FILL CORPORATE COFFERS ENSURE REMUNERATIVE MSP AND ASSURED PROCUREMENT

- All India Kisan Sabha



The BJP-led Union Government announced the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for the Kharif Season 2023-24 on 7th June, 2023 claiming that “the move is to ensure remunerative prices to growers for their produce and to encourage crop diversification”. The MSP announced is neither fair nor remunerative; it belies the hopes of the farmers and inflicts huge losses in their incomes. Let alone encouraging crop diversification, it discourages farmers from investing in agriculture.

Rather than *Doubling Farmers' Incomes* as claimed by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, rising input costs coupled with unfair MSP will push large sections of the farmers, especially the small, marginal, middle farmers as well as tenants into indebtedness. The MSP announced yet again for the ninth year in succession betrays the promise of Narendra Modi that MSP will be fixed in accordance with the Swaminathan Commission recommendation of C2+50 per cent, i.e. at least 50 per cent more than the total cost of

production.

MSP for Paddy has been fixed at Rs. 2,183/Qtl, against Rs. 2,040/Qtl in the last season, a meagre increase of 7 per cent. MSP of coarse cereals has also been increased by 6.3-7.8 per cent with that of Bajra fixed at Rs. 2,500/Qtl compared to Rs.2,350/Qtl in 2022-23. For Maize MSP has been raised to Rs. 2,090/Qtl against Rs. 1,962/Qtl a year ago, an increase of 6.5 per cent. The MSP of Tur (Arhar or Pigeon Pea) and Urad (Black Gram) has a meagre increase of 6 per cent and 5.3 per cent, an increase of Rs. 400 to Rs. 7,000/Qtl and Rs. 350 to Rs. 6,950/Qtl. For Cotton there has been an increase of 8.9 per cent, an increase of Rs. 540 to Rs. 6620/Qtl for Medium Staple from Rs. 6080/Qtl. MSP of Sunflower Seed was increased by 5.6 per cent to Rs. 6760/Qtl, an increase of Rs. 360/Qtl. Green Gram (Moong) MSP was increased by 10.4 per cent over 2022-23, Sesamum saw an increase of 10.3 per cent and Groundnut an increase of 9 per cent over the last year.

The increase is in this range for most crops

and since cost projection is based on cost of production estimates from 2019-20 to 2021-22 the MSP fails to compensate for cost increase from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

The BJP government has conveniently shifted goalposts from the C2 cost, which measures total cost of cultivation, to A2+FL cost, which does not include rental value of owned land and interest on fixed capital. Moreover, there is a catch even in the prices calculated as per the A2+FL formula. The Commission of Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) under-estimates costs for various States, and uses the all India weighted average of these under-estimated costs to compute the MSP.

The CACP document *Price Policy for Kharif Crops, The Marketing Season 2023-24* confesses that the estimates of cost of production for paddy by Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and West Bengal are higher than CACP projections. The routine projections done by CACP fail to take into account increasing input costs or factor in the inflation. The *Double Engine Sarkar* did not bother to take even the recommendations of States ruled by the BJP into consideration.

For paddy, the C2 cost projected by the Kerala State Agricultural Department is Rs. 2847/Qtl while the CACP projection is only Rs. 2338/Qtl. The Punjab State projection of C2 cost for paddy is Rs. 2089/Qtl while the CACP projects it as only Rs. 1462/Qtl. In most crops the State projections are much higher than the CACP projections. Knowing fully well that the costs of production are higher in Kerala and the MSP fixed centrally will not meet the costs, the LDF Government gives about Rs. 800/Qtl bonus for paddy, procuring

at Rs. 2850/Qtl. The BJP Government discourages such initiatives by States claiming that it is market-distorting.

Even if one takes the CACP computation of C2 costs (Rs. 1911/Qtl) and applies the C2+50 per cent formula to calculate the MSP of paddy, it should have been Rs. 2866/Qtl. The MSP announced is only Rs. 2183/Qtl. If the weighted average C2 cost (Rs. 2139/Qtl) provided by the State Agricultural Departments is taken into account, C2+50 per cent would have been Rs. 3208.5/Qtl. In both cases the MSP announced will be way below and farmers will accrue a loss of Rs. 683.5/Qtl and Rs. 1025.5/Qtl respectively. A farmer in Andhra Pradesh with a productivity of 6 Tonnes/Hectare will incur a loss of Rs. 41,010/Hectare and Rs. 61,530/Hectare respectively at these costs. This will translate into a loss of anything between Rs. 9020 crores to about Rs. 13,540 crores per season for farmers of the State (Paddy is cultivated in more than 22 lakh hectares in AP).

In case of cotton, the Telangana State C2 projections are Rs. 11031/Qtl while the CACP projections are far below at Rs. 6264/Qtl that is Rs. 4767/Qtl lesser. Even if we take the MSP (Rs. 6,620/Qtl) and CACP projection of C2 for cotton (Rs. 5786/Qtl) the C2+50 price would be Rs. 8679/Qtl or a loss of Rs. 2059/Qtl. Taking an average production of 15 Qtl/Hectare the losses will be Rs. 30,885/Hectare. As per the State calculation C2+50 would be Rs. 16547/Qtl or Rs. 9927/Qtl more than MSP announced. That would mean a loss of Rs. 1,48,905/hectare. Given that the State has an acreage of about 19 lakh hectares, the losses at Central MSP and State proposed MSP will be ranging from about Rs. 5,868 crores to Rs. 28,291 crores. One can imagine the huge

disincentive to a farmer and the reason why farm suicides are rising in the cotton belt.

For Arhar/Tur, the C2 costs projected by the State of Karnataka is Rs. 9588/Qtl while the CACP projection is only Rs. 5744/Qtl, that is Rs. 3844/Qtl lesser. In Arhar, Moong, Urad, Sunflower, Sesamum, Nigerseed and Cotton, the losses range from around Rs. 2000/Qtl to even higher than Rs. 3000/Qtl even at the CACP projected C2 rates. Even the MSP fixed is not accruable to farmers in the absence of assured procurement. It is anybody's guess that the losses suffered by farmers are in thousands of crores. In cotton as well as pulses and oilseeds, faulty trade policy, import at zero duties and so on at the behest of the government's corporate cronies have further pushed farmers into crisis.

Farmers are first cheated by underestimating the cost at a level that is much lower than actual ground reality. The farmers in States with higher costs of production are cheated the second time as the weighted average cost will invariably be lower than their actual costs. The third time farmers are cheated since this MSP is mostly notional or on paper as there is no assured procurement in most cases. The procurement as a percentage of total production in 2021-22 was 1.14 per cent for Arhar/Tur, 5.07 per cent for Moong, 0.21 per cent for Urad, 2.05 per cent for Groundnut and zero per cent for Soybean. In 2022-23 according to figures reported as on 28th February, 2023 it was zero per cent for Arhar/Tur, Urad and Soybean and 6.39 per cent for Moong.

Farmers are caught in the pincer of low unfair prices for their produce and ever rising input costs as deregulation has given a free hand to the corporate companies to fix prices



without any control by the Government. Often the ruse used is that an increase in MSP will increase prices for consumers, but nothing is done to stop profiteering at the expense of farmers and consumers. Undoubtedly, there is a need to increase productivity with better agronomic practices, high yielding varieties and providing quality inputs at affordable, subsidised rates. Dissemination of scientific agronomic practices with strengthened extension services to take scientific developments to farmers is also required.

This, however, is not the priority of Narendra Modi and the BJP Government. Inflicting losses on farmers to deliberately push them into indebtedness, pauperise and dispossess them from their land is the direction in which the BJP Government is moving. It also serves their purpose of maximising profits and filling the coffers of the corporate companies. The three Farm Acts brought earlier and the amendments to the Electricity Act are all part of the game-plan to squeeze farmers out of cultivation. It is in this context that united struggles to ensure Legal Guarantee of MSP with assured procurement are now even more relevant and need to be intensified. □

PEOPLE NEED URGENT RELIEF FROM UNPRECEDENTED FLOOD FURY DEVASTATING TOLL ON LIVES, LIVESTOCK AND LIVELIHOODS

- Inderjit Singh



The unabated fury of flash floods in Northern and North Western states have taken a very heavy toll in terms of lives, livestock, and livelihoods. Standing crops of paddy, maize, sugarcane, vegetables, horticulture, orchards, fodder etc. have perished over lakhs of acres. Cattle, sheep, goats, poultry etc. have been washed away.

Terrible Devastation

Although people of all the affected states are victims of the fury of floods, the people in Himachal Pradesh are the worst sufferers. The devastating crisis in Himachal Pradesh has been caused by heavy rains, which then led to landslides, cloud bursts, soil erosion, breaches in rivers, drains, and canal systems. These floods have swept away human beings, livestock, homes, hotels, hundreds of cars, trucks, and buses. 134 persons have lost their lives in Himachal while those missing are yet

to be counted. Cattle rearing farmers and agricultural labourers have lost their buffaloes, cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry. The livestock has been swept away by flash floods.

In Himachal Pradesh scary and heart-rending scenes of huge buildings collapsing and submerging like toys in the gushing waters were seen in the media. Shockingly, some of the vehicles had drivers and passengers in them, while others were parked when they were swept away. Many people are reported missing. The bodies of some of the dead have been recovered, but there is little hope for the survival of the remaining victims.

So far as Haryana and Punjab are concerned, it was not the excessive rainfall as such that caused the floods. Instead, the water of flash floods arrived from the rivers emanating from the Himalayas of neighbouring Himachal. This water caused widespread

flooding, inundating more than 6 lakh acres of land in Haryana alone. Now the fear looms large of the fresh incessant rains in some already affected regions of these two states, further aggravating the plight of the people and hampering efforts towards normalisation of the situation.

Haryana is witnessing both flood and drought-like situations at the same time in about equal proportion. In Punjab, 10 districts have been hit, among which Patiala and Kharar were the worst affected. Residential localities of Patiala city were badly flooded. The floods caused unprecedented destruction of public and private property, including roads, railways, electricity lines, highways, buildings, bridges, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure.

Other affected regions so far include parts of Uttarakhand, UP, Delhi, and Jammu & Kashmir. The monsoon fury has since inundated many parts of Assam, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra, Telangana, and some other states. The extent of damage is clearly visible when we go to the affected areas, but the actual losses caused by floods can only be assessed after the situation has improved.

Ruinous Developmental Trajectory and Corporate Profits

The causes leading to this destruction are not just natural, but also due to the ruinous developmental trajectory that has been in vogue for decades. It is often the people who are cursed and blamed for playing with nature, but this is misleading and propagated to conceal the real culprit: the unlimited hunger for profit of multi-millionaires who dominate the tourism industry in the hill states. People dwelling in the forests and hills have an intimate

symbiotic relationship with nature, and on this basis, both have been flourishing. Catastrophe is bound to unravel when the bond between human beings and nature is altered for the sake of corporate profits.

It was precisely for this reason that the Forest Rights Act, 2006, was enacted during the UPA regime after prolonged struggles by the AIKS, AIAWU, CPI(M), and other left, democratic and progressive organisations. It was a significant step in the right direction towards reinforcing the rights of forest dwellers and promoting sustainable reclamation of forests. However, under the pressure of corporates, the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2023 has now been passed in the Lok Sabha, in spite of strong objections from the opposition parties, tribal organisations, and other stakeholders. This will, to a great extent, neutralise the positive provisions of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and allow unbridled corporate access into forests.

How has the corporate-driven, profit-oriented developmental trajectory that the ruling classes have embarked on led to this situation? How has the anarchic tourism strategy allowed the mushrooming of hotels and resorts so closely along the banks of rivers, especially in Himachal and Uttarakhand? It is a known fact that maintenance and desalting of canals, river beds, bridges, and culverts, and removal of weeds have been ignored for a long time. In addition, the construction of a widespread network of highways, which is otherwise touted as a success story, has actually become a big obstruction for the natural course of water. These are some of the major factors that contributed to the floods.

