



Peasants' Struggle

JANUARY - FEBRUARY
2024

PHOTO: PUBLIC MEETING IN KURNOOL
ANDHRA PRADESH ON OCCASION OF
**ALL INDIA KISAN
COUNCIL MEETING
15-17 DECEMBER 2023**



**SKM-CTU NATIONWIDE
MAHAPADAVS DISPLAY
WORKER-PEASANT UNITY IN ACTION**

ASHOK DHAWALE

**UNITED STRUGGLES:
A POSITIVE TREND TO BROADEN THE
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**MS SWAMINATHAN:
AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR
TO INDIA'S AGRICULTURE**

VENKATESH ATHREYA

Mazdoor Kisan Mahapadav 26-28 November 2023



Chandigarh, Punjab



Chennai, Tamilnadu



Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

THE JOURNAL OF AIKS

January - February 2024

Contents**Editor****Dr. Ashok Dhawale****Working Editor****Dr. Vijoo Krishnan****Editorial Board Members****Hannan Mollah****P. Krishnaprasad****Prof. Vikas Rawal****Manoj Kumar****Nidheesh J Villatt****Shubhojeet Dey****ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA****36, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla****Lane (Canning Lane)****New Delhi -110001****Tele: 011-23782890****Website:kisansabha.org****E-mail: psksaiks@gmail.com****kisansabha@gmail.com**

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Editorial

Let us Confront the Formidable Challenges of 2024 with Unity and Determination!

'Peasants' *Struggle*' wishes all its readers a very happy and progressive New Year 2024! To really make it so, we will have to bend all our energies to combat the dark forces of reaction.

The year 2023 was full of severe challenges, many of which have been carried over into 2024.

For several months, the world has witnessed the criminal genocide of thousands of Palestinian children, women and men at the hands of Zionist Israel, which is cynically backed by the imperialist powers like USA, Britain, France, and Germany. The Zionist-Hindutva axis has made India under Modi to shamelessly tilt towards Israel and abandon the just cause of Palestine.

Within India, the challenges are equally formidable. In the last ten years of its infamous rule, the RSS-led BJP central government has launched unprecedented attacks on the working class and the peasantry, on youth, students and women, on Dalits, Adivasis, and Backwards, on Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs – and also on the overwhelming mass of Hindus themselves!

These attacks are in the form of price rise, unemployment, poverty and hunger. They are in the form of dwindling real wages of workers and agricultural labourers, and the refusal to give a legal guarantee of remunerative prices and a loan waiver to farmers. The attacks are also in the form of increased atrocities on all socially oppressed sections of society.

But the four biggest and most fundamental attacks of the RSS-BJP regime are: selling off the country to a handful of crony corporates like the Adanis and the Ambanis; dividing the country on the basis of communal and caste hatred and polarisation, just as the British rulers did with their notorious policy of 'Divide and Rule'; assaulting democracy and hounding political and journalistic opponents with weapons like jail under UAPA, selected enquiries by central agencies like the ED, CBI, IT, and the unprecedented suspension of 146 MPs from Parliament; and, finally, a grave assault on the Constitution of India itself and on all its basic features.

Large sections of the servile Godi media have already caved in to the powers that be. Instead of speaking truth to power, as true journalism does, they have crawled when asked to bend. Honourable exceptions like *NewsClick*, *The Wire* and others are being selectively targeted. *NewsClick* founder Prabir Purkayastha has been arrested under UAPA on trumped-up charges, and the bank accounts of *NewsClick* have been frozen. *Peasants' Struggle* boldly places on record that it was *NewsClick* among others which extensively and excellently covered the one-year long iconic SKM farmers' struggle against the three hated Farm Laws of the Modi regime.

Unfortunately, the most shocking instance has been that of the Supreme Court of India. Its two recent judgements – one upholding the abrogation of Article 370 and the dismantling of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the other effectively letting Gautam Adani off the hook in the Adani-Hindenburg case are extremely disturbing, to say the least. The Supreme Court could salvage only a small part of its credibility by its verdict in the Bilkis Bano case.

The crucial Lok Sabha elections, which will decide the future of India, are due soon. Struggles by peasants, workers, women, youth and students are on the rise. They will culminate in the countrywide district Tractor Parades on 26 January, and the Rural Bharat Bandh and Industrial Strike on 16 February 2024. These struggles must be cemented by a massive political-ideological battle, and by the unity of all Left, democratic and secular forces in India, to resoundingly defeat the RSS-BJP and to bring forth a new regime with alternative policies!

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SKM-CTU NATIONWIDE MAHAPADAVS DISPLAY WORKER-PEASANT UNITY IN ACTION

- Ashok Dhawale



It was a truly historic and unprecedented manifestation of worker-peasant unity in action. Such a widespread nationwide struggle with the participation of such a broad spectrum of trade unions and peasant organisations had never been seen in India since Independence.

Historic and Unprecedented Action

Tens of thousands of workers, peasants and agricultural labourers thronged the capitals of almost all states in the country for three days from November 26 to 28, 2023, in actions that ranged from Mahapadavs (sit-in struggles) to rallies to marches to the Raj Bhawans (Governors' mansions). Women, youth and students joined the struggle in huge numbers. People of all religions, castes, languages, and regions took part in this massive struggle.

Although tens of thousands of people joined the Mahapadavs, like the historic year-long Delhi Farmers' Struggle of 2020-21, this

struggle too remained peaceful across the country with the highest degree of self-discipline and determination.

Many of the Mahapadav sites were artistically decorated with pictures, paintings, cartoons, and quotations of struggle. The struggle sites were replete with bunting, banners, placards and flags. Almost all the colours were represented in the flags of the numerous peasant and worker organisations – red, green, yellow, gold, brown, blue, black, white – all except saffron!

The numbers grew with every passing day from November 26, and reached their climax on November 28. Thousands of farmers and workers cooked food for the day, and stayed the night in the tractor trolleys or in makeshift tents in the Mahapadav site. That, too, was a sight to behold, capture, and cherish.

There was massive mass participation in

the state capitals including Chandigarh, Panchakula, Shimla, Dehradun, Srinagar, Jammu, Delhi, Lucknow, Patna, Ranchi, Kolkata, Guwahati, Agartala, Bhubaneswar, Vijayawada, Chennai, Bengaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and even Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The only exceptions were the state assembly election-going states and a few states in the north east. In some states, additional actions also took place up to the district and even the tehsil levels.

Various national and state level leaders of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Central Trade Unions and Federations (CTU) attended and addressed the Mahapadavs in different state capitals. Their names are too numerous to mention here. Many intellectuals, artistes and eminent personalities attended the mass protest actions and greeted the participants

While all the constituent organisations of the SKM and CTU with a few exceptions tried to mobilise their best, particular mention must be made of the massive countrywide mobilization of the CITU, AIKS, and AIAWU, all of whom have an all India sweep covering several states. The AIDWA, DYFI and SFI also came forward in all states with full solidarity.

The SKM and CTU warmly congratulated all the workers and farmers who made these Mahapadavs a grand success. In their joint statement, they said, “This action will be marked in history as a bold step to save the country from the twin danger of the corporate and communal menace being patronised by the Modi Government.” The SKM and CTU warned that there will be more determined massive, united struggles on the demands of the people.

The call for the November struggle was given in the first historic, nationwide, united worker-peasant convention in Independent India held at the Talkatora Indoor Stadium in Delhi on August 24, 2023, organized by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Central Trade Unions (CTU). Over 7,000 workers and peasants attended it. The day of the Delhi Convention, August 24, was also the Birth Anniversary of Martyr Shivram Hari Rajguru, who hailed from Pune district in Maharashtra, and who courageously faced the British gallows along with two other immortal martyrs, Bhagat Singh and Sukhdev Thapar, on March 23, 1931.

Significance of the Struggle

This worker-peasant struggle targeted the corporate-communal central government of the BJP-RSS led by Narendra Modi, and the whole gamut of its disastrous policies. The first day of this countrywide struggle, 26 November, marked three historic events.

The first was the beginning of the unprecedented SKM-led farmers’ struggle on the Delhi borders from November 26, 2020 against the three anti-farmer, anti-people and pro-corporate Farm Laws that were foisted in a most authoritarian manner by the Modi-led BJP central government. Lakhs of farmers took part in this massive struggle which spread all over the country, and continued unabated for one year and fifteen days, i.e. 380 days till it was suspended on December 11, 2021. It resulted in a magnificent victory. The Modi regime had to surrender and the three hated Farm Laws were repealed. However, nearly 750 farmers were martyred in this year-long struggle.

The second was the All India Strike called

by the CTU on the same day as the farmers' struggle began, again on November 26, 2020. Over 20 crore workers and employees, both organised and unorganised, took part in this huge strike action. This day also marked worker-peasant unity in action.

The third was that it was Constitution Day. It was on November 26, 1949 that the Constituent Assembly, after intensive deliberations, adopted the Constitution of India, all the basic principles of which are today under grave threat from the BJP-RSS regime.

November 28, the last day of this struggle, was the death anniversary of one of the foremost champions of the peasantry and of social justice in India, Mahatma Jotirao Phule. It was Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar who acknowledged that Mahatma Phule was one of his gurus.

Concerted preparations were in progress for months to make these Mahapadav actions a great success in all states. Joint worker-peasant conventions and meetings were held

in almost all states, and even in many districts. Lakhs of leaflets were distributed in innumerable public meetings, big and small. The SKM-CTU prepared, and the Delhi Convention adopted, a comprehensive 21-point Charter of Demands which was popularised all over India. A massive social media campaign was also conducted nationwide.

Combating the Agrarian Crisis

For rural India, the SKM concentrated on those demands which are the burning issues of the peasantry and which will directly help to ameliorate the deep and chronic agrarian crisis. This crisis has further intensified in the last three decades because of the neo-liberal policies followed by successive central governments. But the present Modi government is by far the worst in this regard.

There are two glaring symptoms of the agrarian crisis in India today. The first is the shocking suicides of over 4 lakh farmers in the country in the last 30 years, mainly due to



indebtedness. Of these over 1 lakh farmers were forced to commit suicide in the last 10 years of the Modi regime alone. Farming has become unremunerative and hazardous. Lakhs of farmers have been forced to sell off their land to reduce their debt, and to join the ranks of the landless.

The second symptom is the rapidly growing hunger in the country. The Global Hunger Index is an accurate pointer to this. In 2014, when the Modi regime came to power, India ranked 55 out of 120 countries in this index. Today in 2023, India has sharply slid down to 111 out of 125 countries. Which means that only 14 countries in the world, which are quite small in population, are hungrier than India. The deaths of thousands of Adivasi and Dalit children per year in some states due to starvation and malnutrition continue unabated. The big increase in anaemia, especially among women and children, is also a pointer to this malnutrition.

Burning Demands of the Peasantry

It is in this background that the SKM highlighted certain burning demands of the peasantry.

The first demand, which was also forcefully raised in the 2020-21 Delhi blockade, was for a legal guarantee of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) at one and a half times the comprehensive cost of production (C2 + 50%). This was one of the fundamental recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) that was chaired by the renowned agro-scientist Dr M S Swaminathan. Without this principle being accepted and implemented, there can be no relief in the agrarian crisis.

Allied to this is the crucial issue of sharply

bringing down the cost of production by reduction in the astronomical price of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, diesel, power, and water. This can be done only by strict regulation and control over the domestic and foreign corporate lobby, increase in input subsidy, cutting the abominable central government excise duty on diesel, petrol, and gas, and other measures.

The BJP election manifesto in 2014 had promised MSP as above, but like all its other promises, this too turned out to be a 'jumla'. In fact, the very next year, in February 2015, the BJP government shamelessly submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court, in which it said that implementing its own MSP promise was not possible because "it would distort the market."

