

The Voice of the Working Woman



Intensify Struggles in 2018

Comrade Sukomal Sen



The CITU has expressed its profound grief at the passing away of Comrade Sukomal Sen at a hospital in Kolkata on 22 November, at the age of 83, after a long ailment. He has left behind his wife and two sons. He was a stalwart of the trade union movement in the country.

Comrade Sen was the founder-leader of All India State Government Employees Federation (AISGEF), its General Secretary during 1982 – 2008, Senior Vice Chairman till his demise and was the founder editor of its organ - *Employees Forum* - for over three decades.

He was a member of the CITU Working Committee, Vice President of the CITU and later a permanent invitee in the

Secretariat till his demise.

Comrade Sen made a significant contribution in the international T.U. movement and was the General Secretary of Trade Union International Public & Allied Services (TUI-P&AS) of WFTU during 1996 – 2009.

He was a scholarly writer and the author of several books including *The Working Class in India - History of Emergence of Movement (1830-2000)*, which has been translated into several languages, *The History of All India State Government Employees Federation, International Working Class Movement - Dynamics of Class Struggle vs. Class Collaboration*, outlining the history of the WFTU since its foundation in 1945 to 2011. He was a regular contributor to various journals in India and abroad. Comrade Sukomal Sen led an active Communist life, remaining steadfast in his ideological commitment.

He was a Central Committee member of CPI(M) for decades and its ex-officio member till his demise. He played a leading role in championing the cause of the working people in Parliament during 1982 – 1994 as a Member of the Rajya Sabha. The body of the departed leader was brought to the CITU West Bengal state centre where several trade union leaders paid respectful homage to him. On behalf of the CITU national centre its secretaries A R Sindhu and Usha Rani placed the CITU flag and a wreath. His body was donated to Calcutta Medical College for medical research as per his wish.

In Comrade Sukomal Sen's demise, the country lost a stalwart of the working class movement, a scholar, visionary and a great teacher. It is an irreparable loss in the present situation of physical and ideological offensives against the working class.

The CITU dipped its flag at its centre at BTR Bhawan and conveyed heartfelt condolences to all his comrades and bereaved family members.

The Voice
of the
Working Woman
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In the New Year

As the Year 2017 comes to a close, the working class of India is getting ready for bigger struggles in the New Year 2018, against the policies of the BJP led NDA government that seems unable to stop attacking the lives of common people.

The latest in the series of serious attacks is its FRDI (Financial Regulation and Deposit Insurance) Bill. The government appears to be intent on getting the FRDI Bill, which is at present with the Parliamentary Standing Committee, passed in the present session of Parliament. This Bill proposes to set up a Financial Resolution Corporation (FRC) consisting mainly of central government officials. This FRC will monitor the financial firms including banks and will take corrective actions if they are found to be at risk.

What is of serious concern to the common people and is creating panic among the depositors is this 'corrective action' includes 'bail in' of the banks, i.e. using depositors' money to overcome the default of the borrowers. The Financial Resolution Corporation has the power to liquidate any bank and permit the use of depositors' money to 'bail in' a bank.

Till now the government, the owner of public sector banks was supposed to use its funds to 'bail out' these banks, in case they fail. Common people put their money in public sector banks trusting that it will be safe. At present, all deposits up to Rs 1 lakh are insured by the banks so that there is no risk to the depositors even if the banks fail. The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India covers these depositors. But now this is proposed to be wound up. Nothing has been suggested in the Bill to replace it. Crores of common people, particularly pensioners and old people, feel great uncertainty about their money even in the public sector banks, which they trusted till now.

The BJP led government claims that the FRDI Bill is meant to deal with bankruptcies in banks, insurance and other financial companies. The bad shape of the banks because of the huge NPAs (Non Performing Assets) is often highlighted in support of this. The country's bad loans have reportedly crossed Rs 10 lakh crores. However, the lion's share of these bad loans is of big corporate defaulters. It is estimated that corporate defaulters account for 75% of total NPAs. According to the RBI, just 12 companies are estimated to account for 25% of the gross NPAs. But the Modi government is not ready even to publicly announce the list of corporate defaulters despite the directive from the Supreme Court.

This is yet another instance of the BJP government's policy measures of protecting the interests of the big corporates and the rich at the cost of the common people and the workers. And it is against these policies that struggles have to be intensified. The bank employees' unions are reportedly contemplating on going on strike if the government proceeds with this Bill.