River beds, drains and canals need to be cleaned and maintained. This has been ignored

for a long time. Water weeds from the canals accumulate at the entry points of headwork and block the movement of water through them. These are essential parts of the preparations mandatory under the flood control order in the wake of monsoons, and funds are earmarked exclusively for this.



However, the corrupt act of minting money with ease become difficult to audit, as corruption also gets washed away with floods. The major river that has been causing devastation in both Punjab and Haryana is Ghaggar, which is a seasonal river. It passes through Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, before entering Pakistan. Despite this, no long-term plan has been undertaken to tame this river and find a permanent solution.

Demand for Urgent Relief and Assistance

In view of the gravity of the situation, AIKS has demanded that the Union government declare the flood as a national calamity and provide financial packages to all the affected states to compensate for the losses suffered in terms of lives, livestock, homes, crops, tube wells etc. In addition, adequate financial assistance must be provided to the families who have lost their loved ones and livestock. Their outstanding loans and electricity bills should be waived, free ration and unemployment allowance must be given, and subsidised inputs should be provided for resowing of crops when the water recedes. Most important, clean drinking water, food, and medical aid must be provided free of cost to the flood affected areas.

State governments have casually made some announcements about compensation, but they have not yet provided any assistance to the people who need it most. The government is nowhere to be found and the people are left totally alone to fend for themselves.

The only ray of hope is the work that has been done through community efforts to prevent the water from entering the villages. People have built bandhs out of sandbags at all entry points and have been keeping watch day and night. In addition, it is again the community efforts of local people which have done a lot to minimise the ferocity of the floods by plugging the breaches in rivers, nullahs, drains, and canals.

Teams led by AIKS office bearers visited flood affected areas in different parts of the state. Inderjit Singh, Sumit Singh, Preet Singh, Jagtar Singh, Vishnu, Rajender Batoo, and Yogender visited Fatehabad on 23 July. In this district alone, 125 villages are affected. Inderjit Singh, Sumit, Jagtar Singh, Ram Kumar Bahbalpuria, Surjit Singh, and Hamjinder Singh visited affected villages of Sirsa on 25 July. People told the team that the administration has not done anything to save them from floods. They were not even warned of the

impending flood fury.

Activists of Jind district AIKS, under the leadership of State President, Master Balbir and State Finance Secretary Dimple, deserve commendable appreciation for their timely voluntary services. They sent much-needed help to affected fellow citizens in the form of milk, food items, and other essential things collected from the unaffected Haryana villages to flood-affected villages of neighbouring Punjab. Other AIKS district units also visited the affected areas in their respective districts.

1,500 villages in Haryana alone were affected in 12 out of a total of 22 districts, and even more villages in Punjab. Only assurances have been given by the government, and no worthwhile assistance for relief has been provided anywhere.

Meanwhile, there are serious worries of an outbreak of epidemics, especially because of the non-availability of clean drinking water and other epidemiological factors, when the floods recede. Outbreaks of malaria, dengue, and diarrhoea have been reported from areas where floodwaters are receding.

Solidarity and Call to Action

What needs special mention here is the unique form of free fodder langars and paddy nursery (paneeri) langars for those in urgent need of them. The destroyed paddy crop will have to be planted again if paddy nursery (paneeri) is made available. Farmers in unaffected regions have raised paddy nurseries on their fields and propagated their location on social media so that it can be given free of cost to needy farmers in flood-affected areas.

It is also heartening that farmers from rural areas came to the rescue of urban areas of

inundated Patiala city by supplying essential commodities, including cooked food (prasada). This is in accordance with the wide network of food langars, a legacy of the community spirit that formed the backbone of the 13-month long victorious and historic farmers' movement. The same is now being continued as a spontaneous gesture in practice during distress flood conditions.

Landless households in the villages are always face much more hardship in such situations. They often have their houses on the periphery of the village and are therefore the first to be submerged. In this context, the issue of launching MNREGA on a bigger scale can be one of the immediate relief measures towards mitigating the sufferings of the dispossessed sections and serving as a source of some minimum earnings for survival.

AIKS reiterates its steadfast solidarity with the people suffering due to this unprecedented rainfall and floods. It expresses grief and empathy for the people suffering heavy losses. It puts on record the appreciable voluntary services being rendered to the suffering people. It appeals to all the AIKS units and activists to take part in relief work in every possible way. It further called upon the people to make assessments of the losses incurred and raise these issues in a strong and organised manner before the concerned administrative authorities as demand for adequate compensation. The red flag of the AIKS will always be with them.

In the long-term perspective, of course, the farmers and other stakeholders should struggle for an alternative sustainable development trajectory by replacing the current profit-oriented pro-corporate policy framework. □

OXFORD UNIVERSITY UNION DEBATE

“THE MODI REGIME CAN AND WILL BE DEFEATED!”

- Dr Ashok Dhawale

In June 2023 the Oxford University Union held a debate on the motion, “This House believes that Modi’s India is on the Right Path”. The debate was chaired by the President of the Oxford University Union Mathew Dick, and there were three speakers each on opposite sides.

The speakers for the Proposition were Baroness Verma, Businesswoman and Member of the House of Lords; Akash Banerjee, Founder and host of the Deshbhakt, India’s first political satire platform reporting on Indian politics and promoting media freedom; and Palki Sharma, Journalist, News Anchor and an editor at ‘World is One News’.

The speakers for the Opposition were Dr Ashok Dhawale, National President of the All India Kisan Sabha, one of the leaders of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and a Member of the Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist); Prashant Bhushan, Lawyer in the Supreme Court of India and co-founder of the Aam Aadmi Party and later of the Swaraj Abhiyan; and Ajay Maken, former Congress MP and Union Minister for Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation from 2012-13.

This is the speech by Dr Ashok Dhawale in this debate.

Mr Chairperson, distinguished speakers, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first warmly congratulate the Oxford Union for completing the bicentenary of its vibrant debating tradition of free speech which began in 1823. It is a great and enviable track record, of which all of us are very proud!

In today’s debate, I rise to speak on behalf of the opposition. I am deeply convinced that Modi’s India is on the “right path” ONLY so far as the interests of the Adanis, Ambanis, other crony corporates, and of the rabidly communal and fascistic RSS are concerned. I firmly assert that Modi’s India is on the worst possible path so far as the interests of the massive majority of its 1.4 billion people are concerned.

Glorious Legacy of the Freedom Struggle

Modi’s path is in fact the path of destruction of all the noble values of democracy, secularism, sovereignty, federalism, and socio-economic justice that are ingrained in India’s Constitution, values that are a legacy of India’s glorious two-century long bitter struggle against British colonialism. When I say India in this anti-colonial context, I naturally also include what are now Pakistan and Bangladesh, because we were all part of one country that fought against British imperialism tooth and nail until a few years before we attained Independence.

The freedom struggle of India led to millions of martyrs, from the Sanyasi-Fakir Rebellion and various tribal revolts from 1760; to the First War of Indian Independence in

1857; to the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre in 1919; to the terrible Bengal Famine in 1943; and to the horrifying communal Partition of India in 1947.

Along with this was the British killing in cold blood of a long line of great patriots, who included Tipu Sultan, Mangal Pande, Rani Laxmibai, Chapekar brothers, Birsa Munda, Khudiram Bose, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Alluri Sitarama Raju, Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Chandrashekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, Jatin Das, Surya Sen, Pritilata Waddedar, Udham Singh, the Kayyur martyrs, and innumerable others.

Let me remind you all here in Britain itself that the ruling classes of Britain have never once even apologised for these millions of deaths of Indians for which they were solely responsible, and also for their unprecedented loot and exploitation of India for two centuries, leave alone giving reparations and compensation to India for these priceless losses.

Let us now briefly see the results of the nine-year long Modi rule under the following three major heads: 1. The danger to livelihoods, 2. The danger to democracy, 3. The danger to secularism and national unity.

Danger to Livelihoods

What have the Modi regime's economic policies in the last nine years led to? First, the disastrous demonetisation in November 2016 sucked out about 86 per cent of the cash in the economy in just a few hours. This destroyed the economy, particularly given the further shock of GST reforms in 2017. The unorganised sectors bore the heaviest brunt of demonetisation. Agriculture and the peasantry were severely affected. Millions of workers

lost their jobs. GDP growth rates fell sharply. The clearest indication of economic slowdown was the historic lows to which the offtake of bank credit fell after demonetisation.

As the official narratives of blocking terror financing and unearthing black money proved to be patently bankrupt, the government shifted the goalpost. Demonetisation was projected as a step to usher in a cashless economy, or a less-cash economy. But data show that cash is back, as seen in the cash-to-GDP ratio. Hence that claim, too, was proved false.

Four years later, the sudden countrywide Covid lockdown in March 2020 with just a four-hour notice, the bankrupt Covid vaccine policy, and the terrible state of the public health system led to the unprecedented misery of millions. While the Modi government officially estimated Covid deaths in India through the end of 2021 as just 481,000, the WHO estimated them as 10 times higher, at 4.7 million, the highest in the world. The prestigious British medical journal '*Lancet*' estimated the Covid deaths in India to be 6 to 7 times the official count. The gory sight of thousands of bodies floating in the river Ganga, and the massive queues outside crematoriums and cemeteries, became the symbols of this regime's criminal culpability.

The number of poor in India (with income of \$2 per day or less in purchasing power parity, according to the UNO) has more than doubled from 60 to 134 million in just one year 2020 due to the pandemic-induced recession. It is estimated that 150 to 199 million additional people have fallen into poverty by the end of 2021. During the pandemic, India accounted for nearly 60 per cent of the global increase in poverty.

Before the general elections in 2014, Modi had promised to create 20 million new jobs per year. That means 180 million new jobs would have been created in the last 9 years of his rule. However, the number of Indians in jobs shrank from 440 million in 2013 to 380 million in 2021 – a straight drop of 60 million in eight years of the Modi regime! The working age population grew from 790 million to 1060 million during that same period. Recession hit thousands of factories, which closed down. Unable to find jobs, millions of people just stopped looking for them and headed back to rural India for survival, which was also very hard to achieve.

Women in the work force had fallen from 36 per cent in 2013 to 18 per cent in 2019 even before the pandemic lockdowns. In February 2021, this figure plummeted to only 9.24 per cent, underlining the dire straits that women in India were in.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), which is directly under the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, estimated that over 100,000 farmers and agricultural workers in India were forced to commit suicide due to indebtedness in the last eight years of the Modi regime. Further, the monthly income from “cultivation” fell in real terms from Rs 2,855 to Rs 2,816 (a fall by -1.4 per cent). The enormity of the contemporary distress in India’s agrarian society is fully borne out by the farmer suicides and the absolute fall in real incomes from cultivation.

The 2022 Global Hunger Index ranked India at 107 out of 121 countries. Last year the rank was 101 and a year before it was 94. In 2014, when the Modi regime came to power, India’s rank was 55 out of 120 countries. These figures convey a shocking reality. Today, India is

categorised as a country with a ‘serious level of hunger’. Hundreds of thousands of Adivasi and Dalit children died in rural India every year due to malnutrition and starvation.

All through the Covid period when people’s miseries were rising, petrol and diesel prices were hiked almost on a daily basis, until both petrol and diesel crossed an unprecedented Rs 100 per litre. Prices of cooking gas cylinders sky-rocketed from Rs 400 in 2014 to over Rs 1150 per cylinder in 2023. These massive price rises were a result of increase in government taxes on petrol and diesel and cut in subsidies on cooking gas. The Union Finance Minister informed Parliament that during the last three years the Centre had through this tax loot earned a whopping Rs 8.02 trillion between 2018 and 2021. These price hikes of petroleum products triggered an inflationary spiral due to rise in transportation and other input costs. Food, vegetables and other essentials saw a massive price hike, scaling a 12-year record. Now, for the first time in 75 years of independence, GST was imposed on food items. For the poor, even living has now become difficult.