The second key demand of the struggle was the complete liberation from debt of the peasantry and agricultural workers. This can only be done through a comprehensive loan waiver scheme by the central government. Two central governments had earlier granted a partial loan waiver to the peasantry - the V P Singh-led National Front government in 1990, and the Manmohan Singh-led UPA-1 government in 2008. The Modi government has point-blank refused to give a peasant loan waiver in the last 10 years. On the contrary, it has written off loans worth over Rs 15 lakh crore to its handful of crony corporates in this period.

The third major demand was for a comprehensive crop insurance scheme to fully protect the peasantry against natural calamities like drought, floods, hailstorms, unseasonal rains, and so on. These calamities are greatly intensifying due to climate change and global warming. But the present Prime Minister Fasal

Bima Yojana (PMFBY) is worse than useless, because all available data proves that it helps the corporate insurance companies to amass massive profits, and harms the farmers in distress by denying them compensation for crop damages.

The fourth important issue that was highlighted was that of a substantial monthly pension to both farmers and agricultural workers.

Other vital rural issues that were raised in this struggle were the expansion of MGNREGA so as to double the days of work and triple the wages paid to agricultural workers; stringent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) to vest forest land in the names of the Adivasis who have been cultivating it for generations; other issues concerning land rights and land acquisition; withdrawal of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill and the cancellation of the anti-farmer pre-paid smart meters scheme which would sharply raise electricity bills; key issues concerning expansion of irrigation; strengthening the public distribution system (PDS) to ensure food security to all; and so on.

Working Class and Peoples' Demands

Apart from peasant demands, this struggle of course took up the burning demands of the working class like a National Minimum Wage of Rs 26,000 per month, abolition of the contract and casual system, repeal of the four Labour Codes, reversion to the old pension scheme, government employee status and resultant benefits to all scheme workers, filling up of all government vacant posts, an end to privatisation and to the National Monetisation Pipeline.

This struggle also took up issues of the

common people, prominent among which were the back-breaking price rise and the escalating unemployment, along with key demands concerning education, health, housing and so on.

Vital Issues Flagged

One vital issue that was flagged was the glaring disparities in the country. The alarming inequality in India is captured by the Oxfam 2023 Report, which says that 1 per cent of the richest Indians own 40 per cent of the wealth of the country, 10 per cent of the richest own 72 per cent of its wealth, and the poorest 50 per cent of the population (meaning 70 crore people) owns just 3 per cent of the wealth of the country. It is this entire trajectory that must be thrown out lock, stock and barrel, by both a regime change and also a policy change.

Above all, the November 26-28 nationwide united struggle of lakhs of workers and peasants vowed to fight tooth and nail to defeat the Modi-led BJP-RSS government which is out to:

1. Sell the country at a pittance to domestic and foreign corporates like Adani, Ambani and others through its shameless privatisation drive;

2. Break the country and the unity of its people by using the divisive elements of religion, caste, region, and language, just as the British rulers had done;

3. Subvert the Constitution and dynamite its basic features of sovereignty, democracy, secularism, and federalism. An undeclared Emergency is today the order of the day.

There is no doubt that the November 26-28 struggle by the workers and peasants of India has and will play a major role in saving India and then in changing India for the better. □

UNITED STRUGGLES: A POSITIVE TREND TO BROADEN THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

- Hannan Mollah

A new trend in democratic struggles has been developing since the last decade. Embracing forces willing to join the struggle against a common enemy should not be ignored and the principle of issue-based larger united struggles should be adopted. The correctness of this trend has emerged from the experience of struggles. Earlier united struggles were limited to a few like-minded organisations and so they produced only limited results.

But after the Narendra Modi-led NDA government came to power at the Centre, the nature of the assault against the democratic movement began changing. The authoritarian attacks against the democratic, social, economic, political, and cultural rights of the common people, especially the toiling masses, intensified. All democratic organisations and pluralist societies started to experience this new trend of the brutality of administration.

It was the farmers of the country who tested this new tactic of united struggles first in a larger sense. Their primary means of livelihood

was land. Since British imperialist rule in India, this right was violated. By the 1894 Land Acquisition Act, the collectors had the power to take any amount of land from the farmers for the use of governments and private capitalists. Farmers had no say in this and there was no question of compensation.

The All India Kisan Sabha since its formation in 1936 demanded the end of colonial and capitalist exploitation. There were many struggles organised but they were intensified after neo-liberal policies were adopted. During the second term of the UPA government, a new law titled LARR Act 2013 was adopted to replace the 1894 Land Acquisition Act, in which some of the farmers' rights were recognized.

However, after coming to power, Narendra Modi brought in the Land Acquisition Ordinance and took away those rights for farmers in 2014. This was the occasion when all farmers' organisations understood the need to fight against the current fascistic regime unitedly. AIKS took the initiative to unite



farmers and social organisations and the first broad platform of farmers' organisations of different shades, despite their many differences, even political and ideological, was formed when they came together on issue-based unity demanding the withdrawal of the anti-farmer ordinance. This platform was called the Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA). Several months of the united movement of more than 50 to 75 organisations ultimately defeated the Modi government, forcing it to withdraw the draconian ordinance. It marked the first defeat of the authoritarian, arrogant and anti-democratic regime, at the hands of farmers.

These events positively changed the trajectory of the movement and encouraged further united struggles. The farmers' organisations demanded MSP for all crops as per the Swaminathan Commission Report and a one-time loan waiver for all farmers. Many more organisations joined, and a new larger platform called the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) was formed in which more than 250 organisations joined. Farmers' organisations with different ideological persuasions joined and built up a united struggle on these two common demands. Issue-based unity was the spine of this struggle.

In the meantime, new attacks came during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the darkness of midnight, the Modi regime brought three draconian ordinances challenging the existence of the farmers' economy. The fascistic regime's purpose was to change farmer-based agriculture into corporate-based agriculture. Farmers understood the danger and built a massive struggle led by AIKSCC against this. AIKSCC called for a national convention, in which 250 new organisations joined.

As the demands of the farmers' organisations were the same, we decided to

fight together against the common enemy. A new broad platform - Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) was formed. Never in this country was such a multi-coloured, multi-ideological platform against a common enemy formed and 500 organisations started joint struggles. The rest is history and we saw how united and determined issue-based struggles can defeat any enemy despite its strength.

The SKM added some new demands in its long struggle and gheraoed the national capital for 380 days, faced all types of attacks and atrocities, but finally forced the Modi regime to withdraw those anti-farmer, pro-corporate, anti-national Acts. This was his second defeat at the hands of farmers. But the regime was silent about our other demands such as MSP at C2+50% rate, guaranteed procurement, loan waiver, withdrawal of electricity bill, compensation to 750 martyrs' families, withdrawal of the 4,600 false cases against farmers, and punishment to the killers of the Lakhimpur Kheri farmers, led by BJP's Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teni.

The peasants were very happy with the unprecedented victory and celebrated it, but did not end the gherao until the other demands were met. The government gave the SKM a written assurance, a letter saying they would consider these demands. Only then did the SKM suspend the movement, declaring that if the government went back on its assurances, the struggle would restart.

But the nature of the corporate, communal, fascistic, anti-farmer government and its PM was again exposed with its betrayal. As two years have passed, the government has still not implemented our demands. The SKM general body met several times, discussed it, and decided to resume the struggle at the All India level.

The SKM wrote several reminders to the

government, sent as many as 76 memoranda to the President of India through District Collectors and Governors, and organized many protest programmes at the block, district, and state levels. The SKM organised a huge Mahapanchayat at the Ramlila Ground in Delhi. But the insensitive anti-farmer government remained silent to serve the interests of its masters, Adani, Ambani, and other corporates, and refused to consider demands.

Finally, the SKM decided to build a wider movement. The last movement was Delhi-centric but now it would spread to the whole country, to make it pan India. On 3 October, a BJP-RSS criminal killed 4 farmers and one journalist at Lakhimpur Kheri. October 3 would be observed as a Black Day all over India and effigies of Modi and Teni would be burnt. After that, this campaign would be intensified and spread to the village levels and then massive Mahapadavs would be organized in all 30 state capitals before all the Governors, who are the agents of Central government, for 75 hours, on 26, 27, and 28 November 2023. This would mark a historic turn of the Kisan movement to warn the government and spread the movement at the national level.

All state-level SKM units would mobilize massive numbers of peasants at their respective state capitals. To facilitate this, SKM decided to organise state-level SKM conventions in all states. All the members of SKM at the state level joined these conventions and planned their state-level charter of demands, their state-level campaigns up to village level, and mobilize maximum numbers in their state capital for the three-day Mahapadav. A state-level coordination committee was formed to strengthen the movement.

During this long movement, another historic development emerged: the phenomenon of intensified worker-peasant

unity. During the entire Delhi farmers' struggle, all ten Central Trade Unions had extended unconditional support to our struggle and workers physically participated in all rallies, protests, Rasta Roko, Rail Roko, Bharat Bandh, etc. Initially, there were some difficulties but in course of time, SKM accepted principally the need for joint struggle of peasants and workers. Workers, peasants and agricultural workers are the producing classes. They are all under attack by the Modi government. Like the three Farm Acts, the government also enacted four draconian Labour Codes to attack the workers to serve its capitalist masters. Hence, workers and farmers organisations supported each other's struggles and demands.

To strengthen this process, a Joint National Convention of Farmers and Workers was held at Talkatora Stadium, Delhi, on 24 August 2023. It was a massive convention where all leaders of SKM and CTU spoke and a resolution and joint charter of demands was unanimously passed. It was decided to translate this into all languages and campaign up to the village level. It was unanimously decided to observe 3 October as Black Day and organise Mahapadav at all state capitals from 26-28 November 2023, in which workers will also participate. In the future also, SKM and CTU will jointly organise struggles or synchronize the struggles in a coordinated manner.

The experience of state SKM conventions was very exciting and remarkable. All the state leaders gave it due importance. They contacted each other to try to reach out to organisations that were not part of SKM earlier and planned state conventions. Each organisation tried to mobilize their delegates in good numbers and they participated enthusiastically.

The role of the AIKS in all states in organizing these conventions was remarkable. It took the initiative, contacted other

organisations, organised meetings for preparation, and mobilized a large number of delegates. A healthy relationship of camaraderie among all organisations was noted. All India Agricultural Workers Union (AIAWU) also took part in most of these conventions. All delegates enthusiastically supported the resolutions and were happy with the participation of the working class. Many trade union leaders in states also attended the conventions. A message of the importance of worker-peasant unity reached the states and was greatly appreciated.

Attendance at these conventions was very encouraging. From 500 to 1200 delegates took part very enthusiastically in each, with their organization's badges and common delegate cards. The conventions were conducted democratically. Each organisation had one member in the Presidium and one of their members spoke at the conventions. The largest gathering was in Bihar and big conventions were held in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, and Maharashtra. Assam was exceptionally good. Tripura, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Kerala, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand conventions were also well attended. Some more state conventions are planned and will be held soon.

Through these conventions, the unity among the lower-level members of SKM constituents was strengthened and united actions at the state level were organised in a better way. The importance of worker-peasant unity and united actions was strengthened. Still, there is some resistance and indifference among some organisations and in their lower units, which was reduced through these joint conventions. Our organisation has a major role in building such unity. It is a long-term ideological struggle too. Therefore, we have to work hard to unite all on these issues. It is a

long-term struggle to bring change in the social order and in that struggle maximum forces have to be mobilized. We have to play that historic role. Along with unifying all farmers, agricultural workers and trade unions, we have to mobilize other social forces such as women, students, youth, tribals, dalits, employees, and all such masses who are suffering under the corporate communal loot and exploitation.

Finally, we have to remember that we are working to strengthen the class struggle of the exploited people against the exploiters - landlords, capitalists, and imperialist forces. Along with our independent struggle to organise and mobilize the peasantry, we have to build up united struggles of all sections of exploited people.