The resistance to the policies by various sections of the people is increasing day by day. The recent results of the elections to the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assemblies are a reflection of this growing resistance and the end of the charm of "Vikas Purush" and the "Gujarat model of development". They indicate that the BJP is fast losing the support of the rural poor and the peasantry.

From the historic 'mahapadav' in November, the joint trade union movement has already called upon the working class to usher in the New Year through joint district level conventions in the first week and massive court arrest programmes in the second half of January 2018.

The New Year will be a year of intense struggles to defeat the anti worker anti people policies of the BJP government and the divisive disruptive agenda of the communal forces. Preparations for these struggles should start NOW.

Central Trade Unions Decide to Organise All India STRIKE of 'SCHEME WORKERS' on 17 January 2018

It is more than three and half years since the 45th Indian Labour Conference (ILC) passed the recommendations to recognise all workers working under various government schemes, the 'scheme workers' as workers, pay them minimum wages and give social security including pension.

This was an achievement of years of long struggles under trade unions by the more than one crore scheme workers working in various central and state government schemes. This includes around 27 lakh Anganwadi, Mini Anganwadi Workers and Helpers under the ICDS Scheme, nearly 28 lakh Mid Day Meal Workers under the MDM Scheme and around ten lakh ASHA Workers under the NHM. Lakhs are working under SSA, NRLM, NCLP, Small Savings Schemes etc. These schemes deliver basic services of health, nutrition education etc to the mass of the population. These workers are not recognised as workers and are not paid minimum wages nor do they have any social security benefits. In the name of 'honorarium' or 'incentive' they are paid a pittance as low as Rs.1000 per month for ten months a year in the case of midday meal workers.

Even the ILC recommendation came after long years of struggles by the scheme workers under the leadership of various central trade unions especially CITU. AIFAWH has a history of long 26 years of struggles of anganwadi workers and helpers which resulted in increase in remuneration by the central government and various state governments, maternity benefits, leave, promotion etc. The Mid Day Meal Workers Federation of India and ASHA Coordination Committee have been conducting innumerable struggles in recent years. The term 'scheme workers', which was coined by CITU, was later recognised by the Labour Ministry as a category of workers for the verification of trade union membership in 2011. It was in 2012 that CITU organised a 48 hour day and night Mahapadav of Scheme Workers which was attended by more than 36000 scheme workers who literally captured Jantar Mantar. After this Tapan Sen, General Secretary CITU, had demanded in the 45th Standing Labour Committee to include these issues in the agenda of the 45th ILC, which was supported by all Central Trade Unions. But neither the UPA nor the NDA government was ready to implement these ILC recommendations. Moreover, the Modi led NDA government is moving towards winding up these crucial schemes such as ICDS, NHM and MDMS by drastic budget cuts and structural changes, including privatisation of the schemes involving corporates and corporate NGOs. The beneficiaries are actually being excluded in the name of linking of Aadhar and bank accounts. The government is introducing cash transfers in place of universal services of crucial schemes including the ones which ensure food security. Both the remuneration of the workers and the facilities of the schemes are being affected due to the budget cuts. In spite of repeated opposition by the central trade unions, the Government is going ahead with moves to dismantle the schemes.

The three major federations of scheme workers had separately and jointly conducted many struggles to save the schemes and for better service conditions. AIFAWH, MDMWFI and AICCAW of CITU jointly organised district level protests and met MPs in December 2016. In continuation of these, the 15th Conference of CITU held in Puri, Odisha gave a call for a one day all India

strike of scheme workers on 20 January 2017. The strike was a grand success. In many states the strike has created such a mood of struggle among the scheme workers that in many places they got unionized in CITU and there were numerous local, state level struggles both spontaneous and organised. In Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, MP, AP, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Punjab, Odisha, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Assam, Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand etc there were struggles, some of which continued for many months in various forms. In Karnataka, HP, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab etc there was an increase in wages of anganwadi workers and helpers. In Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana etc the remuneration of ASHA workers was also increased.



The move by the Modi government to introduce cash transfer, PPP etc in schemes has created anger among the scheme workers who are already agitated because of the poor working conditions. In many states including Karnataka, Telangana, AP, Punjab there were struggles against privatisation of the schemes in various forms and cash transfers etc.