Survival of the Richest

On the other hand, there has been a transfer of incomes to a few at the top of the pyramid. According to the renowned capitalist journal ‘The Economist’, published from London, Mukesh Ambani’s net worth increased by 350 per cent between 2016 and 2020 and rose to Rs 7.18 trillion; while Gautam Adani’s net worth increased by 750 per cent during the same period and rose to Rs 5.06 trillion. When the Modi government assumed office in 2014, the Adani group had a market capitalisation of only \$ 7 billion. This zoomed to \$ 200 billion in 2022. In the international ranking, Adani was

No. 609 in 2014 when Modi came to power; he astronomically rose to become No. 2 in the world in 2022, until the Hindenburg exposures in January 2023 pricked his inflated balloon. In spite of revelations of wrongdoings, the Modi regime is still protecting Adani by stonewalling any Parliamentary enquiries against him.

According to the Oxfam India Inequality Report 2023, aptly called 'The Survival of the Richest', the top 1 per cent people in India hold 40 per cent of the country's wealth; the top 5 per cent hold 62 per cent; while the share of the bottom 50 per cent (700 million) is only 3 per cent. Since the pandemic began in March 2020 up to November 2022, the total number of billionaires in India increased from 102 to 166, and their wealth surged by 121 per cent, i.e. by Rs 25 million every minute. The richest 21 billionaires have more wealth than 700 million Indians. But in this same period, the number of hungry Indians increased from 190 million to 350 million. In the last seven years of the Modi government, bank loans taken by a handful of corporates worth Rs. 10.72 trillion have been written off. In addition, corporates have been favoured with tax concessions of millions of rupees.

With receipts from disinvestment (privatization) budgeted at Rs 17,50,000 million in 2021-22, some of the best profit-making public sector firms and financial institutions have been put up for sale to domestic and foreign corporates. Public sector banks and insurance companies are to be privatized. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) is to sell off Rs 6 trillion of land and other public sector assets to the corporate lobby. The entire country – railways, airports, airlines, ports, steel, coal, oil,

telecom, banks, insurance, health, education, and even defence production – is being put up for sale to the domestic and foreign corporates for a pittance. Along with the massive loss to the country, this is also attacking the workers and employees through massive retrenchment. Modi is bringing Thatcherism to India with a vengeance.

Sharp cuts in public expenditure on infrastructure and its growing privatisation are having their disastrous impact, as seen just last week in the horrific multiple train accident at Balasore in Odisha, which claimed nearly 300 innocent lives. While the railways are starved of funds for their development and modernisation, PM Modi goes about the country inaugurating elitist Vande Bharat trains which will run on the same hazardous railway lines.

Attacks on Working People

The Modi government has sharply attacked the working class, the peasantry and the agricultural workers through the four Labour Codes, the three Farm Laws, and the assault on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The three Farm Laws had to be repealed as a result of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM)-led iconic one-year long struggle of the farmers of India. But the BJP government's repression on the farmers' struggle was intense, and it led to the martyrdom of 715 farmers. The worst case was the horrifying mowing down of four farmers and a journalist at Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh under the cars of the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Mishra Teni, who is still shamelessly allowed to continue to remain in office. This would never have happened in any

real democracy. In the UK itself, we have the example of Boris Johnson being forced to resign first as Prime Minister, and then as Member of Parliament, over the ‘Partygate’ scandal, which though serious in itself, pales in comparison with the five murders committed through conspiracy by Modi’s Minister Ajay Mishra Teni.

The classes that actually produce the wealth of the country through their labour – the workers, the peasants and the agricultural workers – are being viciously attacked. This is the real meaning of corporate communalism, whose symbols today are Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Gautam Adani, and Mukesh Ambani.

Attacks on Democracy

One of the main architects of the Constitution of India, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, had written this just before independence came, “If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country... It is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost.”

The attacks on democracy by the BJP-RSS government in India are unprecedented.

The draconian use of the Sedition Act, National Security Act (NSA) and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) on the one hand, and of the CBI, ED, IT and other central agencies against political opponents, has crossed all limits. Hundreds of innocent human rights activists, intellectuals, students and journalists have been thrown into jail for years without charge sheets being filed against them. They include the Bhima Koregaon detenus and the Delhi riots detenus. Along with them, the arrests of Sanjiv Bhatt, R B Sreekumar, Umar

Khaled, Teesta Setalvad, Kappan Siddiqui, Safoora Zargar, and Mohammed Zubair are some other shocking examples. The mysterious and sensational deaths of Haren Pandya and Judge Loya are, of course, the most serious cases.

The removal of opposition state governments in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, and some North Eastern states through a combination of corrupt money power and ED-CBI threats is another manifestation of the BJP-RSS murder of democracy. All constitutional bodies – parliament, judiciary, election commission, central agencies – are being subverted.

Most of the print and electronic media in India are already owned by the corporate lobby, led by Ambani, Adani and the rest. They are kept in line by the grant or denial of government advertisements, and other coercive measures. They are called the Godi media in India, and they are engaged in a competition to glorify the Modi regime and to black out any opposition and dissent against it.

The V-Dem Institute has called India an ‘electoral autocracy’. Freedom House has described India as ‘partly free’. IDEA has said that India scores ‘at the level of 1975’ when a formal Emergency was in place. ‘Reporters without Borders’ has placed India at number 161 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. This is the shocking record of the so-called “largest democracy in the world” under the Modi regime.

Danger to Secularism and National Unity

The grave danger of the Modi regime to secularism and national unity is seen from the regular attacks on, and lynching of, the Muslim

and Christian religious minorities. This is hardly surprising, considering Modi's key role in the 2002 horrendous Gujarat communal carnage, that killed nearly 2,000 Muslims, raped hundreds of women, and slaughtered even children. The BBC documentary "India: The Modi Question" was banned in India. However, thousands of students across University campuses in the country defied the ban and screened the documentary nevertheless.

Communalism is a legacy that the RSS has faithfully lifted from British colonialism and from its dictum of 'Divide and Rule'. It is no wonder that all three communal organisations in India at that time – the Muslim League of Jinnah, the Hindu Mahasabha of Savarkar, and the RSS of Hedgewar and Golwalkar, strictly stayed away from the glorious freedom struggle of the Indian people against British colonialism. The latter two were directly involved in the dastardly assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Decades later, similar forces were responsible for the killings of Dr Narendra Dabholkar, Comrade Govind Pansare, Prof M M Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh. No progress has been made in the investigations into their murders.

One of the most shocking recent instances is that of the BJP-led Gujarat state government setting free 11 criminals convicted of killing 14 Muslims during the Gujarat inferno of 2002, gang-raping the then 21-year old pregnant woman, Bilkis Bano, and killing her 3-year old baby daughter also. The release of these 11 criminals was carried out on the 75th anniversary of India's freedom – 15 August 2022 – and on the eve of the Gujarat state assembly elections, clearly in order to sharpen communal polarisation.

Another shocking instance is the month-long mayhem of murder and rape in Manipur, which also has clear communal overtones, the criminal acts of commission and omission by the state and central government, and the deafening silence on the issue of Prime Minister Modi.

The BJP's attempt to link citizenship to religion through the CAA-NRC-NPR elicited huge countrywide protests for months, including the prolonged Shaheen Bagh protest by women in Delhi, which was eventually crushed by inciting communal riots in the capital. The sudden withdrawal of statehood to India's only Muslim majority state, Jammu & Kashmir, and the abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A of the Constitution that had made special provisions for that state, was followed by an unheard-of crackdown and repression on the people there.

Dalits, Adivasis, backward castes, and women are also at the receiving end of these casteist proponents of the Manusmriti. In the last few years, we have seen the terrible instances of atrocities on Dalits, particularly on Dalit women, at Hathras and Unnao, and in the tragic institutional murder of Rohith Vemula.

The RSS-BJP allegiance to the Manusmriti was clearly shown in the case of the foundation stone laying and inauguration ceremony of the new Parliament building in Delhi. Although the President of India is the highest constitutional authority in the country, both successive Presidents of India were kept out of these two ceremonies – first Ramnath Kovind, a Dalit, and then Draupadi Murmu, an Adivasi woman. Although both of them had been hand-picked and elected to these high posts by Modi, it was Modi alone who conducted both these

ceremonies himself, with a host of saffron-clad sadhus, seers and mahants in tow.

The BJP government's determined opposition to a caste census for the accurate enumeration of OBCs is yet another example of its Manuwadi mindset.

The implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) is being undermined. Adivasis are being driven out of their forest lands to help the corporate lobby acquire their land for mining, industry and other purposes. The recent changes in the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) of 1980 are meant precisely for this purpose.

Atrocities on women and girls have shown a sharp increase in the last nine years of the Modi regime. Many of these atrocities are perpetrated by BJP leaders themselves, and there is no punishment meted out to them. All laws giving protection to women against violence are being systematically diluted. The right to freedom of choice is being snatched away and the growth of 'honour killings' is a matter of grave concern. Laws passed by BJP state governments are a direct attack on the freedom of choice and seek to impose even more control on women.

The most striking recent instance which has rocked the country is the agitation by Olympic medalist women wrestlers against sexual harassment by the then President of the Wrestling Federation of India, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a BJP MP. In spite of the wrestlers conducting an agitation for over a month in Delhi, which got mass support from the people, the accused BJP MP has still not been arrested; on the contrary, the wrestlers were manhandled and arrested on the very same day that the new Parliament building was

inaugurated by Modi.

The Tide is Turning

But as Abraham Lincoln famously said, you cannot fool all the people all the time. Accordingly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aura of invincibility is being eroded in recent years. In the last two years, the BJP has been resoundingly defeated in elections and has received other setbacks in the states of Kerala, Tamilnadu, West Bengal, Punjab, Bihar, Delhi, and recently in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, where its state governments were ousted by the people.

The BJP has lost three of its long-standing and influential regional allies in the NDA in recent times – the Akali Dal in Punjab, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and the JD(U) in Bihar. There are four important state assembly elections later this year, and these will be followed by the parliamentary general elections in April-May 2024.

If most of the secular opposition parties unite to minimise the splitting of the anti-BJP vote, if peoples' struggles around their real burning issues are intensified, like the iconic farmers' struggle of 2020-21, and most important, if the RSS-BJP attempts at communal polarisation are fought politically tooth and nail, it is surely possible that the Modi-Shah-led BJP-RSS regime can and will be defeated, and the people of India will be saved from a dark, divisive, and fascistic future. Let us all bend our energies towards that end!

Thank you very much!

Jai Hind!

Long Live Revolution!

MASSIVE MARCH TO RAJ BHAWAN BY RUBBER FARMERS OF KERALA

CALL FOR PARLIAMENT MARCH ON 14 SEPTEMBER

- Valsan Panoli



On 26 May 2023, around 10,000 rubber farmers from all over Kerala led by the Kerala Karshaka Sangham (AIKS) marched to the Raj Bhawan at Thiruvananthapuram. This was preceded by a Day-and-Night Dharna a day before by more than 1000 chosen volunteers. The Dharna was inaugurated by AIKS General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan. The volunteers continued in the Dharna throughout the day and night despite heavy rain. The dharna was addressed by veteran AIKS leader S Ramachandran Pillai, AIKS Vice President S K Preeja, CKC Members Gopi Kottamurikkal, M Swaraj, Omalloor Sankaran, M Prakasan and other leaders. AIAWU leader Anavoor Nagappan, CITU leader Jain Raj, DYFI leader Shiju Khan and others also addressed the Dharna.

The Rubber Farmers' March began from Asan Square near Kerala University and marched up to the Raj Bhawan with AIKS President Ashok Dhawale, General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan, Karshaka Sangham General

Secretary Valsan Panoli, President M Vijayakumar, AIKS Vice President S K Preeja and others marched with the farmers. CITU, AIAWU, AIDWA, SFI, DYFI etc marched in solidarity. The public meeting outside Raj Bhawan was inaugurated by AIKS President Ashok Dhawale, and it was addressed by AIKS Vice President E P Jayarajan, AIKS General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan, Reception Committee Chairman V Joy, MLA, and AIKS State Secretary Valsan Panoli. The meeting was presided over by AIKS State President M Vijayakumar.