We sincerely started this process to unite peasants, workers, agricultural workers, and the class organisations of these sections. After several meetings of AIKS, AIAWU, and CITU at the national level for the last five years, we have succeeded to some extent. Our class organisations had many meetings at the state level and grassroot level. We had many successful joint programmes at the national and state levels. This is the basis of united struggle.

On this basis, other organisations should be mobilized. Along with that, we have to bring together the toiling masses of workers-peasants-agricultural workers, who are still working under many other organisations of different ideological persuasions. There is no easy way to unite them other than to launch united struggles in defense of their interests. Hence, we need the broadest possible united struggle against the common enemies. To that end, worker-peasant unity is the first step which we are working on. We have to advance that struggle for the cause of change in the social order, in favour of the exploited people. □

WOMEN OF VACHATHI SHINE BRIGHTLY

The Vachathi Incident and the Struggle for Justice

-Vijoo Krishnan



The colonial mentality of branding the most deprived and oppressed people as criminal tribes, harassment and arrests for any crime in the vicinity is not unheard of; rather it continues to be the order of the day. Stories of atrocities and sexual assault by personnel in uniform, especially by forest officials, police and even paramilitary forces are not rare. What unfolded in Vachathi is the story of the tribal people in different parts of India even 75 years after independence. On 20th June, 1992 in the small hamlet of Vachathi on the foothills of the Sitheri hills near Harur in Dharmapuri district of Tamilnadu a large contingent of about 300 persons belonging to the forest, revenue and police department unleashed the worst forms of repression on the tribal women, men, children and the aged. Armed with rifles and lathis they wreaked unimaginable assault on the people, destroyed houses, foodgrains and provisions. Even the

village well that provided drinking water was also not spared; diesel and remains of animals were dumped into it. The officials including the “elite” Indian Forest Service cadre who had ransacked the village had come on the pretext of finding smuggled sandalwood. Their bestiality did not stop either with the destruction unleashed on the village or the brutal attack on the innocent villagers. They dragged 18 women, including school-going children, and gang-raped them.

The outside world came to know of the incident only days later. It was only on 14th July, 1992 that a team including the then General Secretary of Tamilnadu Tribal Association (TNTA) and present Vice President of All India Kisan Sabha P.Shanmugham along with Basha John, then President of the TNTA, Ex-MLA of Harur M.Annamalai, Assistant Secretary of TNTA

N.Krishnamurthy, Harur Kisan Sabha Secretary H.R.Ganeshan, CPI(M) Harur Taluk Secretary C,Vishwanathan and Ponnuswamy, Secretary of TNTA, Sitheri Hills visited the village. The village was engulfed in a deafening silence and bereft of any signs of life, literally echoing the silence of a graveyard. The red flag in their hands gave the confidence and courage for the villagers hiding in the hills to come and narrate their horror to the team. In all 217 villagers including 94 women and 28 children were illegally detained at the Forest Range Office in Harur. The torture was continued throughout the night. The team met the women and other villagers lodged in the Salem Jail and made arrangements to take them out on bail. Leader of AIKS and TNTA Dilli Babu who was one of the leaders of the struggle for justice for the people of Vachathi was also elected twice to the Tamilnadu Assembly from Harur constituency in which the village falls.

The incident did not find any coverage initially in the media except for the CPI(M) organ Theekkathir. The Chief Minister of the State, J.Jayalalitha dismissed the charges as concocted, made to defame the AIADMK Government. The Minister of Forests K.A.Sengottaiyan made insensitive comments claiming that women of Vachathi were lying. AIDWA responded in a timely manner by holding a protest in Chennai including the women of Vachathi who had been sexually assaulted. The DMK that later formed the Government also was not forthcoming to deliver justice to the victims. A lower Court dismissed the charges by exhibiting clear class bias in favour of the perpetrators of the crime, prejudice and utter contempt for the tribal people. The Judge, a woman, claimed that it was unbelievable that highly educated

Government employees would commit such a crime. The TNTA, AIKS, AIDWA and CPI(M) had many protests seeking an inquiry. P.Shanmugham who was also the then State Secretary of Tamilnadu Vivasayigal Sangham affiliated to the AIKS sat on an indefinite hunger-strike and many people thronged to the protest site. Certain newspapers like the Indian Express, the Hindu also took note of the incident and reported on the matter. On 30th July, 1992 the TNTA filed a Public Interest Litigation before the Madras High Court after the police refused to file an FIR in the case. Leader of AIDWA Mythili Sivaraman also prepared a fact-finding report and along with AIDWA played a significant role in mobilising women as well as the masses for getting justice to the people of Vachathi. This report was given by AIDWA to the then Regional Director of the National Commission of SC and ST, Bhamathi, IAS. She visited Vachathi and collected more details which was sent to the National SC/ST Commission. CPI(M) Secretary and member of Rajya Sabha Nallasivan filed a petition in the Supreme Court on 3rd September, 1992. In a swift action, the Supreme Court within 4 days passed an order transferring the petition to the Madras High Court stating that the matter should be heard on an urgent basis. A single member Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Madras High Court with Bhamathi heading it. On the basis of her Report the Court took note of the prima facie case of violation of Human Rights and transferred the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation in 1995.

After nearly 20 years of political and legal struggle led by the CPI-M, Kisan Sabha, TNTA, AIDWA, Class and Mass Organisations in September, 2011 the designated trial court



sentenced all the 215 surviving persons of the 269 accused in the case while finding the entire lot guilty and convicting them under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and 17 personnel of the Forest Department for rape. Among the accused were 155 forest personnel, 108 police personnel, 6 revenue personnel, including four Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers. The district and sessions court found 215 government officials and employees guilty and handed down prison terms ranging from two years to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. Even 54 accused who died were pronounced guilty. Four of the guilty were officers of the Indian Forest Service of whom M.Harikrishnan, the first accused was formerly the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests. Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests P.Muthaiyan, S.Balaji, District Forest Officer and L.Nathan, Conservator of Forests were the other IFS Officers. The officials challenged this judgement.

The brave Adivasi women of Vachathi, and their relentless struggle for justice after more than three tortuous decades emerged victorious when the Madras High Court on 29th September, 2023 upheld the earlier judgement

and also enhanced the compensation to the victims to 10 lakh each and a Government job for a family member. The Court also ordered stringent action against the then Collector, Superintendent of Police and District Forest Officer of Dharmapuri District. The eighteen women including children who suffered the most brutal violence and gang rape at the hands of police, forest and revenue personnel fought under the red flag to create history and won a rare judgement uncommon in the annals of legal history and especially in cases of sexual violence on women. The role of the CPI(M), TNTA, Kisan Sabha, AIDWA and other organisations, the lawyers who fought the case (senior lawyers R.Vaigai, NGR Prasad and advocates G.Chamkiraj, K.Elango and K.Subburam), certain upright officers who stood on the side of justice like the Jail superintendent Lalitha Bai, the CBI investigating officer Jagannathan have all contributed to this victory. Paranthayi, one of the brave women of Vachathi emphatically stated that the truth when she said it was the red flag and only the red flag that gave them the courage to fight the powerful uniformed personnel and the Governments. Paranthayi,

Selvi, Jaya, Poongothai and other women could not be cowed down by threats and the might of the State. They firmly held the red flag that had instilled hope and confidence after the tortuous experience they suffered three decades ago and continue to mobilise people under the red flag for their rights to this day. The brave women of Vachathi refused to be confined to silence in their homes as the perpetrators of the crime would have wanted them to be. A fight-back of a magnitude rarely seen in recent years was built with the help of the Communist Party, the Kisan Sabha and other mass organisations. The victory in the prolonged legal and political battle will undoubtedly further steel their resolve and inspire the younger generations. The book on their struggle by P. Shanmugham who was very much a part of the prolonged fight unravels the great saga.

A Judgment Unparalleled

Why is this a landmark judgement and a historic victory? This can be understood when we see the track record of such cases in India. In the last three decades since the Vachathi gang-rape case, there have been numerous instances where women have been at the receiving end of most brutal sexual violence perpetrated by people entrusted with ensuring law and order- police, forest personnel, revenue officials and even personnel of the armed forces as well as the paramilitary. In the common parlance such incidents are often referred to as the “protector” turning the “perpetrator”. The usual response of the State and the corporate media is to summarily dismiss any such charges and paint such charges as deliberate efforts to slur the image of our much exalted state machinery. State repression is unleashed on people who stand

with the survivors or the victims of such assault. Use of rape as a weapon against women has not been restricted to people in uniform but even mercenaries, caste armies, religious fanatics and mobs incited by them. These cases are in addition to the innumerable cases in a patriarchal society like ours, where sexual violence and rapes against women is a regular feature.

A year before the Vachathi incident on 23rd February, 1991 in two villages of Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir Kunan and Poshpora it was alleged that personnel of the Fourth Rajputana Rifles of the Indian Army cordoned off the two villages during an anti-insurgency operation and allegedly gangraped at least 23 women – with different estimates placing it at around 40 to even close to 80 women. The victims are yet to get justice. On 22nd September, 1992 Bhanwari Devi an Anganwadi worker from Bhateri, Rajasthan from a backward community was gang-raped by five men from the Gurjar community higher up in the caste hierarchy. Bhanwari Devi had attempted to stop a child marriage in the region and the accused perpetrated the crime as a reprisal against her action. The police treated her case in the most insensitive manner and on 15th November, 1995 the District and Sessions Court in Jaipur acquitted all the five perpetrators, dismissing the case. Although the nation-wide movement forced the State to appeal against the judgement, by 2007, fifteen years after the incident, the Rajasthan High Court held only one hearing and two of the accused were dead. The Courts observations similar to the observations of the first court in the Vachathi case were considered obnoxious by wide sections who have argued for an audit of pronouncements of Judges for

caste, class, religious or gender bias while considering their names for postings or promotions. In communal pogroms from the anti-Sikh carnage to the Gujarat genocide, from Surat to Muzaffarnagar, women have faced the worst forms of sexual assault and have not got justice.

In different incidents of massacre by caste armies like the Ranvir Sena in Bathani Tola (1996) and Lakshmanpur Bathe (1997) Shankarbigha (1999) in Bihar, women have had to suffer extreme sexual assaults. At Bathani Tola 21 Dalits, mostly women, children including infants were killed, at Lakshmanpur Bathe 58 Dalits and at Shankarbigha 81 Dalits including women and children were killed. An eyewitness account by a survivor of the Lakshmanpur Bathe carnage, Surajmani Devi mentioned the rape, mutilation of breasts, genitalia of five girls all below fifteen years. In this barbaric incident charges were made against 46 Ranvir Sena men; in 2010 April, 2010 the Additional District and Sessions Judge of the Patna Civil Court termed the incident a “stigma on civil society and rarest of rare cases of brutality” and sentenced 16 men to death and 10 to life imprisonment for the massacre. However, in 2013 the Patna High Court acquitted all 26 perpetrators of the crime citing lack of evidence.

In another incident of the armed forces complicit, in 2004 on 11th of July there was the gruesome torture, rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama in Manipur by the members of the paramilitary unit, 17th Assam Rifles. In this instance after massive protests and a legal battle a decade later in December 2014, the Supreme Court asked the Government to pay a compensation of Rs.10 lakh to Manorama’s family, but there was no

conviction and strong deterrent punishment for the perpetrators of the crime. Rape and sexual violence against women have been reported in many States, especially in those with counter-insurgency or anti-naxal operations, the most recent such allegations being in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh.