The struggle was now to save the schemes themselves from dismantling by the Modi government. AIFAWH, MDMWFI and AICCAW organised a National Convention on “**Right to Food, Health, Education and Care – The Government, Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Beyond**” involving experts, intellectuals, academics and the beneficiaries’ organisations ; organisations of women, students, workers, peasants, agricultural workers youth etc. Renowned economist Prof. Prabhat Patnaik inaugurated the convention which was attended by child right activists, right to food activists etc. The convention gave a call to broaden the struggles and seek the support of beneficiaries.

CITU has taken the initiative to broaden the united struggles of scheme workers and took this up in the joint platform of trade unions. The central trade unions decided to focus the issues of schemes and scheme workers on the last day of the three days Mahapadav of workers and to mobilize the scheme workers that day. On 11 November 2017 nearly one lakh scheme workers, mostly women, painted Parliament Street red. The mahapadav decided to organise a one day all India Strike of scheme workers before the Union budget 2018-19 in order to pressurize the government, which made an election promise to strengthen the schemes but has been ignoring this issue after it came to power. **The Central Trade Unions; INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF, UTUC decided on a one day all India strike of scheme workers and district level joint demonstrations on 17 January 2018.** Again in the pre budget discussions with the Finance Minister, the central trade unions have demanded increased financial allocation to implement the recommendations of the 45th ILC.

During the campaign for the strike, lakhs of leaflets will be distributed among the scheme workers as well as beneficiaries, explaining the government policies for dismantling the basic services

schemes. Nearly fifty lakh scheme workers are expected to participate in the strike and lakhs will join the district level demonstrations to be held.

The main demands of the strike are:

1. Implement the recommendations of the 45th ILC on scheme workers: recognition as workers, minimum wages not less than Rs.18,000 per month and social security including monthly pension not less than Rs.3000 to all scheme workers. Give coverage of EPF and ESI to scheme workers.
2. Adequate financial allocation in the Union Budget 2018-19 for the Centrally sponsored schemes including ICDS, MDMS, NHM, SSA, NCLP etc to ensure increase in wages for the workers to the level of minimum wages and universalisation of the schemes with adequate infrastructure and quality services.
3. No privatisation of the schemes in any form and no subversion by way of cash transfer or exclusion of beneficiaries

The future course of the joint struggles will be decided according to the response of the government.

Worker Peasant Solidarity Day 19th January 2018

The CITU, AIKS and AIAWU have been jointly observing 19th January as 'Worker Peasant Solidarity Day'.

A joint meeting of the leadership of the three organisations, to discuss observance of the Solidarity Day on 19th January 2018 was held at BT Ranadive Bhawan on 7th December 2017.

The meeting congratulated the working class and the peasantry of the country for the magnificent struggles on their demands across the country. It noted that the joint trade union 'Mahapadav' on 9-11 November 2017 and the joint 'Kisan Sansad' on 20-21 November 2017 at Parliament Street were unprecedented and massive.

Our joint campaigns will help in further strengthening such broader joint campaigns and struggles against the neoliberal policies of the BJP led government and the authoritarian tendencies being displayed by it. The meeting decided that all three organisations should make serious efforts to ensure a wide campaign and impressive mobilisation for the 'Worker Peasant Solidarity Day' in 2018.

The demands to be focussed on this occasion are:

1. Curb price rise; universalise Public Distribution System; ban forward trading in essential commodities
2. Remunerative price for the peasants as per Swaminathan Committee recommendations
3. Debt waiver for poor peasants and agricultural workers
4. Minimum wage of not less than Rs 18000 per month for all workers
5. Comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers
6. Implementation of MGNREGA in all rural areas; amendment to the Act to cover urban areas
7. Food security for all

All state committees of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU are requested to have joint meetings at the state level to plan the campaign and take the message up to the grass root level and organise torch light processions/ mobilisations at the district level. Please send reports about the programme immediately after it is held.

CITU

AIKS

AIAWU

Pre-Budget 2018 Consultations

The finance minister held a Pre-budget 2018 discussion with the representatives of central trade unions on December 5, 2017. Representatives of all the central trade unions attended the meeting. CITU was represented by its president, Hemalata.

The meeting, as every year, appeared to be not more than a ritual. The 'consultative meeting' with the 12 trade unions that were called, lasted for around one hour. The trade union representatives were requested to give their opinions in 3-4 minutes. The trade unions were asked to express their concerns and suggestions related to the union budget within this time frame.