All the speakers attacked the pro-corporate policies of the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the Centre for the plight of farmers in general and the rubber farmers in particular. They also attacked the Congress, whose leaders in Kerala supported the Free Trade Agreement with the ASEAN countries that was concluded by the Congress government in 2009, and which led to disastrous results for rubber farmers and

farmers of other cash crops in Kerala and other States. In the context of a Bishop promising two Members of Parliament for BJP from Kerala if the Union Government procures rubber at Rs 300/Kg as the price, AIKS General Secretary said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Party, the BJP should first confess to their wrong-doings, apologise to the farmers for pushing them into distress by imposing unequal Free Trade Agreements, recant and atone by procuring rubber at Rs 350/Kg with retrospective effect (C2+50 per cent promised by Narendra Modi for all crops in 2014 would be around that); only then should they enter the houses of farmers seeking votes. The Congress including Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi, A K Antony, Oommen Chandy and others were equally responsible for pursuing similar policies disastrous for rubber farmers.

Kerala's Rubber farmers have been on the struggle path for the last few months. A State level Convention was held in February addressed by the Chief minister of Kerala Pinarayi Vijayan. In the run-up to the day-and-night Dharna and Raj Bhavan March 22 Long Marches covering more than 425 km with over 20,000 farmers marching were held prior to this in all 14 districts of the State. The primary reason was the increasing costs of production and drastic fall in price of natural rubber due to imports from ASEAN countries. The main demands are the withdrawal of the new pro-corporate and anti-farmer Rubber Bill introduced in Parliament, treat rubber as an agricultural crop, a price of at least Rs 300 per Kg for rubber, stopping duty free imports, withdrawal from Free Trade Agreements, subsidies for rubber cultivation, strict steps against cartels of big tyre manufacturers who are manipulating government decisions and working against farmers.

The Rubber scenario in the country needs to be looked into to understand the present crisis. Rubber was earlier known as White

Gold and the saying in Kerala few decades back was that if there were a hundred trees of rubber, one could live without hunger. Rubber is a major crop in Kerala and occupies over 22 per cent of agricultural land, the largest area after coconut. In 1950 India had only 75,000 hectares of rubber cultivation. That has now risen to 8.27 lakh hectares and from a total production of only about 16,000 tonnes, it now produces about 9 lakh tonnes. In 1955-56 if those cultivating less than 2 hectares accounted for only 21.8 per cent, today nearly 90 per cent of the cultivation is by small and marginal cultivators. The myth that it is a rich man's crop no longer holds. The productivity in Kerala was 323Kg/Hectare in 1954 and had gone up to 1903 Kg/Hectare in 2013 but fell drastically to 1472 Kg/Hectare in 2022-23. In 2013 if Kerala accounted for 84 per cent of all rubber produced in India, it has now reduced to 72 per cent. More than 12 lakh small, marginal and middle peasants, more than 2 lakh tapping workers, over 30,000 small traders and lakhs of workers in allied industries are dependent on rubber for their livelihood.

In April 2011 Rubber fetched for farmers about Rs 236/Kg. On 26 May 2023 it was fetching only Rs 124/Kg. If in 2011 by selling a kilo of rubber one could buy 11 kilos of rice, now only around 3 kilos of rice can be bought for a kilo of rubber. Rubber is not treated as an agricultural crop and is governed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The LDF Government in Kerala that has been implementing alternative policies gave Rs 1807 crores for price stabilisation and fixed a base price of Rs 170/Kg, promising to gradually raise it to Rs 250/Kg. In sharp contrast the BJP Government has cut fertiliser subsidies, has not allocated anything in the last budget for price stabilisation or market intervention.

The farmers are demanding that rubber be treated as an agricultural crop. The collapse of the rubber sector is directly linked to the

neoliberal economic policies and trade liberalisation. Indian farmers under this regime were exposed to the vagaries of the volatile world market. India entered into a Free Trade Agreement with Sri Lanka under the BJP Government of Atal Behari Vajpayee in 1999 and it became operational in 2000. The experience for farmers in Kerala was adverse. Tea, pepper, cinnamon and other spices started coming to Kerala without import duty leading to a price crash, loss of incomes, indebtedness and suicides between 2000 to 2006. Despite this experience and protests against Free Trade Agreements, the Vajpayee-led BJP Government went ahead and negotiated the India ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and came with the Initial Framework Agreement in 2003. It is only the Karshaka Sangham, AIKS, Left Democratic Front that protested against the move with a massive Human Chain from one end of Kerala to the other, from Kasargod to Thiruvananthapuram, covering more than 600 Km and finding a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The Congress competed with the BJP to implement such policies and Congress leaders like A K Antony, Vayalar Ravi, Oommen Chandy, Ramesh Chennithala and others alleged that the Left was opposing the Agreement to safeguard China's interests. Then Chief Minister V S Achuthanandan also led a delegation to the Prime Minister against entering into the Agreement. This agreement has led to a huge increase in duty free imports from Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and other countries. In 2005-06 if we imported 45,285 tonnes of rubber, in 2021-22 imports have touched 5,46,369 tonnes, almost 12 time increase in imports. At least one lakh crore of foreign exchange will be required to import 5 lakh tonnes. The competition of poor Indian farmers is with Thailand that produces 49 lakh tonnes, Indonesia producing 31 lakh tonnes, Vietnam producing 9.5 lakh tonnes and also quickly growing China, Ivory Coast, Sri Lanka

etc. A rubber farmer in Kerala gets about Rs 25,000/hectare as subsidy in comparison to a subsidy of Rs 2,08,000/hectare in Thailand, Rs 1,57,800/hectare in Malaysia and Rs 64,200/hectare in neighbouring Sri Lanka. Almost all imports from ASEAN countries are at zero import duty. In addition, the import of compound rubber has also seen a steep increase.

The ruling classes are implementing these policies at the behest of corporate tyre companies who indulge in illegal practices to get cheap raw material. Recently the Competition Commission of India imposed a cumulative penalty of Rs 1788 crore on 5 tyre manufacturers for cartellisation. These companies control over 90 per cent of tyre production in India. MRF, CEAT, JK Tyre, Birla Tyres and Apollo Tyres raised prices of tyres and tubes on the pretext of increase in prices of natural rubber and other inputs, but did not reduce prices upon decrease in prices of raw materials. The highest fine of Rs 622.09 crore was imposed on MRF, whose sister concern Malayala Manorama publications is one of the vociferous votaries of free trade and neoliberal policies. Now under the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government, the Rubber Act of 1947 is sought to be amended, the representation of Kerala in the Board will be cut down and there is talk of shifting the headquarters of the Rubber Board from Kottayam to outside Kerala. The Niti Ayog has also recommended that rubber no longer requires any beneficial treatment.

It is against this deliberate attack on rubber farmers that the Long Marches and protests before Raj Bhawan was held. There never was a bigger protest of rubber farmers. They have warned to intensify the struggle and on 14 September 2023 thousands of rubber farmers from Kerala and other rubber growing States will hold a March to Parliament to get their rights.

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‘SAVE APPLE, SAVE KASHMIR’: CLARION CALL OF FIRST STATE CONFERENCE OF J&K AFFI

- Shubhojeet Dey



Mobilising farmers along lines of different crop-wise federations, a tactical line put into practice by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in its 34th Conference in Hisar, has achieved its latest milestone with the successful conclusion of the first historic conference of the Jammu & Kashmir state unit of Apple Farmers' Federation of India (AFFI). Held on 15 and 16 July in the late Comrade Abdul Hameed Wani (a dedicated Kisan leader) Hall in Shopian, a total of 165 apple farmer delegates from 10 apple dominated districts of Kashmir, including 4 delegates from Jammu, participated in the proceedings of the Conference on 15 July.

The Conference was inaugurated by P Krishnaprasad, Finance Secretary of AIKS. Mohd Yousuf Tarigami, ex-MLA and spokesperson of the Gupkar Alliance, greeted the conference. A report was placed by Zahoor Ahmad Rather, which discussed various issues affecting the apple economy. The report, which also presented a 14-point charter of demands,

was unanimously adopted by the delegates after a rich discussion. The Conference condoled the deaths due to floods and expressed grave concern and solidarity with the people affected by the devastation caused in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and other states. The Conference then elected a 11-member state committee with Zahoor Ahmad Rather as President and Abdul Rashid Itoo as Secretary. The delegate session concluded with a rousing speech by AIKS President Dr Ashok Dhawale.

Large Public Meeting

On July 16, history was made when a large public meeting was held at the *Maidan* in Shirmal area of Shopian. While more than 3,000 apple growers were expected, heavy rain just before it began, coupled with increased security checking at various points, made it difficult for apple farmers to assemble at the venue. Despite these difficulties, more than 1,000 growers holding flags of AFFI from several villages joined, ignoring the stormy weather. With loud cheers and slogans of 'Save

Apple, Save Kashmir’ and ‘Apple Farmers’ Federation Zindabad’, the key speakers of the meeting Dr Ashok Dhawale, P Krishnaprasad, and Mohd. Yousuf Tarigami entered the stage.

In his inaugural speech, Dr Ashok Dhawale congratulated the farmers who were getting organised under the banner of AFFI and said that along with the struggle for higher prices and lower input costs for apple growers, AFFI and AIKS would also struggle for the restoration of statehood and the repeal of abrogation of Article 370 and 35A that is essential for the ‘Atma-Samman’ of Kashmiris. He also asked the apple growers to join the All India calls given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Central Trade Unions (CTUs) to hold anti-corporate demonstrations in J&K on August 9, and to hold a three-day mahapadav at Srinagar from November 26 to 28, on the burning issues of farmers and workers.

P Krishnaprasad in his speech focused on the loot of apple growers where they get just 30 per cent or less of the value in the supply chain while the rest is eaten up by intermediaries, corporate agribusiness and retailers, as well as by governmental taxes. He stressed on the need to build the organization of AFFI in every village so that growers could begin directly marketing to consumers all over the country.

Senior Kisan leader Ghulam Nabi Malik and Zahoor Ahmad Rather addressed the rally and demanded that the government should give up its anti-farmer policies and take concrete steps to address the legitimate demands of the apple growers. They also appealed to all shades of people connected with apple production to unitedly raise their voice in support of demands concerning apple farming.

In his concluding speech, Tarigami said that be it the education of their children or their marriage, apples were the only hope of Kashmir’s apple farming community. He said that this community demanded nothing but a fair price for its hard-harvested produce. Tarigami sought the support from the farmers of the country in favour of the demands of Kashmiri apple cultivators. “We won’t beg before this government. We seek the support and solidarity of the country’s hard-working farmers, who forced this government to repeal the contentious Farm Laws,” he said.

The Apple Economy

Apple is the common farmer’s gold in J&K. More than 75 per cent of India’s apples come from here. In the valley itself there are 8 lakh households spread across districts of Shopian, Budgam, Srinagar, Pulwama, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Kupwara, and Anantnag. Even in Jammu, apple is grown in Udampur, Doda, Poonch, Ramban and Reasi, albeit on a much smaller scale. In terms of land distribution, more than 90 per cent of orchardists are small and marginal farmers (less than 2 hectares) in J&K.

Apple and other fruits were considered essential for J&K’s autonomous development path. The historic ‘Naya Kashmir’ manifesto adopted during the Kashmir movement had the primary objective to enable J&K’s horticulture to acquire leadership not only in fruit production and productivity, but also in the supply chain in the South Asian market. Unfortunately, the political events of 1953 adversely affected the developmental process.

The outcome has been that though more and more farmers have taken up apple cultivation in the last four decades to avail of better prices offered by the high-value crop in

the mandis, they often face disappointments and the sector is facing virtual stagnation.