The Kandhmal case of the gang-rape of a nun in 2008 also saw the acquittal of a majority of the accused and the convicted were soon out on bail. In the recent cases at Kathua, Hathras and innumerable others it is only in rare instances like the gang-rape of Nirbhaya that the culprits were punished. On 15th August, 2022, when India celebrated its 75 years of Independence, 11 men convicted by a lower Court of gang-rape on Bilkis Bano were exonerated and given a public reception as though they were back after some heroic deed. The trauma of Bilkis Bano of the past two decades continues with the perpetrators of the crime going scot-free. Her resolute struggle shall get a big boost by what her sisters have achieved in Vachathi.

It is in the context of innumerable such cases that this judgement assumes unparalleled significance. The poor people of Vachathi took on the mighty State and the personnel and achieved victory against great odds. The struggle is an inspiration for all oppressed people and offers a ray of hope for all people who have faced such attacks. The alchemy of struggle transformed the women of Vachathi from victims to fighters and then into a message of hope for all those struggling against powerful oppressors. The message is clear: those tempered with the fire of struggle shall not wilt in the sun; they will shine brightly for generations to come.

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AIKS HOLDS WORKSHOP FOR HINDI STATES

- P Krishnaprasad

The Hindi states workshop organised by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) on August 25-26, 2023 at Harkishan Singh Surjeet Bhawan in New Delhi was a successful and encouraging initiative. It was envisaged as a workshop focusing on current political challenges and organisation. 86 leading AIKS activists from 15 states attended.

The workshop was planned in the context of the enthusiasm and growing struggles, especially in the Hindi Belt region, on genuine demands of the peasantry facing acute agrarian crisis. The important role of the AIKS in the historic and successful farmers struggle under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has generated hope and confidence among peasants, workers as well as all toiling sections. The slogan of worker-peasant unity has become meaningful to the people today.

The first-ever historic All India National Convention of the Central Trade Unions/Federations and the SKM at Talkatora Stadium in New Delhi held on August 24, has called for massive struggles in the entire year 2023. In order to undertake these vast responsibilities, the only weapon we can depend on is the organisation. Thus, strengthening and expanding the AIKS organisation up to the village level has become the most important task ahead.

Independent and United Struggles

The workshop was divided into five sessions of two hours each, including the question-answer sessions. The session on



‘independent and united issue-based struggles’ was conducted by AIKS president Ashok Dhawale. He explained the role of the peasantry in alliance with the working class, in forging widespread unity of the toiling people to overthrow the exploitative and suppressive rule of feudal and capitalist classes by giving examples from world history, including the revolutions in Russia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba. He illustrated how the AIKS, after its inception in 1936, played an independent and unique role in glorious struggles from Telangana Peasants Armed Struggle in Andhra Pradesh to Tebhaga struggle in West Bengal, Punnapra Vayalar in Kerala to Surma Valley in Assam, Gana Mukti Parishad in Tripura to Warli adivasis in Maharashtra, as part of the freedom struggle against the repressive colonial rule of British imperialism in India.

In recent history, the 17 days day-and-night mahapadav struggle in Sikar, Rajasthan in 2017, demanding loan waiver and MSP was an example of independent struggles held under the leadership of AIKS. It was a

pathbreaking struggle that inspired the peasantry across the country. The united 11-day farmers' strike of June 2017 and the independent kisan long march of 2018 in Maharashtra demanding MSP, loan waiver and implementation of FRA, caught the attention of the people of India as well as the world. These struggles were joined by many independent issue-based struggles in various states and attracted the peasantry across the country towards united struggles that emerged later.

The BJP-led union government suffered the first big blow in 2015 when a united platform-Bhumi Adhikar Andolan (BAA) was formed against the imposition of the Land Acquisition Ordinance. The peasantry unleashed vigorous struggles that succeeded in forcing the union government to step back from amending the Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act of 2013. When the three Farm Acts were imposed, the country witnessed the most militant, massive and determined united struggle of farmers that prolonged for 13 months under the banner of the SKM. These struggles were possible since they were issue-based struggles. Identifying the concrete issues relating to the livelihood of the peasantry and developing concrete demands out of them is the unique way to attract the peasant masses towards such struggles.

Ashok Dhawale concluded the session by stressing that both independent and united struggles were of crucial importance, and without a strong and vibrant organisation at the grassroots level no mass movement could be built. The widespread organisational network of the AIKS was instrumental in sustaining all these united struggles and giving an all-India scale to them.

The second session was on combating the dangerous influence of the communal and

casteist forces. This session was also conducted by Ashok Dhawale. The secular traditions of the people of India even during the feudal period were noted. The secular and united nature of the First War of Indian Independence of 1857 instigated the British imperialists to begin their notorious policy of "divide and rule" on the basis of religion, the formation of the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, and the eventual horrific holocaust of Partition.

Tracing the growth of communal forces like the RSS-BJP to the extent of them now dominating the all-India politics, and the scourge of caste and casteism in the context of the hated Manusmriti, he asserted that these will also be eventually countered through massive class struggles against the economic policies of imperialist globalisation pursued by the BJP-led union government, through a concerted political-ideological battle, and through the building of a strong organisation. The larger unity being forged under the CTUs-SKM platforms will help to forge unity of the secular forces and reach out to the villages and towns and cities across the country, convincingly explaining to the people who are our class enemies and class friends. The AIKS in coordination with the CITU and AIAWU will work among various sections of the people – especially minorities, adivasis, dalits and women – to eliminate the atmosphere of hatred, fear and isolation, and will instead strive to inculcate togetherness, love and care for each other.

Worker-Peasant Unity in the Context of Agrarian Crisis

The third session was on worker-peasant unity in the context of the agrarian crisis. This session was conducted by AIKS vice president Hannan Mollah. He said that the failure of the bourgeois-landlord ruling classes under the leadership of the big

capitalist class since independence to accomplish land reforms is a crucial factor that caused the present agrarian crisis in India. Though 6.30 crore acres of land was identified for distribution during the period of Jawaharlal Nehru, only 73 lakh acres were distributed. Even today 36 per cent of land is under the control of 0.8 per cent of landlords. At the same time more than 50 per cent of the peasantry is landless. He explained that land reforms is the major component of the democratic revolution and without that no true industrialisation could materialise.

This issue needs to be addressed through forging worker-peasant unity across the country that can develop as a political alliance. The first worker-peasant rally on September 5, 2018 and the second such rally on April 5, 2023 under the combined leadership of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU were conscious efforts in this direction. The non-parliamentary forms of struggle should have primacy in the process of political action and this is a unique achievement in the fight against the corporate-communal ruling combine led by the RSS-BJP, and backed by American imperialism. Such independent actions helped to create a conducive atmosphere to achieve larger unity of the central trade unions and kisan organisations.

The session on organisation was conducted jointly by AIKS general secretary Vijoo Krishnan and AIKS finance secretary P Krishnaprasad. The importance of membership and fund was dealt with by P Krishnaprasad. He stressed the need to advance the organisation in the Hindi belt in order to overcome the uneven character of the kisan organisation at the all India level. Vijoo Krishnan explained the need of focusing on village level activities based on the slogan 'kisan sabha in every village, every kisan in the kisan sabha' that was given by the 34th AIKS conference held in Haryana

in 2017. Independent functioning at the village level is crucial to checkmate the menace of the corporate-communal nexus and to save the livelihood of the people, and save the country. The importance of regular committee functioning, role of whole-time cadres, and political schooling were stressed.

In the context of the capitalist expansion in agriculture, crop-wise mobilisation is necessary to coin specific and concrete demands to unleash struggles in the fight against corporate exploitation of the peasantry. The demand for value addition, developing processing and marketing infrastructure under the producer cooperatives are some of the key components of the alternative agricultural policy framed by the AIKS and AIAWU. This is inevitable to counter the corporate domination on agriculture being promoted by the big capitalist class and to advance towards cooperative agriculture. Likewise, sector specific movements like tenant farmers, fishermen, dairy sector, women farmers etc would help to expand the kisan movement to reach the so far unreached sections and regions.

The workshop concluded with the understanding that similar workshops be organised at the state level, followed by district workshops where the AIKS has substantial strength and membership. Already, political schooling has been completed in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Jharkhand. The remaining states will conduct it in September-October 2023. In the review session, all those who participated appreciated this Hindi workshop initiative and proposed to hold annual all India workshops in order to train the leading cadres, and monitor the progress in fortifying and expanding the organisation. □

MS SWAMINATHAN: AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR TO INDIA'S AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Venkatesh Athreya

MS Swaminathan, a renowned agricultural scientist widely seen as the architect of India's "Green Revolution," passed away at the age of 98 years on 28 September 2023. Most unusually for a scientist working on the frontiers of research in agricultural sciences, Swaminathan was mourned widely, especially across rural India, by thousands of people, a large proportion of them being farmers and women. For a scientist who had been inspired by India's freedom struggle in general and M K Gandhi in



particular, this was especially appropriate and poignant. The more immediate reason for the resonance evoked in the minds of his rural mourners was, of course, the key role played by the powerful recommendation of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) chaired by Swaminathan that the minimum support price (MSP), at which the state must procure agricultural produce from farmers, should be 150% of total cultivation cost, including the imputed value of family labour, imputed rent for the land used in cultivation, and interest chargeable to investments made in capital assets used in crop production. The countrywide movement of farmers belonging to more than 500 farmers' organisations and united under the leadership of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) made the MSP recommendation of NCF one of their key demands in their historic and successful

struggle for the repeal of the three farm laws passed in the Indian Parliament that were seen by the movement as anti-farmer. In the process, the "Swaminathan formula for MSP" entered the consciousness of a large section of the Indian peasantry.

The Green Revolution

While the term "green revolution" is widely used, it has never been precisely defined. This has enabled different interpretations of green revolution which underpin the responses to green revolution ranging from the euphoric to the condemnatory. As Swaminathan reminds us, green revolution "... started as a small government programme called the High yielding varieties programme ..." It is important to recall the historical context that had given birth to the highyielding varieties programme (HYVP). When India attained

independence in 1947, its agriculture had more or less stagnated for nearly two centuries under British rule. The rate of growth of foodgrain output during the first five decades of the last century had been around 0.5% per annum and the per capita availability of foodgrain at independence was estimated to be a little less than 150 kg per year. Hardly one-sixth of the area cultivated was irrigated. Output per acre was quite low. Between 1947 and 1965, there was an improvement with the rate of growth of output at 3% per annum exceeding that of the population at 2.1%

The increase in output that occurred was partly on account of more area being brought under the plough following limited land reforms (which did not break the back of feudal landlordism but led to greater security of tenure for at least the better-off sections of the tenants) and partly because of the expansion of areas under irrigation (made possible by public investments in irrigation and power). While this meant that per capita foodgrain output had risen, the margin between foodgrain output and requirements remained small and precarious, especially given the dependence on monsoons. Two successive droughts led to a sharp decline in foodgrain availability in the mid-1960s, and the need to increase foodgrain output substantially as soon as possible became obvious. Given the inability/political unwillingness of the Indian state to carry out radical land reforms, which would have both brought larger areas under cultivation and enthused those gaining from land redistribution and rent reduction/abolition to invest in farming and thus helped enhance food grain output, the state turned to a primarily technology-led route to increase food grain output in the short and the medium term. The

role of Swaminathan and his team in delivering the breakthrough in yields of grain, first of wheat and then of rice, was critical to the success of the “new agricultural strategy” initiated in the 1960s. His role in this regard, on a global scale, was recognised by Norman Borlaug (who won the Nobel Prize for peace in recognition of his role in substantially enhancing wheat yields through agricultural research) when he acknowledged in a letter to Swaminathan that,

to you Dr Swaminathan, a great deal of the credit must go for first recognising the potential value of the Mexican wheat dwarfs. Had this not occurred, it is quite possible that there would not have been a Green Revolution in Asia. (Kesavan and Iyer 2014)

The green revolution, however, was not just a high-yielding varieties programme. It represented, in official parlance, a “new agricultural strategy” (NAS), which included by 1969 several elements.