Ten central trade unions jointly presented their views in a note to the finance minister. In her intervention, Hemalata reiterated that pre budget consultation with trade unions should not be treated as a mere ritual; the views of the trade unions representing the workers who produce the wealth should be given due place in the budget proposals. She also demanded that the Group of Ministers constituted under the chairmanship of the finance minister in 2015 to discuss the demands raised by the trade unions should continue discussions with them and resolve their demands. Instead of focussing on improving '*ease of doing business*' to benefit the corporates, the government should focus on improving India's position in 'Global Hunger Index' and closing the 'gender gap'. This should be done by increasing allocations for social sector including health and education, to the ICDS, National Health Mission, Mid-day Meal Programme etc that serve the poor, particularly women and children. ILC recommendations on recognising 'scheme workers' as 'workers', paying minimum wages to them etc should be implemented.

She also emphasised that the government should increase spending on social sectors like education and health and mobilise resources for this by taxing the rich who can pay. It should focus on employment generation and increasing public expenditure on infrastructure. All vacant posts in various government departments including railways etc should be filled up by fresh recruitment. MGNREGA should be implemented in all rural areas and extended to urban areas. The trade unions reiterated the 12 point charter of demands of the working people of the country and presented their views as follows:

- **Increase budgetary allocations for social sector:** The government should increase allocations on social sector and basic essential services like health, education, food security etc in the union budget. The necessary financial resources should be raised internally by taxing the rich who have the capacity to pay.
- **Effective measures against deliberate tax and loan repayment defaults:** Effective and firm measures should be taken against deliberate tax default by the big business and corporate lobby to curtail the huge accumulation of unpaid taxes, which have been continuously increasing. Further, wilful default should be made a criminal offence, the list of wilful defaulters should be made public and stringent measures such as fast track debt recovery tribunals should be implemented.
- **Minimum Wage:** Minimum wage fixed on the basis of the recommendations of the 15th Indian Labour Conference and the Supreme Court judgment in Raptakos & Brett case and linked to consumer price index, should be guaranteed to all workers. The Seventh Pay Commission has worked this out to be Rs 18000 per month, which the government has accepted. Hence, the minimum wage should not be less than Rs 18000 per month, which has been the common demand of all the central trade unions. Need based minimum wage should be considered as an essential part of social security.
- **Resolve demands of the government employees regarding Seventh Pay Commission:** All the pending demands of the government employees in centre and states with regard to Seventh Pay Commission be resolved within time frame including arrears of allowances with effect from January 1, 2016. The autonomous bodies be included into, for all the benefits of the Seventh Pay Commission.
- **Price rise:** The prices of essential commodities, particularly of food items have been spiralling, making it impossible for the workers and other toiling people to meet their basic daily needs.

Speculative forward trading and hoarding are major factors contributing to the price rise. The government should ban speculative forward trading in essential commodities, take strong measures to curtail hoarding and strengthen public distribution system, making it universal. Stop the system of cash transfer to beneficiaries' accounts in lieu of PDS.