A common farmer looks to his/her apple orchard to give good returns. However, he/she is a 'price taker' and suffers from the volatility of prices during the harvesting season in the near absence or lack of access to crucial logistical support of packaging, transport, and cold-storage/controlled-atmosphere facilities. Commission agents in mandis take their slice of the profit, while retailers too rejoice by charging consumers premium prices for apples that earned the farmer nickels and dimes. On average, the apple growers get Rs 50 per kilo of A-grade (best quality) apples from their traditional orchards, while consumers buy the same fruit at jacked up prices of Rs 150, Rs 200, even Rs 300 per kilo.

Even the Himachali apple grower suffers from the same loot. However, J&K suffers from a political nightmare like no other state, with the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A having come as a body blow to the apple economy here. The apple harvesting season in the Valley is September to end of November. In 2019, apple harvesting was to begin in early September, but was delayed as farmers could not go out for picking due to the political turmoil since August 5. There was severe shortage of labour in apple orchards and no transport facility was available since trucks were not allowed in villages and interior roads.



In 2019, in majority of orchards, nearly half of the apple produce had fallen and was ruined causing huge loss to apple farmers. Transportation and communication came to a standstill. The Union government then bungled the procurement by a thoughtless market intervention scheme through NAFED, nosediving prices of whatever little apples that could reach the market to as low as Rs 13 per kilo! For a horticulture sector that commands Rs 10,000 crore, a conservative estimate showed a loss ranging from Rs 7,000 crore to Rs 12,000 crore. Calling it a devastating tragedy would be an understatement.

New Challenges

Since 2019, it has been one challenge after another for apple growers. Through the Covid pandemic and even last year, the movement of apple laden trucks got disrupted along the national highway. It is estimated that till September 28 last year, more than 5,000 trucks carrying an average of 20 tonnes of apples each were standing still on the national highway stretching from Mirbazar in Anantnag to the Banihal tunnel. Apple fruit perishes within a fortnight, and for most growers, affording refrigerated trucks is not possible. This hit the common growers in a most cruel way.

Another way in which the Modi government has hurt Kashmiri apple orchardists is through the unbridled, often illegal import of apples. Even though Afghanistan's total annual apple produce is just 1 lakh metric tonnes, the country exported 6 lakh metric tonnes to India between October 2020 and January 2021 alone. Very recently, PM Modi reduced the import duty on US apples from 70 per cent to 50 per cent, flooding the domestic market further with cheap foreign apples.

All these and many other issues came up for discussion in the Conference in Shopian. It was heartening to note that delegates who took part in the discussion were from almost all the districts of Kashmir valley. This shows that the crisis of the last years has awakened apple growers across the Valley to come together against the Union government's anti-farmer policies.

Of the 165 delegates, 120 were small and marginal growers, and 47 were young growers of less than 31 years of age while 83 were aged between 31 and 65 years. A majority of delegates (105) sold their produce to mandis outside the Valley. Both these facts tell us that the J&K AFFI State Conference attracted apple growers who are willing to take risks, undertake modernised farming, and forge links with apple growers in other Himalayan states.

AIKS has envisioned its crop-wise federations to seriously undertake the building up of producer and marketing cooperatives, and this Conference too resolved to bring together growers into such collectives. It is the alternative path that AFFI through its state unit offers the apple growers of J&K. By addressing the tasks of establishing required cold chain facilities including controlled

atmosphere storage facilities, transportation, processing industries and marketing interventions, such cooperatives can develop supply chains in favour of the producers and the surplus thus created can be shared with farmers as additional price and to the workers as additional wage.

As the access to domestic markets is limited in the prevailing supply chains, the possibilities of directly marketing the apple produce from such cooperatives to southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu via a special policy of the respective governments can provide a new pathway for apple growers. Such innovative and real-time experiments only can counter the present exploitation of large capitalists and their intermediaries, as well as the central government which seems hell bent on breaking the economic spine of J&K.

Intensive Preparations Against all Odds

Holding the Conference as well as the public meeting on 15-16 July in Shopian was no small task. South Kashmir, which consists of Shopian, Anantnag, Pulwama and Kulgam districts, is a volatile and sensitive region. A door-to-door poster campaign was conducted and large billboards came up in Shopian town as well as in villages.

Indeed, two days before the Conference began, three innocent migrant labourers from Bihar were grievously injured by militants in Shopian town. But the efforts of kisan activists and public support made it possible to hold this Conference successfully. It was covered well by the media and the message got conveyed to the people that it is only united struggles of the kisans, particularly apple growers, which can force the government to listen to, and then concede, their legitimate demands.

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STRUGGLE FOR CROP INSURANCE IN CHURU DISTRICT OF RAJASTHAN

- Chhaganlal Chowdhary

The organized peasant movement led by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) has achieved remarkable victories in various areas of Rajasthan, particularly in the struggles for crop insurance claims. The Kisan Sabha in Churu district has been at the forefront of fighting against the exploitation by crop insurance



companies for over a decade. Alongside the struggles in Hanumangarh district, Churu's efforts have yielded significant successes, inspiring movements in other districts like Sikar during this year.

The peasant struggle in Churu has endured for more than a year. In the Kharif season of 2021, farmers in the district were insured by SBI General Insurance Company Limited. Unfortunately, unprecedented and unseasonal rains resulted in extensive damage to the pulses crop just as it was time to harvest. As per the state government's notification, crop insurance claims should be assessed based on crop cutting conducted by Patwaris and agricultural supervisors.

After receiving the Crop Cutting Report through the State Government from the State Revenue Board, the SBI General Insurance Company submitted its objections directly to the State Government, rather than the District Collector, after the stipulated time. In response, the State Technical Advisory Committee held a meeting on 15 February 2022, and sought permission from the central government to determine the claims of 181 patwar mandals in 5 tehsils of

Churu district using satellite data. The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare approved this request on 24 March, and subsequently, the satellite data was made available to the state government and shared with SBI General Insurance. Based on this data, claims were issued to the farmers, with 60 percent calculated from satellite data and 40 percent from crop cutting, and the funds were deposited into the farmers' accounts.

Upon learning that the Central and State Governments were allegedly colluding with the SBI General Insurance Company regarding crop insurance claims, farmers started a protest dharna at Taranagar on 7 March 2022, followed by Sardarshahar on 24 May, Churu on 8 June and Rajgarh on 22 June, demanding transparency in the crop cutting process. The farmers demanded access to the crop cutting report that was provided by the government to SBI Company, as they were also involved as parties. However, the state government refused to release the report, citing the need for permission from the central government. After 3-4 months of continuous dharnas and a 58-hour chakka jam starting from 16 July, the state government was forced to reach a written agreement through

the district collector, assuring the Kisan Sabha that it would receive the crop cutting report. Additionally, any objections raised by the Kisan Sabha would be considered an appeal against the state government, with the district collector responsible for handling such appeals.

In Churu, the Kisan Sabha District Committee studied the claims made through satellite data and crop cuttings for the Kharif season of 2021. The calculations amounted to approximately 700 crore rupees for 181 patwar mandals across 5 tehsils in the district, namely Churu, Taranagar, Rajgarh, Sidhmukh, and Sardarshahar. SBI Company, in conjunction with the state and central government, paid out only Rs 213 crore using satellite data. An illustrative example from Chikamsara Patwar mandal in Churu district showed that for groundnut, farmers received Rs 9050 per hectare based on the satellite claim combined with crop cutting, whereas the amount as per crop cutting alone was Rs 57581.24. This would result in farmers receiving Rs 48538.44 after the claim was settled. The ongoing struggle is to obtain the remaining amount, with farmers from the 181 patwar mandals in Churu district expecting to receive about Rs 486 crore.

After examining the crop cutting report, the Kisan Sabha appealed to the district collector against the state government's decision. However, the BJP Member of Parliament raised objections, questioning whether the Kisan Sabha represented all the farmers. In response, the Kisan Sabha submitted individual applications from 3000 farmers in the district, requesting that their claims be based on crop cutting instead of satellite data. This move was backed by mobilising significant mahapanchayats in Sardarshahar, Taranagar, and Rajgarh, where AIKS Vice Presidents Hannan Mollah and Amraram addressed the gatherings. The struggle intensified further during the last phase, with padayatras (foot marches) starting

from different areas of the district on 28, 29, and 31 May 2023. These marches culminated in thousands of farmers reaching the district collectorate on 2 June. That evening, a revised letter from the state government was received, in which 65 out of 71 objections by various companies for the Kharif season of 2022 were rejected by the District Collector. Most of the remaining objections were also dismissed after the Kisan Sabha and farmers presented their statements and proofs.

On the evening of 2 June 2023, farmers from all parts of the district started mobilising at the district collectorate to continue their protest. In the next phase of the movement, the Kisan Sabha presented a memorandum to the MPs and MLAs of the district at their residences. Congress MLA Narendra Budania from Taranagar, Congress MLA Krishan Poonia from Rajgarh, BJP MLA Rajendra Singh Rathore from Churu, and the Leader of the Opposition himself visited the protest site, received the memorandum, and expressed their support for all the demands of the movement. They pledged to support the farmers in obtaining claims from both the state and central government based on the crop cutting report. Similarly, the Congress MLA from Sardarshahar sent his representative, the Panchayat Samiti Vice President and other Congress leaders to show solidarity with the movement. The BJP local MP also received the memorandum at his residence and he also expressed support for the cause. Various prominent figures, such as State Women's Commission President Rehana Riaz, former Churu MLA Haji Maqbool Mandelia, AIKS General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan, AIKS Vice President Amraram, CPI(M) MLA Balwan Poonia, Teachers Union Shekhawat, Employees Federation and others showed their solidarity.

During the protest, the support from the people of the city and villages has been overwhelming. They have contributed milk, wood, flour, spices, oil, and monetary aid to

help sustain the protest. The common people stood strong with the cause. On 13 June, an impressive 4-kilometer torchlight procession was held in the city, it being a statement of this support. On 20 June, during the Aakrosh rally, the state government sent a written invitation for talks to the Kisan Sabha. District Collector Siddharth Siyag mediated several rounds of talks with the Kisan Sabha, bankers, and electricity officials during this period. The movement has gathered significant momentum, with the farmers continuing to press for their demands through peaceful protests and negotiations.

On 22 June, a delegation of the Kisan Sabha, comprising AIKS Vice President Amraram, State General Secretary Chhaganlal Chaudhary, Churu District President Indraj Singh, District Secretary Umrao Singh, Nirmal Kumar Prajapat, State Committee Member Sunil Kumar Punia, and others, along with BJP MP from the district Rahul Kaswa, Congress MLA Narendra Kumar Budania from Taranagar, and Congress MLA Krishna Poonia from Rajgarh, held negotiations with Principal Secretary of Rajasthan Government Dr Prithvi, and the Agriculture Commissioner. Unfortunately, they could not reach an agreement on crop cutting claims, leading to the failure of the talks.

On 18 July 2023, the 47th day of the Dharna, the farmers made a militant move by completely closing the five gates of the Churu District Collectorate until evening. On this day, all the lawyers from the five courts operating in the District Collectorate showed their support for the Kisan Sabha's movement by boycotting judicial work. The farmers made arrangements for providing food and tea to the officers and police personnel who were inside the district collectorate during the bandh. The continued protests and the solidarity from various sectors of society showcased the resolve and unity of the farmers.

A Kisan Ekta Rally will take place at Churu District Collectorate on 9 August 2023 to

intensify the movement. The rally will be attended by prominent leaders such as AIKS President Dr Ashok Dhawale, National Spokesperson of Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) Rakesh Tikait, and AIKS Vice President Amraram. More than 20,000 farmers from across the district are expected to take part in this gathering. The Kisan Sabha is actively holding meetings in 1000 villages of the district to prepare for the rally and garner support.