- (i) Rapid expansion of HYVP.
- (ii) Strengthening and expansion of the national agricultural research system.
- (iii) Putting in place a countrywide agricultural extension system to provide hands-on, science-based advice to cultivators adopting the HYVP.
- (iv) Building a countrywide system of open-ended procurement of wheat and rice from farmers at prices that would encourage them to adopt high-yielding varieties (HYVs).
- (v) Building, likewise, a storage system, distributed across the country, to store large quantities of grain for long periods.
- (vi) Linking the policy of public procurement

and storage of rice and wheat with building a nationwide system of retail outlets through which grains could be sold to people at affordable prices, a key to ensuring food security for the weaker sections.

(vii) Strengthening of the rural credit system to enhance credit provision at an affordable cost to agriculture and animal husbandry.

(viii) Nationalisation of banks, first in 1969, followed by a second round in 1980, to expand credit to agriculture by adopting an approach of social development banking as against lending solely on commercial considerations.

(ix) Provision of input subsidies to ensure profitability of cultivation.

Swaminathan was involved in policymaking for agriculture and rural development, and played an important role in the adoption and subsequent implementation of the elements of NAS/GR described earlier.

As he has often emphasised, rapidly increasing foodgrain output was necessary to feed a growing population and to ensure the country's political sovereignty.

He has remarked:

One thing I learnt during the 1960s and early 70s was the importance of food self-sufficiency in enabling Indira Gandhi to take independent foreign policies to uphold national sovereignty. Food grains are indeed a political weapon. Abdul Kalam later said that Pokhran would not have been possible without the Green Revolution. While I do not support the nuclear bomb, food self-sufficiency helped us support the liberation of Bangladesh and feed the newly united Vietnam. People do not often see this relationship, but these historic decisions

would not have been possible without food self-sufficiency. (Rao [ed] 2015: 40)

For those unaware of the context of the 1960s, Swaminathan reminds us of the difficult period in the mid-1960s: "Waiting for the ships carrying PL 480 wheat to arrive before people could be fed came to be known as the 'ship-tomorrow' existence" (Rao [ed] 2015: 98). He notes the humiliating conditions that such wheat imports implied. Swaminathan points out:

Westerners often criticise us for focusing on increasing food production to be food self-sufficient. They say that with resources, you can buy food anywhere. Yet, food security is powerful; there is a larger dimension in terms of the role of agricultural advantage in global negotiations and national sovereignty, which critics of the technology, both national and others, fail to take into account. (Rao [ed] 2015: 42)

The significant increase in foodgrain output that has occurred in India since the launching of green revolution in the mid-1960s has taken place with relatively small increases in gross cropped area. Notwithstanding the inequalities across regions, crops and agrarian classes that may have been accentuated by green revolution/NAS, the fact that the country has a National Food Security Act in place since 2013 is significant. That the act itself is being indifferently implemented by the governments in power does not take away the point that the set of policies and technological interventions that have come to be collectively called the green revolution have been critical to both national sovereignty and macrolevel food security.

From Green Revolution to Agrarian Crisis

Successive union governments and most state governments in India have been implementing neo-liberal economic policies since 1991. These have entailed domestic liberalisation (deregulation), privatisation and international trade and capital account liberalisation. A key aspect of these policies was the considerable liberalisation of finance capital flows into and out of the country and the related passing of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act that limited government fiscal deficits as a share of gross domestic product (GDP). The fiscal deficit targets were to be met mainly through expenditure reduction and not through additional resource mobilisation through effective direct taxation of the wealthy. These policies had a severe impact on India's rural and agrarian economy. Swaminathan, while not formally an economist or social scientist, had long recognised the importance of state support to agriculture and rural development. The tragic phenomenon of farmers' suicides in large numbers from the mid/late 1990s onward exercised his mind greatly. He saw the crisis of profitability that cultivators in India across several farm size groups faced as a result of neo-liberal policies and did not hesitate to advocate alternative policies in his own, unique way. The reports of the NCF which Swaminathan chaired provide clear evidence of the view held by him that state support to agriculture and rural development was crucial to food security.

The NCF recommendations, for instance, call for a "paradigm shift" and the need to improve the economic viability of farming by substantially increasing the income of farmers, not just the yield per hectare. The neo-liberal

policy framework, with its focus on cutting the fiscal deficit primarily by expenditure reduction, imposes severe constraints on the provision of input subsidies, ensuring open-ended procurement of grains at MSPs providing an adequate return to cultivators and adequate public investment in farm research, agricultural extension services, and credit at affordable rates of interest.

Scientist with a Societal Mission

Swaminathan was a rare phenomenon. He was at once an outstanding agricultural scientist, a remarkable builder of research institutions which were also field-based, an exceptional communicator, and a practical scholar-activist with a holistic understanding of agriculture and rural development. He had a great ability to inspire people working with him or in the institutions/missions that he led.

It is important to add that Swaminathan contributed not only to agriculture and rural development in India, but also helped other developing countries through his leadership of the International Rice Research Institute and many other international bodies devoted to research and practical application of advances in agricultural sciences with the primary objective of eliminating hunger and ensuring universal food and nutrition security. Throughout his long and distinguished career, he worked with various governments at different levels in India and elsewhere to advance the cause dear to him, that of a better life for the rural, especially agrarian population. This, in my view, makes him an outstanding scientist with a societal mission. Swaminathan will inspire generations to come as a scientist and a humanist devoted to the cause of ensuring a life of dignity for all.

(Courtesy : EPW)

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AIKS DIPS ITS BANNER IN MEMORY OF COMRADE N SANKARAI AH



Comrade N Sankaraiah, veteran trade union and Kisan leader, General Secretary of All India Kisan Sabha from 1986-1989 and its President from 1992-1995, passed away on the morning of November 15, 2023 at the age of 102. Sankaraiah was a freedom fighter who had spent eight years in jail during the anti-imperialist independence movement and also after the country became free. His first prison term when he was a student had extended up to 18 months under the colonial Defense of India Act. He joined the Communist Party in 1940.

During his Presidentship at the cusp of India's economic liberalisation, Sankaraiah played a crucial role in the AIKS formulating its first alternative agricultural policy in 1993 which challenged the neoliberal order of export-oriented agriculture and the Dunkel draft that created a conducive atmosphere for the hegemony of international finance capital and sought to weaken the masses of India's peasantry. In contrast, the AIKS document stood for completion of land reform measures, distribution of land to agricultural workers and poor peasants, expansion in irrigation, more public investment in agriculture, assuring remunerative prices for all crops, reduction in the cost of inputs, cheap institutional loans, comprehensive crop insurance, and other measures in a similar vein.

When Com N Sankaraiah turned 100 years old, a team of AIKS and AIAWU met him at his residence. They greeted him and felicitated him on the occasion. He donated the ₹10 lakh cash prize he received as part of the Thagaisal Thamizhar award (given on his centenary) in 2021 to the Tamilnadu government for COVID-19 relief.

Comrade N Sankaraiah was one of the 32 National Council members who walked out of the CPI to form the CPI(M). He was a popular leader who helped build the CPI(M) in Tamilnadu and went on to become its State Secretary from 1995 to 2002 and Central Committee member. He was thrice elected to the Tamilnadu Assembly in 1967, 1977 and 1980. A powerful speaker, he became a steadfast voice against all forms of economic exploitation and social oppression.

He remained a voracious reader throughout his life, and took a keen interest in Tamil Sangam literature.

Sankaraiah till his last breath continued to guide and follow the latest developments in the country's democratic and progressive movements. On 6th December 2022, through video conference he inaugurated the Shaheed Jyoti Yatra/Martyrs Flame Yatra that started from Keezhvenmani that was held in the run-up to the 35th All India Conference of AIKS and he gave a clarion call for strengthening Worker-Peasant Unity, advancing towards an alternative agricultural policy and defeating the anti-people BJP Government.

With his passing away, the AIKS and the left democratic movement has lost a towering leader for whom personal difficulties were always secondary, and the cause – liberation of the working class, peasantry and all the oppressed – remained supreme. The AIKS will always remember him with love, respect and pride, and shall strive to fulfil his ideals of a democratic, secular and socialist society. □

AIKS DIPS ITS BANNER IN MEMORY OF COMRADE BASUDEB ACHARIA

AIKS expresses deep shock at the passing away of Com.Basudeb Acharia, veteran Trade Union leader, Vice President of CITU and leader of CPI(M). He was a member of the Central Committee of the CPI(M) from 2005 till 2022 and also served as the Chairperson of its Control Commission. He was leader of the CPI(M) Parliamentary Party from 2004 till 2014. A down-to-earth leader accessible to all, he worked tirelessly even at his advanced age and people from all walks of life went to him with their problems. A much respected parliamentarian, he remained unwavering in his commitment to the rights of workers and peasants.

He was elected to the Lok Sabha from 1980 onwards for 9 times till 2009. During this three decade long engagement with Parliamentary democracy, he has stood resolutely in favour of the working class and the peasantry. An excellent parliamentarian, he headed many important Committees during his tenure, like Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on Government Assurances, Committee on Railways, Committee on Petitions and Committee on Agriculture in addition to being on different Committees.

In his capacity as a leader of the CITU he organised the workers in the Damodar Valley Corporation under the DVC Shramik Union, coal workers under the Colliery Mazdoor Sabha, LIC Agents as well as contract workers in the Railways, Thermal Power Station, Cement industry etc. He has taken up issues of the farmers consistently both within the Parliament and outside emphasising the need to implement the recommendation of the Swaminathan Commission on remunerative prices. His role in evolving a pro-farmer Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement legislation won him wide respect across all farmers' groups. He stood up for the rights of farmers and dependants on land moving numerous amendments to the official Bill. Even as the UPA-II Government sought to hastily move the Bill without adequate discussion and consultations, his timely intervention ensured that the

then Speaker of the Lok Sabha called for following the established Parliamentary procedure and the Government was forced to hold consultations. He was a strong voice

on the issue of rights of the agricultural labour, the effective implementation of the MGNREGA as well as the Forest Rights Act.



He played a pioneering role in organising silk farmers, reelers and workers and took up their issues with the Government and the Central Silk Board. On problems of the sugarcane farmers and their mounting arrears, he has addressed many protests. As the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, he raised his voice against corporatisation of agriculture, against the dismantling of the extension services, public stockholding and efforts to privatise the Food Corporation of India. The Report on GM Crops tabled under his tenure, emphasised that the regulatory system in India is inadequate, needs to be more robust, ensure adequate scrutiny as well as control over monopolies and cannot ignore concerns like biosafety, biodiversity, food sovereignty and farmers' livelihoods.

He continued the struggle against the anti-people policies of the undemocratic, corrupt TMC Government in West Bengal and during the 2018 Panchayat elections he was brutally attacked by TMC goons as he was leading a procession of candidates for filing nomination. Undeterred by physical attacks and threats he carried on his work tirelessly.

AIKS extends its heartfelt condolences to his son and daughters, family members and all comrades. He will continue to be an inspiration for generations to come.

EXPOSE LIES OF THE NARENDRA MODI LED BJP GOVT. ON MSP OF RABI CROPS-2024

AIKS condemns the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government's farcical announcement of the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for Rabi Marketing Season 2024-25 claiming it is "at least 1.5 times the All India weighted average Cost of Production, will ensure remunerative prices to farmers and incentivise crop diversification". The claim that the Rs.150/Qtl hike in MSP of wheat is 'highest' since 2014 is hollow when one considers the fact that the MSP announced does not take into account the increased costs of production for which the policies of the BJP Government are responsible. It is a dishonest attempt to deceive the farmers and it needs to be called out; the Cost of Production mentioned is not the comprehensive cost C2 but A2+FL which is much lower. The BJP Government is peddling lies to mislead farmers especially in the election-going States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana.