- **Stop disinvestment and strategic sale of public sector units:** The public sector has to be strengthened and expanded. Budgetary support should be provided for the revival of potentially viable sick public sector units. Strategic sale of the profit making PSUs, which is being resorted to at present should be stopped. The amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act, which pave the way for privatisation of the state-owned public transport system should be withdrawn.
- **Employment generation:** Employment generation has nosedived in the recent period. Massive public investment in infrastructure, social sectors and agriculture would generate employment. The union budget should give priority and allocate the necessary funds for this. All vacant sanctioned posts in the different government departments, PSUs and autonomous institutions should be filled up through fresh recruitment. The ban on creation of new posts should be lifted. The practice of surrendering/ abolition of posts should be done away with.
- **Prevent dumping:** The increasing import of industrial commodities including capital goods should be contained and regulated to prevent dumping. Protect and promote domestic industries. This will also help in preventing job losses
- **Extend MGNREGA:** Expenditure on MGNREGA should be increased to cover all rural areas. Ensure immediate payment of wages to workers employed under MGNREGA. It should be amended to include the urban areas as well. The unanimous recommendation of 43rd ILC to extend the scheme to urban areas, guarantee employment for a minimum of 200 days with statutory minimum wage, should be implemented.
- **Contract and casual workers:** No contract/casual workers should be deployed on jobs of perennial nature. The contract and casual workers doing the same and similar work as the permanent workers should be paid the same wages and benefits as paid to regular workers as directed by Supreme Court of India in 2016.
- **FDI:** The CTUs have been repeatedly demanding that FDI should not be allowed in crucial sectors like defence production, railways, financial sector, retail trade etc. But the government has persisted with this policy. Corporates with large NPAs are allowed to invest in sensitive sectors like defence. We reiterate the demands that FDI should not be allowed in the crucial sectors.
- **Defence:** Privatisation of the defence sector should be stopped. The order given for the outsourcing of the 143 items of the total 273 produced by the public sector ordinance factories should be withdrawn.
- **Scheme workers:** Regularise the workforce employed in the various schemes of government of India including the ICDS, NHM, Mid-day Meal Programme, National Child Labour Project, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan etc. Till this is done, at least immediately implement the recommendation of the 45th ILC that these scheme workers should be recognised as 'workers', they should be paid minimum wages and provided social security benefits including pension. Increase budgetary allocations to these schemes and stop privatisation of these schemes in any form.
- **Domestic workers:** The government should ratify the ILO Convention 189 and enact a central law and create support system for domestic workers.
- **Unorganised workers:** Create a National Fund for Unorganised Workers to provide social security for all unorganised workers including contract, casual, migrant workers etc. Direct all state governments to frame rules under the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act and allocate funds for developing street vending as livelihood model. Management of cess under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board, Beedi Workers Welfare Board etc. should be made the responsibility of ministry of finance, which should ensure its proper collection, stoppage of evasion and utilisation.

- **Labour law reforms:** Stop labour law amendments that curtail the basic and trade union rights of workers and provide unhindered 'hire and fire' facilities to the employers. The Code on Wages Bill, at present before the Standing Committee on Labour and on the draft Code on Industrial Relations Bill should be finalised on the basis of the opinions of the central trade unions expressed unanimously. No labour law amendment should be undertaken without the consent of the trade unions and workers who are the main stakeholders and the most affected.
- **EPF:** The threshold limit for EPF scheme should be brought down to 10. Government and employers' contribution should be increased to provide a minimum pension of Rs 3000 per month and make it sustainable. Stop investing EPF funds in share market. The Supreme Court has given a judgment and order for higher payment of pension under EPS – 95. This option should be made available for all workers covered under the said scheme.
- **Pension for all:** Pension should be construed as deferred wage and all workers who are not covered by any pension scheme should be ensured a pension not less than Rs 3,000 per month.
- **New Pension scheme:** NPS should be withdrawn. All central and state government employees recruited on or after January 1, 2004 should be covered under the old pension scheme.
- **Gratuity:** Gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act should be raised to Rs 20 lakhs and 30 days wages instead of 15 days per completed year of service.
- **AADHAR:** Government should not rush making Aadhar linking compulsory.
- **Closed and sick factories:** Ensure that workers of closed factories get their dues within a fixed time limit. Sudden winding up of the BIFR has left many stakeholders without a remedy. Rules for carrying out the provisions of the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Repeal Act, 2003, should be framed immediately to facilitate them.
- **Income tax exemption:** The ceiling for income tax for salaried persons and pensioners should be raised to Rs 5 lakh per year. Income Tax ceiling for senior citizens should be raised to Rs 8 lakhs. All perks and fringe benefits like housing, medical and education facilities and running allowances in railways should be exempted from income tax net totally.
- **Political funding:** Recently the government has removed the limit on the amount companies can donate to political parties and the need to name the political party receiving the funds. This is far from the transparency promised in public life. The earlier regime should be restored.
- **Railways:** Adequate financial resources should be allotted to the railways to ensure more effective, accessible and affordable transport to the common people, particularly the poor. The capabilities of public sector production units should be utilised fully, further developed and strengthened. No measure should be taken to privatise the railways. The measures to hand over the railway stations across the country to private players should be immediately stopped. Any property of railways should not be handed over to private sector through lease or sale. The decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in railways should be withdrawn. The pending expansion, track renewal, signals up gradation projects should be completed at the earliest. Adequate financial resources should be allocated to improve safety systems and ensure safe rail travel for the people. All the vacancies in the railways should be filled up. The long pending demands of the railway employees like enhancement of ceiling in respect of running allowance for tax exemption, housing scheme etc should be addressed positively.