The struggle has put forward several demands, including providing 6 hours of reliable electricity to agricultural tube wells, giving outstanding electricity connections for agricultural tube wells since 2013, granting domestic leases to villagers, offering 200 days of work with Rs. 600 daily wages under MGNREGA, procuring the entire crop at MSP (Minimum Support Price) instead of just 40 quintals, initiating procurement of Bajri, fixing MSP for milk, moth pulse, guar, and vegetables, and providing Bhavantar until MSP is ensured.

The struggle has garnered immense public support, leading MPs and MLAs from Congress, BJP, and other parties standing in solidarity with the AIKS-led movement. Its significance lies in the fact that if it becomes victorious, insurance companies will have to implement the same formula in other parts of the country and the state. The victory of this movement would serve as a precedent for other districts in the state and across the country.

It is vital to raise nationwide awareness about the exploitation by insurance companies, the fraudulent practices in crop insurance notifications, and the covert nexus of governments and crop insurance companies. Building a mass movement on a nationwide scale is necessary to protect farmers from such exploitation and ensure their well-being. The struggle will continue until victory is achieved, and the farmers' voices are heard and their rights safeguarded. □

UNITED FARMERS' MOVEMENT IN GREATER NOIDA PAVES THE WAY

- Pushpendra Tyagi

Under the leadership of the All India Kisan Sabha, the ongoing farmers' movement of Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh has been successful in instilling renewed trust in the united struggle of farmers and landless farm workers. What started from 25 April 2023 in Greater Noida, has on 31 July 2023 entered its 75th day (61 days till June 24th when agitation was suspended and 14 days since its restart on 18th July), with support and determination among farmers and the landless increasing. Over the course of these past months, the agitation has sustained itself day and night against the Greater Noida Development Authority, with large and equal mobilisation of both men and women. Big processions were taken out on several occasions including impressive demonstrations conducted with protesters tying black bands, women farmers took the centre stage and a dharna day dedicated to landless farmers. The long and colourful

tractor parade and public meeting thereafter organised on 28th May made a huge impact within the villages and the farmer community of Greater Noida. All India Centre of the Kisan Sabha is coordinating and guiding this movement.

Background and Issues

The origin of this movement lies in the acquisition of farmers' land by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA). Located along the east bank of the Yamuna River, the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA), set up in 1976 became what we know today as NOIDA. Fifteen years later, in 1991, GNIDA was established with the public purpose of planned industrial development in 124 villages that were notified under it. The acquisition of land began in 1991 under the 1894 British Raj Land Acquisition Act, and with it began its far-reaching impacts on the farmers and landless workers of the region.



Situated between the now barely recognizable Hindon river and the Delhi Howrah rail line, 49 villages in the Greater Noida area have so far been acquired in different phases. These villages are called affected villages. Until the introduction of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in the Land (Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement) Act, 2013 there had been several farmers' agitations, some of which had turned violent. In the forefront were farmers who felt cheated after losing their land in lieu of a meagre compensation and in absence of any other benefit. Share in the declared purpose of development announced by the authority, employment, developed plots, residential areas, lease-back of acquired residential land, specific farmer quotas, residential plots for the landless, rehabilitation and so on came to the fore as new forms of challenges for the farming community. The issue of 10% developed plot land had come to the fore in 1997 itself, and the movement that took place then was successful in increasing the rates of compensation.

After the implementation of the new Land Acquisition Act in January 2014, some of the important issues of affected farmers have come as provisions under the new act and the fight began to implement these provisions. Along with this, farmers also got success in courts on some issues. It was supposed to benefit all affected people, but the government and Authority did not allow this to happen. The issues of 10% developed plot and 40 square meter plot to the landless are some such issues. As per the provisions of the new law, the compensation for land acquired should be four times of the prevailing circle rate in villages and two times in urban areas. In an appalling

attempt to stop this from happening, the Authority changed the compensation condition by abolishing panchayats in the villages. On the other hand, after 2014, the circle rate has not been increased in the villages. Now, what is happening is that the authority is giving Rs. 4125 per square metre to the farmers and selling the developed land at the rate of Rs. 72000 per square metre to the private players through auction.

Mobilising farmers who were fed up with the arbitrary, bureaucratic and insulting attitude of the government and the authority, the All India Kisan Sabha along with other small farmer groups and organisations of the region have participated in protest dharna and demonstrations held during this period. Kisan Sabha leaders and activists in the area, have regularly raised the issue of the affected farmers and the landless and organised a protest demonstration on 23rd December 2019 under the banner of the AIKS. But due to restrictions imposed during Covid-19 pandemic this initiative could not move forward. The Authority on the other hand, turned this aapada (disaster) into an avsar (opportunity) and put the farmers' issues on the backburner. Some decisions and provisions were secretly abolished. Sending bulldozers in villages for demolition and imposing baseless penalties on the farmers and the lack of respectable treatment in the GRENO office increased the restlessness of the farmers.

In such a situation, in February 2023, the Kisan Sabha approached the villagers and decided to restart the movement. Well attended dharnas were organised on 07th February, 14th March and 23rd March. After every demonstration several rounds of contact building with the farming community of

affected villages were undertaken by AIKS leaders. Farmers' participation in these increased equally. Subsequently, a motorcycle rally was taken out on 23rd April and from 25th April an indefinite day-night dharna in front of the Authority office was started.

Fight Against Repression and Betrayal

On 6th June, late in the evening police swooped on the farmers peacefully sitting on dharna and forcibly vacated the dharna sthal arresting 33 farmers including the main leaders of the movement who were sent to jail. When hundreds of farmers including women reached the police lines in the night, the police resorted to lathi-charge in which more than a dozen sustained injuries. In a very significant and unprecedented move, within hours of this attack, led by women, angry farmers re-assembled and defying prohibitory orders started their dharna at the same place. This determination of farmers helped them in sustaining and expanding the agitation when their leaders were in jail and also helped in garnering support of other kisan organisations and political parties. Sensing the charged-up atmosphere and mounting pressure for resolution of demands and release of jailed farmers forced the BJP state government to direct the authorities to start negotiations. On 24th June- the 61st day of the agitation, jailed farmers were released and dharna was suspended after the authority gave in writing that a high-powered committee will be set up under the chairmanship of the state Industry Minister having MLAs, MPs, Kisan Sabha Leaders and officials of GNIDA as its members to address the demands by July 15th.

While the farmers were waiting for the government to adhere to its commitment, the government informed them that the high-powered committee would not be formed. This

was a clear betrayal and farmers not going to back down this time, re-mobilised and started their day-night dharna on 18th July.

Achievements so Far

The biggest achievement of this movement so far is the ever-increasing active participation of women and instilling confidence within the affected farmers, the landless and common people of the region to come together and fight unitedly. This movement is not a spontaneous movement in which the Kisan Sabha intervened, rather it is a movement based on identifying issues and one that has been organised and shaped step by step. Its strength lies in the continuous on-ground initiative taken within the villages through the committees of the Kisan Sabha formed during the course of this movement. Conscious efforts are being made to unite and put the demands of the landless on priority.

In its small and local form, this movement is taking inspiration from the historic farmers' movement of Delhi. This united character of the movement in Greater Noida is the first of its kind in the area and it possesses the ability to take a wider form and go further as conflicts related to land acquisition are expected to escalate in the neighbouring areas and elsewhere in the country as a whole.

In order to make it widespread, initiatives need to be taken towards strengthening the solidarity of farmers and other organisations. This movement has kept open the path of dialogue and discussion with the Authority, government and people's representatives. The movement till now has been completely disciplined and non-violent. Experience has shown that this method is the strength of this movement and it should be strengthened this way only. □

25,000 PEASANTS OF AIKS STORM PALGHAR DIST. OF MAHARASHTRA, WREST DEMANDS

- Chandrakant Ghorkhana / Chandrakant Dhangda



It was the largest mobilisation of people on the Palghar District Collectorate, in the nine years that the new Palghar district was formed after dividing the original Thane district in 2014.

On 30 May 2023, over 25,000 peasants led by the AIKS stormed the Palghar District Collectorate in Maharashtra. They had come from all the eight tehsils of Palghar district – Dahanu, Talasari, Jawhar, Mokhada, Vikramgad, Wada, Vasai, and Palghar. Adivasis, women and youth peasants formed a large chunk of this huge rally, which stormed the gates of the collectorate, marched in, and occupied its grounds for over three hours until the end of the AIKS delegation's discussions with the District Collector.

This was the fourth large mobilisation of people from Thane-Palghar district in the last three months. Over 1,000 peasants had joined at short notice the AIKS-led Dindori (Dist

Nashik) to Vasind (Dist Thane) Long March in March 2023; over 8,000 peasants had joined the AIKS-led March from Akole to Loni in Ahmednagar district in April 2023; over 12,000 women had joined the large AIDWA-led rally on the Palghar Collectorate just the previous week on May 24; and over 25,000 peasants joined the AIKS-led rally to the Palghar Collectorate on May 30. Thousands of forms for land rights - over forest land, absentee landlords' (varkas) land, temple trust land, inaami land, pasture land, etc had been filled from peasants by the AIKS for the last one month. All of these were submitted to the Collector and receipts taken.

In the two hour long positive discussion of the AIKS delegation with the District Collector Shri Govind Bodke and other concerned district officials, he conceded several demands concerning land rights, water and irrigation, MNREGA, ration, and other issues, and assured their implementation in a

definite time frame.

The three most important assurances given by the District Collector were:

1. A complete and detailed list of the current status of all 61,000-odd Forest Rights Act (FRA) claims in the district would be made available to the AIKS. The latest information on FRA implementation in the district given by the Collector was as follows. There was a total of 61,043 individual FRA claims made in the district. Of these, 51,376 claims had been accepted and 29,392 hectares of forest land had been distributed to the beneficiaries. 6,615 claims had been rejected by the SDO level committee, and around 3,000 claims were still pending. The number of collective FRA claims received was 627, of which 496 had been accepted, and 27,775 hectares of forest land had been distributed. Thus, the two cardinal questions in Palghar district are: that over 10,000 claims have been either rejected or are pending; and even out of the 51,376 claims that have been accepted, the amount of land given in most cases is much less than what is being actually cultivated by the Adivasi peasants. Four hectares (10 acres) is the limit under the FRA. There are also instances of hundreds of FRA claims just missing from the administration's records. All these issues can be settled if the AIKS is given the detailed list, as agreed by the Collector.
2. Thousands of land rights applications of different categories that were submitted today by the AIKS would be processed village-wise and decisions taken on each in a positive spirit. To solve the burning issues of water and irrigation, he agreed to convene a special meeting of all concerned officials in the district with the AIKS.

3. As regards the absentee landlords' land, the Adivasi peasants actually cultivating the land would make applications when there was a standing crop in their fields in September 2023. This would be checked, and made the basis for making them tenants and then owners of the land. It was during the glorious AIKS-led Warli Adivasi Revolt from 1945-47, spearheaded by Comrades Shamrao and Godavari Parulekar, that hundreds of rapacious landlords were forced by the newly-freed Adivasi peasants to leave the areas, and abandon their lands. However, as per land records, those lands still remain in the landlords' names, although they are in the possession of and are cultivated by Adivasi peasants for the last 75 years and more.

This huge AIKS Palghar rally was led by AIKS National President Dr Ashok Dhawale, State President Umesh Deshmukh, State General Secretary Dr Ajit Nawale, State Vice President Kisan Gujar, AIDWA National General Secretary Mariam Dhawale, CITU State Secretary Vinod Nikole, MLA, AIKS District President Chandrakant Ghorkhana, District Secretary Chandrakant Dhangda, District Vice Presidents Radka Kalangda and Kiran Gahala, Treasurer Vijay Katela, AIDWA State Secretary Prachi Hatiwlekar, State Vice President Lahani Dauda, State Joint Secretary Sunita Shingda, DYFI State President Nandkumar Hadal, and many others.