The losses suffered by the farmers in each crop per quintal are shown in the table above. The stark nature of difference in A2+FL and C2 costs as well as State proposals and CACP proposals can be illustrated with certain glaring examples. The Punjab Government projection of C2 cost for wheat is Rs.2051/Qtl while the A2+FL taken by the CACP is merely Rs.741/Qtl i.e., Rs.1310/Qtl lesser than C2 cost. The Punjab Government suggestion of MSP for wheat is Rs.3077/Qtl as per the C2+50% formula. The loss suffered by a farmer in Punjab is Rs.802/Qtl and about Rs.38,496/Hectare taking into account the State's average yield of about 48 quintals per hectare. About 35 lakh hectares of wheat is cultivated in Punjab. The loss suffered by farmers of Punjab every year in wheat alone is to the tune of about Rs.13,500 crores. It is notable that Maharashtra's A2+FL cost for wheat is Rs.1934/Qtl and the C2 cost is Rs.3592/Qtl. The MSP announced is Rs.1317/Qtl lesser than even the costs incurred by the farmer. The BJP-Shiv Sena ruled State had proposed an MSP of Rs.4131/Qtl; at the MSP announced a farmer in the State incurs a loss of Rs.1856/Qtl or a loss of Rs.46,400/Hectare. Maharashtra farmers suffer losses of Rs.4640 crores

Crop	A2+FL	C2	C2-A2+FL	MSP	C2+50	Farmers' Loss/Qtl
Wheat	1128	1652	524	2275	2478	203
Barley	1158	1614	456	1850	2421	571
Gram (Chana)	3400	4547	1147	5440	6820.5	1380.5
Lentil (Masur)	3405	4890	1485	6425	7335	910
Rapeseed/Mustard	2855	4068	1213	5650	6102	452
Safflower	3807	5414	1607	5800	8121	2321

in wheat every year. So much for the 'Double Engine Sarkar' and their promise of Doubling Farmers' Incomes.

In BJP ruled Madhya Pradesh the State projected C2 cost of Lentil/Masur is Rs.4615/Qtl while the A2+FL is only Rs.2288/Qtl that is Rs.2327/Qtl lesser. The State projected C2+50 for Masur comes to Rs.6922.5/Qtl implying that a farmer in Madhya Pradesh loses Rs.497.5/Qtl or Rs.4975/hectare. In the case of Gram/Chana Telangana State projected C2 cost is Rs.6055/Qtl while A2+FL is only Rs.2290/Qtl that is Rs.3765/Qtl lower. The State suggested an MSP of Rs.9351/Qtl which is Rs.3911/Qtl higher than the MSP announced. A farmer suffers a loss of Rs.58,665/Hectare. In Rajasthan the state projected C2 cost of Chana/Gram is Rs.4100/Qtl while A2+FL cost considered by the CACP is only Rs.2591/Qtl. Rajasthan State had proposed Rs.6149/Qtl as the MSP i.e. Rs.709/Qtl higher than the MSP announced. A Farmer in Rajasthan in Chana/Gram alone loses Rs.8500/Hectare given a productivity of 12Qtl/Hectare.

The farmers of India have seen through the repeated betrayals by Narendra Modi and the BJP Government and their charade of Doubling Farmers' Income. Even the unremunerative MSP announced is only notional. It is not accruable to majority of the farmers since there is no procurement. This is the reason why farmers remain steadfast in the demand for a legal guarantee for MSP and assured procurement. AIKS calls upon all its units to expose the Government, disseminate the information to all sections of society and rise in protest. The people of the States going to elections will give a fitting rebuff to the BJP and their propaganda using the corporate media and advertisements spending huge amount of money. □

AIKS CONDEMNS ISRAELI BOMBARDMENT OF GAZA AND ITS CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

All India Kisan Sabha has stood with the Palestinian people and their struggle for liberation from the very beginning, stands with them today and forever. The barbaric Israeli onslaught in Gaza on the pretext of 'self-defence' against the attack by Hamas and others is a clear move to exterminate the Palestinians, a crime against humanity and a Zionist attempt of genocide. In addition to the forced displacement of lakhs, thousands have been killed. In the last week 4 hospitals have been bombed by Israel in which more than 500 people are reported to have been killed. AIKS demands immediate halt to the attack on Gaza, withdrawal of the Zionist occupation forces from all Palestinian territories, adherence to international humanitarian law as well as resumption of electricity, water, medicine supplies and food to over 23 lakh besieged people of Gaza. AIKS reiterates its position that the two State solution as mandated by the United Nations be upheld, allowing an independent sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. AIKS has also consistently been a part of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement that works to end international support for Israel's occupation and oppression of Palestinians. AIKS condemns the US led imperialist forces for perpetrating crimes against humanity and the Narendra Modi led BJP Government that has discarded India's long-standing position on Palestine by extending support to Israel. Later attempts to reiterate its commitment to the Palestinian cause is pointless.

In this year alone Israel had launched its biggest aerial and ground offensive in Jenin City of the West Bank. This two-day military offensive was followed up with air strikes on the Gaza strip. In this year no single day has passed without killing of a Palestinian. In West

Bank alone prior to the present escalation more than 200 Palestinians were killed this year with children, women and the aged being the biggest casualties. An additional about 100 people were killed in the other parts. The US imperialism has been providing Zionist Israel with all support in the offensive disregarding repeated decisions of the United Nations. Illegal encroachment into Palestinian territory and its occupation by private militia run by illegal Jewish settlers patronised, protected as well as armed by the Israeli State have been evicting Palestinians.

The corporate media and allies of Israel have adopted a deceptive chronology of the events as though the present conflict has begun on 7th October, 2023 only when Hamas and other groups began the operation Al Aqsa Flood. This is deliberately done to condone the decades of incessant violence, bombardment, killings, apartheid and humiliation of millions of Palestinians by the far-right Zionist state. The sinister move is to brand the Israeli actions as an act of self-defence in response to the attack and in the process wipe-out Gaza of Palestinians. The US demand that Arab countries provide a "humanitarian corridor" for the besieged Palestinians to Sinai and absorb at least half of the population in Egypt, Qatar and Jordan clearly reinforces this position. The attempt now is to accompany aerial bombings with ground movement of troops, clearly aimed at forcing an exodus of Palestinians from Gaza strip. This is in violation of the United Nations demand that Israel call off the evacuation order.

AIKS calls upon all its units to organise solidarity actions in support of the Palestinian people, their struggle for liberation and against the on-going barbaric attack by Zionist Israel.

□

AIKS CONDEMNS FASCISTIC ATTACK ON MEDIA

THE ATTACK ON MEDIA IS A PUNISHMENT FOR SUPPORTING THE FARMERS' STRUGGLE

The All Indian Kisan Sabha strongly condemns the fascistic assault on NewsClick and other independent media organisations who are critical of the Narendra Modi led BJP regime. The onslaught against NewsClick reached a new low on October 3rd, when the Special Cell of the Delhi Police raided the houses of several journalists and technicians and confiscated their electronic gadgets including laptops and mobile phones. In a shocking move, Delhi Police sealed the office of NewsClick and arrested NewsClick's founder and Editor-in-Chief Prabir Purkayastha and HR head Amit Chakravarty under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

46 people including 9 women were questioned on October 3rd. This action comes after the Enforcement Directorate raid months earlier had not deterred NewsClick from reporting truth. The present move to clampdown using UAPA is a sinister attempt to paint NewsClick as 'anti-national' working at the behest of China to divert attention from the government's failures. The NewsClick responded with a statement, asserting that the allegations leveled against them by certain political actors and segments of the media are baseless and lack factual or legal foundation.

The hounding of NewsClick based on false allegations is part of a larger design by the Modi regime to eliminate all forms of dissent. It is a blatant attack on press

freedom.

It is to be noted that the arrested and detained journalists were asked several questions on their coverage of the Delhi Farmers' and anti CAA-NRC struggles. When the 'Godi media' was busy authoring sycophantic eulogies on the corporate communal nexus that is ruling India, progressive establishments like NewsClick took pains to uncover the tales of corporate exploitation and horrendous crimes of Hindutva vigilante groups. NewsClick's coverage of the historic Farmers' Struggle and other policy issues related to working people, killings of dairy farmers in the name of Gauraksha by Hindutva extremists, Sangh Parivar role in Delhi riots etc., are fitting testimonials to their journalistic integrity and commitment to the masses.

This authoritarian attack on journalists by the fascistic regime will be resisted by the people of India. AIKS calls upon the peasants and all sections of working people to extend solidarity to the journalists and media organisations in their struggle against the fascistic Modi regime. AIKS appeals to the Indian peasantry, which has the legendary history of defeating the Modi regime, to intensify their struggles and align with democratic forces to fight this undeclared emergency. AIKS reminds the Modi regime that attempts to stifle pro-farmer voices in the media will be resisted with all strength. □

MAHARASHTRA: PEASANTS AND WORKERS HIT THE STREETS IN SKM-CTU STRUGGLE

- Kisan Gujar

Over 65,000 peasants and workers in 25 districts of Maharashtra hit the streets from November 26-28, 2023, as part of the all India struggle call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the Central Trade Unions (CTUs). The actions included mahapadavs, rallies, marches, dharnas and demonstrations at numerous district and tehsil centres in the state.

First Joint Statewide Meeting

A successful joint meeting of the Maharashtra chapters of the SKM and the CTUs was held at the S M Joshi Socialist Foundation at Pune on October 15. It was attended by over 100 leaders of different trade unions and peasant organisations. The SKM in Maharashtra had been formed in an impressive 1,000-strong state convention at the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Mumbai the previous month on September 5, 2023. The Workers and Employees Joint Action Committee, which is the Maharashtra chapter of the CTUs, has been consistently active in Maharashtra for the last several decades.

The October 15 Pune meeting was the



first joint meeting of the trade unions and the peasant organisations in Maharashtra. It unanimously and enthusiastically called for a united worker-peasant March from the historic Shivaji Park Maidan to Mantralaya (secretariat) in Mumbai. The total mobilisation quotas of all organizations taken in the meeting exceeded 50,000.

However, the BJP-led Shinde-Fadnavis-Ajit Pawar state government and its Mumbai police point blank refused permission to the worker-peasant March, despite repeated demands. That would make it very difficult for the thousands of peasants and workers who would come to Mumbai from all the districts. Hence the SKM and CTUs in a joint online meeting decided instead to mobilise in strength in each district to teach the state government a lesson.

As per the detailed district-wise information gathered from across Maharashtra, the total state-wide joint mobilisation on all the three days was over 65,000. Of this the mobilisation of various organisations was as follows: AIKS – 21,220, CITU – 19,575, Lok Sangharsh Morcha – 9,250, Sarvahara Jan Andolan – 3,200, AIDWA-DYFI-SFI – 2,500, NAPM – 2,450, Kashtakari Sanghatana – 2,000, NTUI – 1,700, AIAWU – 1,053, CPI-led Kisan Sabha – 1,000, HMS – 700, Shramik Shetkari Sanghatana – 655, AITUC – 500, Satyashodhak Shetkari Sabha and Satyashodhak

Sangharsh Samiti – 500, AICCTU – 150, Total – 66,453.

The largest AIKS mobilisation was in: Thane-Palghar – 12,600, Nashik – 5,000, Ahmednagar – 1,300, Satara – 1,000, Nandurbar - 300; the largest CITU mobilisation was in: Solapur – 10,500, Satara – 3,000, Nashik – 2,600, Jalna – 800, Mumbai – 700; the largest AIAWU mobilisation was in: Jalna – 504, Nandurbar – 400, Parbhani – 100.

The ten districts with the largest total mobilisation were: Thane-Palghar – 16,200, Solapur – 10,580, Nashik – 7,600, Jalgaon – 5,607, Mumbai – 5,000, Nandurbar – 4,550, Satara – 4,000, Raigad – 3,450, Ahmednagar – 3,015.