Concluding the discussion, the trade unions reiterated their strong opposition to the anti-worker measures being undertaken by the government on the pretext of improving the 'ease of doing business', to benefit the employers, particularly the big corporates, domestic and foreign. They once again urged upon the government to take concrete measures to resolve the 12 point charter of demands of the working people, being repeatedly raised by them, as well as the pressing issues listed above.

The central trade unions regretted that none of the suggestions made by them in the earlier pre-budget meetings were incorporated in the previous budgets. They hoped that this would not be repeated yet again and the points raised by them will be given positive consideration while framing budget 2018-19.

Starvation Death again in Jharkhand

Premani Kunwar, a 64 year old widow living with her thirteen years old son, was completely dependent on the grain entitlements of 35 kg/month under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and pension of Rs.600/month under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS). Lack of sufficient food and nutrition was a regular affair in her family. She did not get her grain entitlement of 35 kgs in November 2017. She also did not get the pension of September-October 2017 (Rs. 1200) as it was credited to the account of Shanti Devi, her husband's first wife, whose new bank account was linked with Premani's Aadhaar, without her knowledge, two months ago. As a result, the widow pension and other benefits which she used to receive in her existing bank account were diverted to that new account, leaving her high and dry.

Premani last withdrew her pension on 8 September 2017 following which there was no money left in her account. No food had been cooked in her house for 8 days preceding the date of her death, 1 December 2017, as there was no grain in the house and Premani did not have proper meals during this period. In November, she had borrowed some uncooked grain, cooked rice and sattu from her neighbours. She passed away early in the morning on 1 December 2017 because of continual starvation that was at its worst in the last eight days before her death.

A fact-finding team of the Right to Food Campaign, Jharkhand, visited Premani's village on 4-5 December 2017 to inquire into the report on Premani Kunwar's death on December 1 due to starvation. The team rejected media reports claiming that money was available in the victim's bank account when she died.

Jharkhand is a BJP-ruled state where reports of starvation deaths are a regular feature.

(Input from the Internet)

UP Farmers Potato Woes

With farmers not turning up at cold storage facilities to take away their potato produce, and the produce beginning to rot, storage owners have started dumping the rotting tubers on roadsides and fields for stray cattle and the poor to feed on. A total of 2.5 lakh tonnes of the produce, which could not be sold, are being dumped across Agra district alone.

The wholesale price of potato has reached as low as Rs 10 for a packet of 50 kg, which translates into 20 paise per kg. Besides, farmers have to pay transportation cost to take potatoes for sale to big markets. Moreover, to take the potatoes from cold storage centres, farmers have to pay a storage fee of Rs 110 per packet. The economics don't add up for them anymore. In July, the wholesale price was Rs 400 per packet. But there has been a continuous fall in prices since then. Considering the low prices of the tuber and in order to avoid further losses, farmers have simply decided not to take the stored produce away.

Meanwhile, most of the 240 cold storage units operating in the district have switched off their preservation machines to save on electricity expenses. This is causing rapid rotting of potatoes. Now thousands of tonnes of the produce are being taken out and dumped. These are consumed by poor people and animals.

According to doctors, rotten potatoes are harmful for both human beings and animals and may cause fungal infections if eaten. Air polluted by decaying potatoes can cause serious respiratory problems for lung patients.

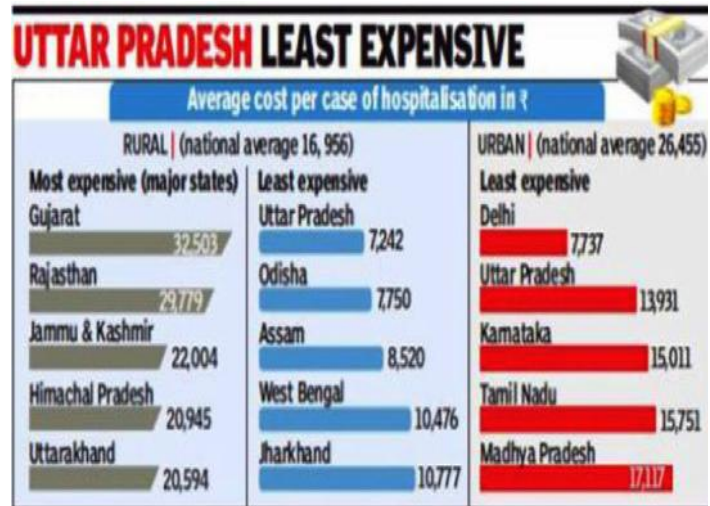
In urban India, potato is sold for Rs. 20 a kilo. Who eats up the Rs. 19.80 p. gap per kilo in between is a question one can ask.