AIKS Leads 3,000-strong Rally on Thane District Collectorate

A day later, on 31 May, a 3,000-strong rally of peasants led by the AIKS marched to the Thane District Collectorate to press their demands related to land, water, and irrigation. The peasants, both women and men, came from Shahapur, Bhiwandi, Murbad and Thane tehsils

of Thane district. AIKS work in this district has traditionally been limited to Shahapur tehsil; it has newly started in the latter three tehsils.

In contrast to the new Palghar district, which is predominantly a rural and Adivasi dominated district, with the major exception being the Vasai-Virar urban belt, the present Thane district is predominantly an urban and non-Adivasi dominated district, with two exceptions being the Shahapur and Murbad tehsils.

Hundreds of forms for land rights - over forest land, temple trust land, inaami land, pasture land etc had been filled from peasants for the last one month. All of them were submitted to the Collector and receipts taken.

In Thane, an AIKS delegation met the Collector Shri Ashok Shingare and held discussion on the memorandum. He also agreed to furnish a full list of the current status of all the Forest Rights Act (FRA) claims to the AIKS. The information that he gave about the status of FRA implementation in Thane district was serious. The total number of FRA claims in the district are 17,157. Out of these, the Adivasi claims are 11,910, of which 6,382

have been accepted, 3,473 have been rejected, and 1,785 are pending. Of the 5,247 non-Adivasi claims, only 55 have been accepted, 5,044 have been rejected, and 148 claims are pending. Not only is this situation very unsatisfactory, but even among the FRA claims that have been accepted, there are large scale complaints that the amount of land given is much less in most cases than the amount of land that is being actually cultivated.

The Collector also agreed to process all the land rights applications submitted by the AIKS and take decisions on them in a positive spirit. To solve the burning issues of water and irrigation, he agreed to convene a special meeting of all concerned officials in the district with the AIKS.

The AIKS Thane rally was led by Dr Ashok Dhawale, Umesh Deshmukh, Dr Ajit Nawale, Kisan Gujar, Mariam Dhawale, Vinod Nikole, MLA, Prachi Hatiwlekar, Chandrakant Ghorkhana, Chandrakant Dhangda, Kiran Gahala, and AIKS leaders Krishna Bhawar, Bharat Walamba, Nandu Khanjode, P K Lali, Jagdish Bhalke, Ganesh Dumada, Ramchandra Jadhav, Dattu Kharad, and SFI state joint secretary Bhaskar Mhase, among others. □



PROBLEMS OF UTTAR PRADESH POTATO FARMERS AND SOLUTIONS

- Bharat Singh

Potato is a major crop in Uttar Pradesh, which provides livelihood not just to lakhs of peasants, but also to lakhs of farm labourers of the state. Despite this, neither the BJP central nor the state government has made any policy regarding potatoes and there is no provision to declare a minimum support price. Potato producing farmers are heavily looted in various ways by market dealers, cold storage owners, freight and transport owners, chemical fertilizer retailers, and shopkeepers selling new potato seeds. There is no policy of the government to save them from this illegal loot. Due to the ups and downs in the price of potato in a single year, the poor and resourceless farmer becomes a victim of this and is drawn into the debt trap. They are forced either to sell their land or due to high prevailing rates of rent, give their land on rent to rich farmers.

At the time of sowing the crop, the farmers have to pay more money than the government rate of chemical fertilizers. There is active collusion between commission agents and input retailers. On sale of farmer's potato to the merchant or a cold storage, 5 kg more potato is demanded on every quintal. Farmers blindly use many chemicals in the sowing of potatoes, chemical fertilizers, to eliminate weed attacks, to get more yields, due to which on one hand more cost per bigha is being incurred, on the other hand the yield in farming is decreasing at an alarming level. Therefore, the Uttar Pradesh Kisan Sabha makes the following demands:

1. The support price of potato should be declared as Rs 1,600/ per quintal. Purchase should be started through NAFED cooperative by opening several government purchase centres.



2. Effective intervention to control the arbitrary storage rate of cold storage should be made.

3. Sufficient quantity of seed of progressive variety of potato should be made available to every farmer at a fixed rate.

4. Factories for potato products should be opened in potato producing areas, so that the consumption of potato can increase.

5. An effective control should be imposed on the illegal addition of 5 kg on every quintal by commission agents.

6. The government should make arrangements to provide training to farmers in potato producing areas on application of fertilizers, seeds and insecticides, conducting soil tests etc through agricultural scientists at its own expense, so that the cost of farming can be reduced. Arrangement for soil test should be done at development block level for a nominal fee. □

THIRD CONFERENCE OF BIHAR STATE SUGARCANE FARMERS FEDERATION

- Prabhuraj Narayan Rao

The third state conference of Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation was held on 9th July, 2023 at Madan Mohan Yadav Nagar, SH ITI Balua Motihari. The conference commenced with flag hoisting by Nand Kishore, General Secretary, All India Sugarcane Farmers Federation. Ramashray Singh, Rajendra Prasad Singh, Ramlakhan Yadav, Jatashankar Singh, and Vishwanath Bundela presided over the conference. The condolence resolution was presented by Prabhuraj Narayan Rao.

While formally inaugurating this conference, Vijoo Krishnan, General Secretary, AIKS and leader of Samyukt Kisan Morcha, said that the central government for mistreating farmers. The anti-farmer sentiment of the Union government was proven time and again with their policies. This was reiterated with the act of announcing an insignificant Rs.10 per quintal hike in sugarcane FRP for the 2023-24 season starting October. The Union government is assisting the corporates to strangulate the farmers and their families, leaving them with blood, sweat, and agony. Peasantry must carry forward the struggle for the legal status to MSP.

Nand Kishore Shukla, General Secretary,

AISFF, said that in the last five years, there was only a petty increase of Rs. 40 in the FRP of sugarcane, increasing it from Rs. 275 to Rs. 315. This hike, as reported by CCEA, is for a basic recovery rate of 10.25%. However, as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, the farmers must be receiving a Minimum Support Price at $C2 + 50\%$, which, in this case, amounts to Rs.500 per quintal for a recovery rate of 9.5% .

Awadhesh Kumar, Joint Secretary, AIKS, said that according to the Sugar Control Order, 1966, payments for the cane purchased should be made within 14 days of delivery. In case, the payment of sugarcane remains unpaid even after 14 days, the sugar mills have to pay the interest of the amount due at the rate of 15% per annum.

In the concluding speech, Vinod Kumar, General Secretary, Bihar Rajya Kisan Sabha, said that the farmers of Bihar will organise struggles against Narendra Modi-led government anti farmers policy. The conference demands the Bihar government to operationalize all the sugar mills, provide employment to lakhs of unemployed youth, and assist the farmers to benefit from cash crops like sugar.

Prabhuraj Narayan Rao, General Secretary, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation, presented the GS report, in which the miseries of sugarcane farmers of the state are explained. 20 sugar mills, which are under the Bihar State Sugar Corporation are non-operational. Sugarcane Farmers Federation demands



the Bihar government to revive all the non-operational sugar mills without any more delay. Planting cash crops like sugarcane can benefit farmers, and the labourers will also get good wages from cutting and carrying sugarcane.

Representatives from eleven districts participated in the discussion based on the GS report. In the discussion, they stated how the farmers remain unpaid by the sugar mills even after purchase. The representatives suggested organising struggles to revive the non-operational sugar mills. They also suggested that a strong struggle should be launched against the theft of sugarcane of farmers by the sugar mills. It was raised that after extracting sugar, 50% of the profit from by-products like electricity, ethanol, manure, paper etc. should be shared with the growers.

The Conference elected a new 31-member state committee, with Ramashray Singh as Patron, Prabhuraj Narayan Rao as General Secretary, Rajmangal Prasad as President, Ramlakhan Prasad Yadav, Jatashankar Singh, Ajay Kumar Yadav, and Vishwanath Bundela as Vice Presidents, Dhananjay Puri, M. Waheed, Satyanarayan Singh, and Sonelal Prasad as Joint Secretaries and Arun Kumar, Treasurer. Total 167 delegates from 11 districts participated in the conference.

The Conference called for protests in front of all sugar mills, government institutions, or Collectorates in Bihar on July 20, against the insignificant Rs.10 per quintal hike of FRP of sugarcane.

The delegates were greeted by Satyendra Kumar Mishra, Ashok Pathak, Harendra Singh, Vipin Dubey, Santosh Kumar, Mukesh Kumar, Dhruv Trivedi, Arun Kumar Singh and others.

DHARNA IN FRONT OF SUGAR MILLS

Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation staged massive protests, as part of the nationwide protests, at the gates of sugar mills in Bihar on the call of All India Sugarcane



Farmers' Federation. Addressing the dharna at Majhaulia Sugar Mill gate, Prabhuraj Narayan Rao, General Secretary, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation, M. Waheed, Joint Secretary, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation, Chandsi Prasad Yadav, state executive member, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation, Lalbabu Yadav district president, M. Hanif, AIAWU, Sanjeev Kumar Rao, District secretary, DYFI and others present also addressed the dharna at Majhaulia Sugar Mill of Bihar's West Champaran district.

A demonstration was held at Hasanpur Sugar Mill in Samastipur under the leadership of Manoj Kumar Sunil, President, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation, Satyanarayan Singh, Gangadhar, Upendra Rai and others.

Dharna was also held at Sasamusa Sugar Mill in Gopalganj district which was addressed by Jatashankar Singh, Vice President, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation. Arun Kumar, Treasurer, Sachchidanand Thakur, Muna Prasad, Ramesh Kumar, Hridayanand Singh, and Shivnarayan Narayan participated.

At the Riga Sugar Mill of Sitamarhi, a protest was held under the leadership of Vishwanath Bundela, Devendra Yadav, Madan Rai, Vice President, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation.

The Protest at the Sakri Sugar Mill of Madhubani district was led by Ramlakhan Prasad Yadav, Vice President, Bihar State Sugarcane Farmers Federation and member, Zila Parisad. □

SUCCESSFUL PROTEST BY COCONUT FARMERS IN KARNATAKA

- T Yashwantha

The Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) affiliated to AIKS and the Coconut Farmers' Struggle Committee formed at its initiative held a successful Vidhan Soudha Chalo on 19th July, 2023 demanding a Minimum Support Price of Rs 16,730/- per quintal of copra, opposing wrong Import Policy of the BJP Government at the Centre as well as against the neglect by the State Government.

The Coconut tree is widely known as Kalpavriksha (wish fulfilling tree) but it is no longer so for the farmers. The price of copra, the major horticultural crop of Karnataka, has fallen to an unprecedented low of Rs 6,000/- to 7,000/- per quintal. The fact that, the price of copra, which, two years ago stood between Rs 18,000/- and Rs 20,000/- per quintal, has fallen to such a low level, has become a huge concern farmers.

India is one of the largest producers of copra, producing 31 per cent of the total copra production at a global level. Kerala, Karnataka,

Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh — these four South Indian States account for 90% of the copra production in our country. Karnataka, the second largest copra producing state in the country, grows Coconut in a total area of 6.46 lakh hectares. Annual copra production is 2.18 metric tonnes.

Reason for Fall in Copra Price

Karnataka's share in the country's total production of copra used for producing edible oil is 65.5 per cent. Kerala, which is the number one producer of coconut in the country, accounts only for 13.5 per cent of the copra used for edible oil extraction. This means that the state's demand for copra is very closely related to the volume of copra used for domestic production of edible oil. Coconut oil is also an important raw material used in the production of soaps and detergents used for cleaning and removing dirt.

As part of the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement negotiated by the Atal-Behari-led



BJP government and signed by the Manmohan Singh-led Congress Government led to palm oil being imported duty-free without any quantitative restrictions. The demand for coconut oil has fallen consequently, and the price of copra in the state has fallen from Rs 20,000 to Rs 6,500 per quintal.