Major Districtwise Actions

At Akole in Ahmednagar district, AIKS state general secretary Ajit Nawale and other associates went on an indefinite hunger strike on the issue of remunerative price for milk. The state government had announced that dairy farmers would get Rs 34 per litre for their milk. But the milk industry refused to implement the government's decision. The hunger strike continued for six days. There were state-wide demonstrations by dairy farmers. AIKS president Ashok Dhawale personally intervened with NCP President Sharad Pawar and state dairy development minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil. After certain assurances, the hunger strike was withdrawn, but the struggle for remunerative price for milk still continues. A 1,600-strong rally was held by the AIKS on the last day at Akole, and another 1,000-strong one later at Sangamner. Similarly, other organisations also mobilised elsewhere in the district.

In Thane-Palghar districts, which mobilised a total of 16,200 people - 12,600 by AIKS, 2,000 by Kashtakari Sanghatana, and 1,600 by others - large mahapadavs of 2,500 to 4,000 people each were held in the tehsils of Dahanu, Vikramgad and Wada, and rallies of 1,000 to 2,000 each were held in the tehsils of Talasari, Shahapur, and Palghar. Demonstrations were held at Kalyan and Jawhar. In the largest mahapadav at Dahanu which continued for four days, the SDO and her office was gheraoed until she accepted all the main local demands. Similarly, many local demands had to be conceded in the other tehsils as well.

In Solapur, an 8,500-strong working class rally was held by the CITU on the district collectorate, and another 2,000-strong rally of scheme workers led by the CITU was held the next day, making it a total mobilisation of 10,500. In Nashik, the AIKS and CITU led a 7,600-strong rally on the district collectorate. In Mumbai, a joint 5,000-strong dharna by trade unions was held at the Azad Maidan.

ASHA workers and facilitators in Maharashtra conducted an indefinite state-wide strike which lasted for 23 days up to November 9. This led to the state government agreeing to a substantial rise in remuneration ranging from Rs 7,000 for ASHA workers to Rs 10,000 for facilitators. This, however, is yet to be implemented. But Diwali ex-gratia payment of Rs 2,000 each was immediately given to the ASHA workers. Inspired by this, Anganwadi workers in the state have now begun an indefinite strike from December 4. In this whole background, the participation of scheme workers in the November struggle in many districts was substantial. □

WB: MASSIVE THREE-DAY WORKER-PEASANT DHARNA IN KOLKATA

- Subinoy Moulik

“Either change the policies or we will change the government”. The three-day workers-farmers dharna called by Central Trade Unions and Federations and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, held from 26 to 28 November in Esplanade, at the heart of Kolkata, in tune with the countrywide Kisan-Mazdoor Mahapadav held in 25 state capitals of the country, warned the Modi government in Delhi that the fight against the corporate communal nexus of the government will intensify. In this dharna, the pledge was taken to move forward with the unceasing motivation of the historic farmers’ movement in Delhi. The leaders present at the meeting said that the united and strong movement of workers, farmers and agricultural workers would be strengthened and spread further. More people shall join the struggle to defend their interests. Not

only the Delhi government but also the Trinamool government of the state shall be forced to accept the just demands.

Massive rallies were organised for three consecutive days on Rani Rasmani Road at Esplanade demanding the cancellation of the four anti-worker labour codes, legal guarantee for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of crops at 1.5 times the comprehensive cost of cultivation, repeal of the Electricity Amendment Bill and prepaid meter system, payment of arrears of MNREGA wages and wage hike, and prevention of price hike. This rally voiced strong protest against various levels of corruption going on in this state. A march to Raj Bhavan was called from this rally. Various speakers addressed the gathering on different days. Similar programme was organised at Siliguri for North Bengal. A



presidium comprising the leaders of various mass organisations had conducted the proceedings of the rally.

Speaking at the rally on the first day, CITU state secretary Anadi Sahu denounced the anti-national policies and decisions of the Modi government and said that the Modi government on the one hand is working against the interests of the workers, farmers and working people of the country, and on the other hand, it is continuously attacking the country's democracy and secular credentials. Sahu also said that the Modi government as directed by the RSS is plotting to change India, the meeting place of diverse cultures, into a communal Hindutva state by dividing the people of the country on the basis of caste, religion and language. On the other hand, Mamata Banerjee's government in this state also continues to play a supportive role in implementing the anti-people policies and decisions of the Modi government. No government is paying attention to the terrible increase in the prices of essential commodities. People in various fields have to join a stronger fight against Modi government's misrule. Mamata Banerjee's government is resorting to unlimited corruption in the recruitment of teachers and other appointments in the state. They are also running the government with a clear anti-worker attitude.

On the second day, the rally was addressed by AIKS West Bengal state committee secretary, Amal Halder. He said that like other states of the country, the life of people of this state in various fields including workers and farmers has come to a miserable situation. Farmers are not

getting proper support price for crops. Unable to bear the burden of severe anxiety and debt, many have chosen the path of suicide. The number of unemployed people is increasing by leaps and bounds. People's income is decreasing day by day. In this situation people are more endangered by the skyrocketing price of essential goods. He also said that although Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi come to this state again and again to take advantage of vote politics, they have nothing to say about the real suffering of the working people of this state. Talking about the various benefit transfer schemes of the state government, he said that through them, people's money is being embezzled in various ways in this state.

From the sit-in protest on this day Subhash Mukherjee, president CITU West Bengal committee has called for intensifying the struggle movement in the coming days. Bank Employees Federation of India (West Bengal) general secretary Joydeb Dasgupta said that efforts are being made to destroy the country's financial base by destroying the country's state bank system. We have to stop the Modi government's attempt to hand over people's money to the private sector. CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, AIKS leader Hannan Mollah along with various leaders of the SKM-CITU were present at the protest meeting on Rani Rasmani Road.

Protest to Resistance

At the protest rally on September 28, CITU all India general secretary and CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Tapan Sen said that the government's policy has affected the workers, farmers, students, youth, women,

and the poor people of the society. Workers and peasants must take the fight against this policy to the stage of resistance. That the workers and peasants have come together to share a common platform and have been able to identify their enemy is a significant progress. This Modi government for the sake of imperialism is destroying and handing over to corporates the economic structure that we have built for 75 years since independence, overcoming many hurdles. Privatisation and selling out our national assets has become the hallmark of the present government's policy. And, unfortunately, this policy is being pursued while chanting nationalistic slogans. The effects of this disastrous process are being reflected in social life. 37 per cent of our population earns about Rs 6000 per month. Their earnings are such that they find it difficult to make both ends meet. The majority of the wealth is accumulated in the hands of one per cent of the people of the country. Tapan Sen made it clear that taking control of State-owned enterprises or installation of smart meters cannot be accepted. Government representatives should be questioned and resisted. The protest against such wrongdoing should be taken to the level of this resistance. This work has started. We have thus stopped privatisation in several places. Many more working people must be involved in the resistance struggle.

The gathering practically blocked the entire Esplanade area beyond the intersection of Rani Rashmoni Road. The Esplanade Square was abuzz for three days with a combination of songs and recitations by cultural activists including the IPTA. A memorandum was also given on behalf of

the Pensioners' Association on September 28. The open letter given to the chief minister from the rally was read out. Huge marches from different parts of the city, including Howrah and Sealdah, arrived at the meeting on this day.

At the rally, peasant leader Hannan Mollah said the government has not fulfilled any of its promises. In order to realise all those promises, we have to take to the streets and protest. The fight has to be spread from state to state. About this three-day movement in different parts of the country, he said that workers and farmers have joined hands in resistance, in the whole country. Attacks on the working people by the central and state authoritarian governments have changed form, hence the need for total resistance. Referring to the suicide of farmers and labourers, he said the list of suicides of agricultural labourers is long. Worker layoffs are increasing. The government should be forced to listen to the people by creating a more intense movement against it.

AIAWU leader Tushar Ghosh told the rally that people want an alternative. They want an alternative government that will give a fair price for crops in the country, provide 200 days of employment under MGNREGA (additional 100 days of work), and increase wages. Workers, farmers, agricultural workers will have to fight to realise these demands.

A delegation of workers and farmers from the rally went to the Raj Bhavan and gave a deputation. Among these representatives were Nirapada Sardar, Asadullah Gayen, Prabir Banerjee, Basudev Basu, Deepak Das and Ashok Guha. □

KARNATAKA: MASSIVE PARTICIPATION IN BANGALORE MAHADHARNA

- Vasanth N K

Massive participation marked the 72 Hour Mahadharani (Mahapadav) during November 26-28, at Bangalore on the call of joint nation-wide call given by Samyuktha Kisan Morcha and Central Trade Unions. In Karnataka, Mahadharani was organised by SHK (Samyukta Horata Karnataka – a united platform of struggles of kisan, agricultural workers, dalit, women’s, student and youth organisations and trade unions) and JCTU (Joint Committee of Trade Unions – a platform of state units of Central TUs and state level independent Employees’ Federations of various sectors). Over 40 organisations were involved in the Bangalore Mahadharani.

First day was called Sankalpa (Resolve) Day and second and third day was called ‘Sangharsha’ (Struggle) and ‘Sandesha’ (Message) Days respectively. First day was dedicated to making a ‘resolve’ to defend the constitution and its values and the republic. On the second day, focus was on the demands of various sections of working people and

for policy changes for which continuous ‘struggles are being and will continue to be waged. The demands of mahadharani included few state specific demands, apart from the 21 demands finalised by SKM-CTUs. These include – Scrapping anti-farmer State laws ‘Land Reforms (Amendments) Act, APMC (amendments) Act, Cattle Protection Act – all passed in 2020 by BJP Government. Congress was committed to repealing the three anti-farmer laws in its manifesto, but is silent on them even after 6 months of being in power. The demand also includes scrapping amendments to labour laws increasing working day to 10 hours a day and imposing compulsory night shift on women workers. Conveying the ‘message’ of necessity to oust BJP-RSS of power at the centre also and drive towards pro-people policy changes was emphasized on the third and final day. The emphasis was also on taking this message to people in every street of every ward and village in the state before crucial 2024 Lok Sabha elections.



Peasants, workers, working people from various sectors various regions participated in the mahadharani occupying not only 'Freedom Park' in the heart of the city but also the adjoining streets, as capacity of the venue could not accommodate sea of working people who converged on the venue. Additional chairs and Giant LED TVs were quickly organised to facilitate their participation. Food was organised for all participants. On an average well over ten thousand people participated each day taking the total participation to around forty thousands.

March of Bangalore workers from Bannappa Park to Freedom park, mass 'Constitutional pledge' and Release of third revised edition of 'Kadana Kana' (a book on Historic Kisan Struggle) were the highlights on the "Sankalpa Day", the first day. Sending of a letter with demands of mahadharani to the CM, and insistence by organisers for visit of chief minister and governor to the venue and consequent visit of senior

minister Krishna Byregowda (as a representative of CM) was the highpoint of second day of 'Sangharsha'. Insistence of organisers for the minister's date for a full day of meeting of the leaders for comprehensive discussion on charter of demands with chief minister along with relevant ministers/secretaries; and a written invitation for the meeting 'here and now' and consequent visit of Naseer Ahmed, political secretary to CM with the letter (of invitation for a full day meeting on December 19) demanded was a major highlight of the final day of 'Sandesha'. Burning of three effigies representing 'anti-worker anti-peasant laws', 'policies fleecing common people', 'vicious hate politics' in a Agnikund; and passing of a resolution were also highlights of the final day of mahadharani. A resolution criticising anti-people policies of BJP-RSS government was adopted, which called for a sustained campaign to defeat the BJP-RSS in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and for policy changes.

□

J&K APPLE..(Continue from page 35)

Non-local transporters are operating without any permission, which has hampered the livelihood of the local transporters. Preference should be given to local transporters (stakeholders) for starting cab services, he said and demanded roll back of the taxes leveled on these poor transporters.