(Courtesy – The Times of India)

1 in 5 Urban Families Forced to Borrow to Fund Hospital Stay

About a quarter of all rural households and one in five urban families in India are forced into debt or sale of assets to meet hospitalization costs. This is true across income levels, revealed the National Health Profile 2017 published recently by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence.

In rural India, about two-thirds - ranging from 65.6% in the poorest to 68% for the richest - depend on the household income or savings, while 27% of the poorest household and 23% of the richest households depend on borrowings for hospitalization costs. In urban India, 68% of the poorest and about 80% of the most well-off households depend on their own income and savings.



As they get richer, their reliance on borrowings goes down from 22% among the poorest to 14% among the richest. In rural India, about 1% whether rich or poor meet hospitalization costs through sale of assets. This is negligible among urban households. Roughly 5% of rural and urban households are helped out by friends and relatives to meet the cost. The data on hospitalization was from the health expenditure survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation from January 2013 to June 2014. The data also shows that getting hospitalized was most expensive in Gujarat for rural households and in Assam for those who lived in towns and cities.

The average cost per hospitalization case in rural areas was Rs 32,500 in Gujarat, over four times as expensive as in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, each hospitalization in urban Assam cost on an average about Rs 52,368, nearly seven times as much as in urban Delhi. Next to Assam, the urban areas of Goa and Himachal Pradesh were the most expensive places to get in-patient treatment, costing over Rs 37,000 and Rs 35,200 per hospitalization case.

MOST EXPENSIVE (URBAN)

1	Assam	52,368
2	Himachal	35,217
3	Andhra Pradesh	33,671
4	Uttarakhand	33,402
5	Rajasthan	31,978
Urban nat'l avg		26,455

*Avg cost per case of hospitalisation in ₹

Interestingly, in states with very high total per capita spending on health, such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir, the average expenditure on each hospitalization was not among the highest. This could be due to higher spending on out-patient costs. In many of these states, the presence of a robust public hospital network could also be the reason for lower expenditure on hospitalisation as several of them also have the highest government spending per capita on health.

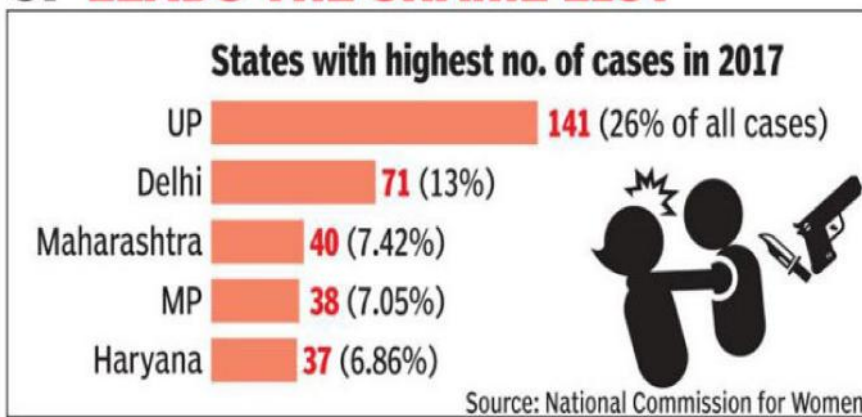
(Courtesy – The Times of India)

Women Harassed at Workplace

About two women were harassed every day at their workplace in India so far in 2017, with the National Commission for Women (NCW) receiving an average of 1.7 complaints per day. In the 316 days between January 1 and December 12, the commission received 539 complaints, 60% of which were from five states: Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.

However, the cases reported to the NCW represent only the tip of the iceberg. According to sexual harassment laws, complaints are first expected to be addressed by an internal complaints committee or district complaints committee in the case of unorganized sector workers. The complainant then has a choice to approach the state women's commission or national commission for redress. However, in many cases victims don't complain because the committee has either not been set up or is not considered effective.

UP LEADS THE SHAME LIST



Cumulative data for four years from 2014 shows a similar trend with the NCW receiving 1.8 complaints per day on average. In four years, 1,971 complaints were received by the commission.