Betrayal in Fixing MSP and Injustice in Purchasing Centres

The State's Horticulture Department had recommended to the Union Government's Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACAP) to ensure a MSP of Rs 16,730/- per quintal of copra on the basis of the cost of production. (Actually the cost of production is more than what is estimated by the Horticulture Department). Ignoring the official recommendation of the State Government Department, the Union Government has fixed only Rs.11,750/- as the MSP. Not just that; Union Government takes false pride that it is more than fifty percent of the production cost. This is, indeed a Government of sanctimoniousness! The Narendra Modi Government has done a great betrayal by fixing the MSP without giving any reason for not accepting the recommendation of the Government Horticulture Department of the major Copra growing State.

Even in the procurement system, the BJP Government has only thrown dust in the eyes of the coconut farmers. Although the MSP is stipulated to be Rs 11,750/-, the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED) has imposed a condition that, unless the maximum selling price of copra is less than Rs 10,000, buying centres can not be opened. Due to this condition, the farmers had to see their produce getting rotten for almost a year without having any procurement centre.

It was only after the maximum selling price fell below Rs.9000/- that purchasing centres were opened. But the Union Government did not release the money required for the purchase to NAFED. The pace of procurement was at a snail's pace. As a result of all this, the farmers' anger broke out. Militant protests were held in all the copra-growing areas of the state, including Tiptur. Several farmers' associations, including the KPRS, have been protesting for months at Tiptur, which is Asia's largest copra market. It is notable that the BJP candidates from the copra growing regions lost miserably in the just concluded Assembly Election.

Coconut is a long duration crop. It takes at least ten years for the produce to come into the hands of farmers, by overcoming all the difficulties like lack of proper rain on the one hand, and the tremendous increase in the cost of production on the other hand. Coconut crop is being grown in spite of many challenges such as the menace of mites/pests, drought and falling ground water level. Poor farmers have been pushed into a dire situation as they do not even get the production cost. Expecting that the price may increase, many farmers kept the stock without selling the crop. Even after months, the price did not increase. Instead, due to the fear that fungus may grow on the stocked coconut, when the farmers took the produce for sale, the price of copra further fell drastically. Farmers were forced to once again take to the streets. A taluk level convention of copra growers was held under the leadership of KPRS in Channarayapatna of Hassan district and a protest was held in front of the Tehsildar Office. Thousands of copra growers of Hassan, Tumkur and Mandya districts held a massive protest meeting on 15th July, 2023 at Kadaballi, Nagamangala Taluk. Thus the cry of the coconut farmers echoed in the Assembly.

The state government has announced an incentive of Rs 1250/- per quintal of copra along in addition to the Union government's MSP.

But the farmers were not happy as NAFED, the copra procurement agency announced that this year's procurement would end on 26th July, 2023. Out of this year's total copra production of 2.18 lakh metric tonnes, only 47 thousand tonnes i.e. about just a quarter of total produce was purchased by NAFED. Still three-fourths of the copra produced remains unsold with the farmers. In this context, the KPRS State Committee called for struggle on the following demands:

- Necessary basic facilities should be provided to the farmers in the market premises.
 - Necessary agro-based industries should be established for value addition of coconut products and by-products.
 - A special package for solving the problems of coconut farmers be announced.
 - A joint meeting of the officials of the concerned departments and farmers' organisations, should be held under the Chief Minister, with the objective of solving the problems of the coconut growers.
- Joint Press Conference of Agriculture Marketing Minister and Farmer Leaders**
- Bowing to farmers' outrage, the Agriculture Marketing Minister held a meeting with farmers' leaders led by KPRS State General Secretary T Yashwantha, Finance Secretary HR Naveen Kumar and listened to our grievances and agreed that all our demands were fair. The Minister assured that he would write to the Union government as per the demand of the Farmers' organisations. A joint press conference with the farmers' leaders was held at the Legislative Building on the next day, 20th July, 2023, and the Minister demanded that the Union Government should increase the support price to Rs 16,730, extend the period of the procurement and allow new registration of farmers .
- In the press conference, KPRS State General Secretary T Yashwantha, Finance Secretary HR Naveen Kumar, Tumkur District RS Channabasavanna, Hassan District HS Manjunath and Ramachandra were present on behalf of the Prantha Raitha Sangha. Coconut farmers of the State are preparing for a massive protest in front of offices of the Members of Parliament to press their demands. □
- Fix the price of one quintal of ball copra as per the recommendation of the Karnataka Horticulture Department and the Karnataka Agricultural Prices Commission at Rs.16,730/-. The state government should announce an Incentive Price of at least Rs.5000/- per quintal.
 - The State government should pressurise the Union government to buy copra at MSP.
 - The recommendation of the Swaminathan Commission for fixing MSP adding 50 per cent profit margin to the cost of production must be implemented.
 - Government itself should purchase Copra and Coconut through APMC market.
 - Coconut procurement through NAFED should be strengthened and expanded.
 - Installation of digital meters for irrigation pumpsets should be dropped, and RR number and Aadhaar card linking of pumpsets should be abandoned.
 - APMC market should be strengthened to benefit farmers and corruption should be prevented.

KARNATAKA COTTON GROWERS' CONVENTION DEMANDS REMUNERATIVE PRICES

- Channappa Anegundi

A State Convention of cotton growers was successfully held on 12th June, 2023 under the aegis of Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS), affiliated to AIKS at the Agricultural University Auditorium in Shahpur taluk, Yadgir district. The convention was



inaugurated by AIKS All India General Secretary Dr. Vijoo Krishnan. More than 300 farmers, a good number of them women from Yadgir, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Raichur and other districts attended the Convention. Agricultural scientists and students also attended. The meeting was presided over by Channappa Anegundi, veteran leader of farmers and District President of KPRS. T.Yashawanta, State Secretary of KPRS, Sharanabasappa Mamshetty, Joint Secretary of KPRS, Gulbarga District Secretary Saibanna Guduba, senior leader of KPRS and Raichur District President Veeranna Gowda, Annaraya Eligera, Bijapur District President and Secretary Bhimaraya Poojari, Yadgir District Secretary Narasanna Naik, SM.Sagar and other leaders also were present. The Convention began with all leaders watering a plant.

The AIKS General Secretary Vijoo Krishnan said Cotton Farmers in the State are facing huge losses due to increasing costs of

production and low prices. Seed costs are rising in an uncontrolled manner as the Government has removed all controls. Seed available earlier at RS.800/- per packet of 450gm is now being sold as high as Rs.2500-2750/- per packet. The problem of spurious seeds with farmers incurring huge losses while defaulting seed companies go scot-free has pushed many into indebtedness and even to commit suicide. The BJP Government has also allowed free import of cotton bringing the duty to zero. The policies are being dictated by textile lobby, seed companies and traders. The BJP led Union Government and State Governments are pursuing pro-corporate policies and ignoring the genuine demands of farmers. The income of farmers has been steadily declining. Though the cost of production of cotton is increasing at an alarming rate, the minimum support price (MSP) is remaining stagnant.

The recently announced MSP for Kharif 2023-24 has been yet another betrayal of

cotton farmers he said and the ‘double-engine’ Government was pulling in different directions derailing lives of the farmers. The MSP of cotton announced is merely Rs.6620/Qtl while the C2 cost of production as per the State Agricultural Department under the former BJP Government in Karnataka is Rs.9488/Qtl almost Rs.3000/Qtl lesser. The State had proposed an MSP of Rs.14,232/ Qtl as MSP. If about 4 lakh hectares is the total area under cultivation in Karnataka, had the State recommended MSP accrued to farmers, farmers would have got more than Rs.5000 crore every year. That is the magnitude of losses suffered by the farmers. Coincidentally the C2 cost of production in Telangana is Rs.11031/Qtl and the State had recommended RS 16,547/Qtl as the MSP. Due to deliberately deflated costs and low MSP Telangana farmers suffer a loss of about Rs 30,000 crores annually.

T Yashavantha, State General Secretary of KPRS addressing the Convention said that the import policy of the BJP government is against cotton growers. Imports are carried out duty-free, without any restrictions and due to these policies farmers do not get remunerative price for their crop. As a result of this, cotton growers are incurring huge losses. He



demanded that at least ten thousand crore rupees should be allocated in the budget to ensure assured purchase of the produce of the farmers affected by the fall in prices in coming budget by the newly elected State Government. Multinational companies are conducting research to their advantage and benefit .There is no farmer-centric research. All agricultural technology related research should take place in the public domain. He said that privatisation of research is a threat to the country’s self-reliance.

The Convention decided to launch united struggles and fight for remunerative prices and protection of their interests. It demanded a MSP of not less than Rs.12,000 per quintal and adequate funding for public sector research . It also pointed to the huge problem of spurious seeds and called for strong deterrent action against the manufacturers and sellers of fake cotton seeds. The Convention unanimously passed a resolution demanding that the black marketing of cotton seeds and creation of artificial scarcity by traders should be severely dealt with and their licenses should be cancelled. It called for strict enforcement of the laws governing the sale, distribution and production of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides to stop sub-standard inputs. A protest at district

and taluk centres in cotton-growing areas was called on 3rd July,2023 demanding implementation of the demands . K P R S activists also picketed Seed traders who were charging exorbitant rates and also creating artificial scarcity. □

STATE LEVEL POLITICAL SCHOOLING HELPS PLANNING AND CONSOLIDATION

- P Krishnaprasad

After the process of the completion of the membership for 2022-23 by 30 May 2023, one of the major tasks undertaken by the AIKS CKC was ensuring political schooling at the state level. This is to be followed by schools at district, tehsil and village level. There are tangible results in this regard. The schooling helps to improve the political understanding of the main activists at all levels of the peasant movement in the respective states. The two major aspects given a special thrust in these schools are: 1. Politically, combating the anti-peasant, pro-corporate, communal, Manuwadi and fascistic Modi-led BJP-RSS government, 2. Organisationally, concentrating on expansion of AIKS membership and on village level units and their regular activities.

The Rajasthan School was held from 10-12 June 2023 at Bhadra Tehsil of Hanumangarh district. 199 delegates attended. Vijoo Krishnan, Amra Ram, Badal Saroj, Dr. Vikas Rawal and Chhaganlal Chowdhary took the classes.

In Madhya Pradesh, a three-day school was organized at Bhopal from 7-9 July 2023. The school was attended by 118 delegates, including 55 Adivasis and 18 women. Dr Ashok Dhawale, Dr Vikas Rawal, Badal Saroj, Chhaganlal Chowdhary, Jaswinder Singh and Akhilesh Yadav took the classes. The school was appreciated by all and it planned the steady expansion of the organisation.

The Uttar Pradesh school was held on 8-10 July at Chitrakoot in the Bundelkhand region. The classes were taken by Dr Ashok Dhawale, P Krishnaprasad, Badal Saroj, Dr Vikas Rawal and Mukut Singh. 76 activists



participated in the school. The school helped to inspire the cadres and a plan of district level schools will be completed by 15 September. The thrust on crop wise federations was discussed.

The Haryana school was from 28-30 July at Rohtak. This school was attended by 56 activists, including three women. The classes were taken by Dr Vijoo Krishnan, Dr Ashok Dhawale, P Krishnaprasad, Badal Saroj, Inderjit Singh and Sumit Singh. A plan of expanding the base of the organisation by concentrating on village level activities and strengthening mass-based struggles was adopted.

Kerala organized its two-day school on 18-19 July at Charalkunnu camp site in Pathanamthitta. The school was attended by 184 activists including 35 women. S Ramachandran Pillai, Govindan Master, T M Thomas Isaac, V Karthikeyan Nair and Valsan Panoli took the classes. AIKS JS and Tripura state secretary Pabitra Kar also attended the camp and received the amount of Rs. 20,34,979 as the solidarity fund through mass collection at tehsil level to assist the farmers of Tripura facing the brunt of attacks unleashed by the BJP-RSS combine. The main thrust of the school was on addressing the acute agrarian crisis in Kerala caused by the attacks of the neo-liberal policies of the Centre. □

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