Abdul Rashid Pandit, trade union leader, said that despite the constitution of several committees for regularisation of daily wagers, casual labourers and other workers, nothing concrete has been done. These workers have been waiting for regularisation for a long time. The scheme workers including ASHAs and Anganwadi workers, helpers who are working on meagre wages, are not being provided wages in time and as per minimum wages act. The registered

construction unions, who are the important stakeholders of the construction board are being isolated and harassed, which is against the labour laws.

Instead of providing employment, the administration is snatching the livelihood of employees on flimsy grounds. Recently the government has issued an order restricting employees from protesting or raising their issues. This is colonial law and needs immediate withdrawal.

Others who spoke on the occasion include Mohamad Yaqub Ganie, Ghulam Mohamad Shah, Abdul Rashid Itoo, kisan leaders, Mohamad Younus Dar, chairman Kashmir Tourist Taxi Transporters Welfare Federation and Mohamad Abass, youth leader.

□

J&K: APPLE FARMERS AND CITU PROTEST IN SRINAGAR

Despite restrictions and severe cold conditions, hundreds activists of Jammu Kashmir Apple Farmers Federation and CITU assembled at Press Enclave Srinagar and held protest demonstrations on November 26, against anti-people, anti-worker and anti-farmer policies of the government. The protesters were shouting slogans against the government.

While addressing the demonstration, CITU president Mohamad Yousuf Tarigami expressed serious concern over problems being faced by the common people. Kashmir is facing its worst power crisis in the last two decades and is reeling under acute power shortage, with people facing extreme inconvenience due to long and unscheduled power cuts at a time when temperatures in the valley have dipped to sub-zero levels. Hospitals are bearing the brunt of the crisis and industries as well as other crucial sectors are suffering too.

J&K is a direct victim of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) and has been put to a disadvantageous position. J&K is made to bear a recurring loss of billions of rupees annually besides limiting its 15000 MW power generation potential, Tarigami said while urging the central government to

compensate for these losses.

Raising royalty from existing 12 per cent to 40 per cent in all Centre Sector Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs) in the region is a legitimate demand which should be fulfilled if the union government is serious to streamline the precarious power situation in Jammu and Kashmir, Tarigami said. The government must implement the recommendations made by the Rangarajan Committee to handover two JK based hydroelectric power projects to J&K.

While addressing the demonstration, Ghulam Nabi Malik, kisan leader said that apples provide livelihood to thousands of households of Kashmir but apple farmers are in distress. A major issue confronting the apple farmers is the denial of remunerative price. They are being supplied with spurious pesticides, fungicides and fertilizers, which harm the produce and orchards instead of treating different diseases.

Mohamad Afzal Parry, kisan leader, demanded 100 per cent import duty on foreign apples, provision of fertilizers and pesticides at subsidised rates to apple farmers and cold storage facility to apple producing districts. The crop insurance scheme must be implemented at ground level under the supervision of the government.

Zahoor Ahmad Rather, kisan leader said that transporters are facing immense hardships in the region. They are asked to provide fitness certificates on a monthly basis.

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HP: FIRST STATE CONFERENCE OF APPLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION

- Prem Chauhan



The first state conference of the Himachal Apple Growers Association took place on December 24-25, 2023, at Rampur in the Shimla district in which 92 delegates from 16 blocks participated. Following the condolence resolution, CITU state leader Amit delivered the welcome address at the conference.

The inaugural address was given by P Krishna Prasad, treasurer of the All India Kisan Sabha, who shed light on the challenges faced by apple growers at the national level. Emphasizing the significance of the conference, he highlighted the critical role of apple cultivation in the economy of Himachal Pradesh, a state with modest economic resources. Prasad underlined the need to confront those destroying agriculture and expressed concern about a substantial portion of wealth flowing to intermediaries. Advocating for a collective struggle, he emphasized the importance of fighting for the welfare of the common people and the preservation of agriculture.

Drawing parallels between the crisis

faced by apple farmers in Himachal Pradesh and the broader challenges in the country, Prasad pointed out the detrimental impact of domestic and international capital on farmers. He highlighted the escalating debt burden due to rising cultivation costs coupled with decreasing income, leading to widespread losses among farmers.

Addressing the soaring prices of fertilizers and pesticides in the country, Prasad noted the dire situation. He emphasized the pivotal role of apple cultivation, sustaining approximately 9 lakh families in India, with around 42 lakh individuals in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand relying on it. Stressing that 95 per cent of the produced apples are consumed as fruit, Prasad highlighted India's global standing as the sixth largest producer, contributing around 50 lakh metric tonnes to the world's apple production.

The conference report was presented by Secretary Prem Chauhan, covering the political and organisational situation of the country. The report delved into

the challenges faced by orchardists, detailing aspects such as organisation, membership, funds, activities, and future agitational plans. Delegates engaged in in-depth discussions within their respective groups, focusing on the specific issues concerning apples in their respective regions.

Addressing the challenges confronted by farmers in Himachal Pradesh, Kuldeep Singh Tanwar, state president of Kisan Sabha, highlighted that the state's total crop production amounts to 44 lakh tonnes. This includes 47 percent vegetable production, 34 per cent foodgrain production, and 16 percent apple production. Approximately 65 per cent of the state's population relies on agriculture. However, Tanwar emphasized the absence of a systematic and effective government system to disseminate knowledge of modern technology among common farmers.

Rakesh Singha and Onkar Shad, CPI(M) leaders, also addressed the gathering, emphasizing that apple production serves as the primary livelihood for approximately 50 lakh individuals and 9 lakh families in India, particularly within the apple sector. In Himachal Pradesh alone, 1.75 lakh families are engaged in apple farming. Agriculture plays a substantial role in the state's economy, with horticulture accounting for 39.0 per cent of total employment and 48.3

per cent of the area dedicated to apple cultivation.

The apple sector constitutes 84 per cent of the total fruit production in the state. However, the production of apples in Himachal Pradesh stands at 8-10 metric tons per hectare, significantly lower than the global average of 40-60 metric tons per hectare. Moreover, the cost of production is steadily increasing. Since 1990, fertilizers have become nearly 9 times more expensive, medicines 20 times, and equipment 6-7 times. In India, government subsidies to farmers and horticulturists are a mere 3 per cent, contrasting sharply with 29 per cent in the US, 37 per cent in European countries, 60 per cent in South Korea, and 26 per cent in Pakistan.

The Himachal Pradesh government, under the pressure of the movement of the apple growers, was forced to sell the apples to the arhtiyas in the market on the basis of weight instead of box. A movement has been announced to be started from next year and preparations will be made for the movement by raising the problems of the orchardists in front of the government.

The newly elected committee comprises 35 members and a 13-member secretariat. The key office bearers are Sohan Thakur (president), Purna Thakur (secretary), Prem Chauhan (treasurer). □



RUBBER FARMERS MARCH AND PROTEST AT JANTAR MANTAR, DELHI



Hundreds of rubber farmers from Kerala, Tripura, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka affiliated to the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) organised a parliament march and protest at Jantar Mantar on 14th September to highlight the problems faced by them. The Dharna was inaugurated by Vijoo Krishnan, General Secretary, AIKS. Ashok Dhawale, president, AIKS, EP Jayarajan, Vice President, AIKS, Hannan Mollah, Vice President, AIKS, P Krishnaprasad, Finance Secretary, AIKS, Valsan Panoli, Joint Secretary, AIKS, Pabitra Kar, Joint Secretary, AIKS, M Vijayakumar, Vice President, George Mathew, N Ravi, members, Rubber Sub Committee, B Venkat, General Secretary, AIAWU, and Vikram Singh, Joint Secretary, AIAWU spoke.

Kisan leaders commented that the policy-driven crisis in rubber has created unprecedented hardships to rubber farmers. They attacked the pro-corporate policies of the successive Union govt. led by the BJP and the Congress which are responsible for the dire situation faced by the rubber farmers. Particular references were made to the Free Trade Agreement with the ASEAN countries, which was initiated by the BJP government and finally signed by the Congress government in 2009. This Free Trade Agreement has resulted in a tremendous increase in duty-free imports of rubber from Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and other countries. Imports of natural rubber into India increased from

45 metric tonnes in 2005-06 to 5.28 lakh metric tonnes in 2022-23. Kisan leaders from Kerala recalled that top Congress leaders had promised that the ASEAN Agreement would hugely benefit rubber farmers in Kerala, the largest rubber producing state in India. However, it was the tyre manufacturing giants like MRF which benefited from Free Trade. There was a consensus that to save rubber farmers and national interest, Free Trade Agreements should be scrapped. They also demanded to make rubber an agricultural crop.

Speakers also stressed that a fair remunerative price of at least Rs 300/kg should be declared immediately. Pro-corporate policies unleashed by the Modi regime are significantly increasing the cost of production. It is humanly impossible to survive with the present dismal price. Adding salt to the injury, the Modi regime is in the process of dismantling the Rubber Board and paving the way for intense corporate control. The Rubber (Promotion and Development) Bill, 2023 is a clear instance of pro corporate policy by the BJP-led Union govt.

All speakers pointed out that the nefarious designs by the giant tyre MNCs are damaging the livelihood of the rubber farmers. The sinister game of the tyre MNCs was evident when Competition Commission of India (CCI) fined them about Rs.1788 crores for market manipulation in 2022. While rubber farmers and workers are struggling with livelihood, leading tyre MNCs like MRF, Apollo, JK, CEAT, and Birla amassed wealth. This fortune is at the cost of the lives of the rubber farmers. Kisan leaders reiterated that CCI fine amount should go to rubber farmers as demanded earlier by AIKS. □

KERALA RUBBER FARMERS MARCH TO MRF AND APOLLO

Two massive marches were organised by the Samyukta Karshaka Samithi, a united forum of 11 organizations of farmers led by AIKS to MRF Kottayam and Apollo Kalamassery on 30 December 2023 against cartelisation in rubber sector. The Competition Commission of India has fined the major tyre companies including MRF, Apollo, CEAT, Birla, JK Tyres, etc. a sum of Rs.1788 crores for having formed a cartel in the price fixation of tyres even when the price of the raw material, the natural rubber, was falling. The case is now pending in the Supreme Court as the companies have challenged it. Their activities have ensured that the domestic price of rubber is pulled down through imports and market manipulations. The class conflict between the monopoly capital and the peasantry as a whole has clearly come to the fore.

The principal slogan of the anti-corporate struggle was “Down With Tyre Cartel, Save Rubber Farmers”. The Samyukta Karshaka Samithi demanded that the Union government should use the fine amount for the benefit of



farmers. The siege of MRF and Apollo was preceded by an intensive anti cartel campaign in all rubber growing regions by the Samyukta Karshaka Samithi. The developing anti-Monopoly struggle is gaining momentum in Kerala which was evident from the massive participation of peasantry in the district-wise campaigns.

Com. Vijoo Krishnan, GS, AIKS inaugurated the rubber farmers’ March to MRF factory at Kottayam. Reji Kunnamkot, State President, Kerala Karshaka Union (M) presided. Com. SK Preeja, Vice President, AIKS, Com. George Mathew, Convenor , Rubber Sub Committee, AIKS and senior leaders of Samyukta Karshaka Samithi addressed the gathering.



Com.Satyan Mokeri, National secretary, AIKS (Ajoy Bhavan) inaugurated the rubber farmers’ march to Apollo Factory at Ernakulam. Com. P Krishnaprasad, Finance Secretary, AIKS, Com. K Chandran Pillai, National Secretary, CITU and other senior leaders of Samyukta Karshaka Samithi spoke. Com. Valsan panoli, State Secretary, Kerala Karshaka Sangham presided. □

Mazdoor Kisan Mahapadav 26-28 November 2023



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