According to a Supreme Court Lawyer, one major problem with the existing system is that there are no penalties for

committees within companies not acting on complaints, or in many cases further harassing the victims. Eight out of 10 firms do not have a functional committee. While the big ones are more sincere in putting in place a system, the majority of them fail in addressing the concerns of women, and no legal action is taken

Three months ago, after the Karnataka Women's Commission (KWC) ensured action against a supervisor of a garments firm in Bengaluru, 11 other women complained of harassment by the same man for several months.

The KWC chairperson says that the majority of complaints come from technology firms. *"There are two kinds of harassment, professional and sexual, and I've seen many cases that began as professional harassment and eventually ended up as sexual,"* she says, adding that it is important to improve prevention mechanisms.

Despite the introduction of redressal systems - POSH (Policy on Prevention of Sexual Harassment) and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, women continue to refrain from filing complaints as most workplaces are still dominated by men and victims are often harassed for raising such issues.

(Courtesy – The Times of India)

Odisha ASHA Workers Day-Night Dharna

Under the banner of Odisha Asha Karmee Association of CITU, 3000 ASHA workers, coming from different parts of the state, brought out a procession from the railway station and, on reaching the State Assembly in Bhubaneswar, staged a militant demonstration and sat on an indefinite day-night relay dharna on 17 November which entered the 6th day on 22 November before going to press.



The union is agitating for their 20 points charter of demands which includes the demand for regularization as government employees, Rs. 18,000 as minimum wage and till that time, enhancement of incentives, social security including PF and pension, regular payment of wages etc.

The president of the union's, R R Sarangi, general secretary Nalini Sahu and CITU state leaders Lambodar Nayak, Janardhan Pati, Bishnu Mohanty, Dusmanata Das, Satyananda Behera, Ramesh Jena and others addressed the meeting.

(Inputs: Ramesh Jena)

Demonstration of Health Workers in Patna

A big demonstration of various categories of temporary, contract and outsourced and scheme workers working under the health department of Bihar government was held on 30th November 2017 in Patna. The struggle was organised by the Bihar Medical and Public Health Employees Association. Health workers, contract and outsourced workers, ASHA workers, Mamata, Courier, 102,108 and 1099 Ambulance workers, technicians, data entry operators of 'Sanjeevani' scheme, contract workers of state health samity and rogi kalyan samity and para medical workers participated in this huge demonstration. The meeting was addressed by CITU state general secretary, Ganesh Shankar Singh, AIDWA Vice President Rampari, Arun Kumar Ojha and Vishwanath Sing General secretary of the BMPHEA among others. The demands were immediate payment of arrears of wages, removal of ban on payment of increased remuneration of the contract workers by the state health samity, payment of minimum wages



to ASHA workers, mamta workers and courier workers, permanent appointment in vacancies, equal pay for equal wages for contract and outsourced workers, making of proper service rules for different categories and for their promotion and working conditions etc. The union decided to observe 3 December as black day and organise dharna at the civil surgeon's office on 4-5 December. The union declared to go for further struggles in case the government does not agree to their demands.

Punjab Anganwadi Mulazam Union Forces Policy Change



As a result of the struggle of the Anganwadi Mulazam Union (AMU), which is affiliated to the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH) and CITU, the Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has given an assurance in writing that no anganwadi centre would be affected with the commencement of pre-primary classes. The government also made it clear that the anganwadi centres would function

from their set locations and the government would not shut down any centre in Punjab. Anganwadi workers and helpers under the banner of AMU, participated in the 67 day long mass militant agitation and compelled the Punjab government to withdraw its decision to enroll children in the age group of 3-6 years in the pre-primary classes in Government Primary Schools instead of anganwadi centres. The Punjab government had to issue a fresh notification in this regard assuring the AMU that it would not close any anganwadi centre. Earlier, the government had made policies to merge 800 primary schools and taken the decision to start pre-primary classes in government schools by merging the anganwadi centres without considering the workers in this sector. The pre-primary classes at the government schools were intended for the children in the age group of 3-6 years which comes under ICDS. The pre-primary classes named as *Khed Mahal* (play palace), would ultimately have resulted in the shutdown of the anganwadis.

The government's decision to merge the centres had raised several concerns regarding employment for around 64,000 employees working in 26,833 anganwadi centres across the state. The Anganwadi Mulazam Union held massive victory rallies at Mohali, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Bathinda, Gurdaspur, Sangrur and Tarantaran. Over 25 thousand workers and helpers took part in these victory rallies. Addressing the rallies, Usha Rani, all India president of AIFAWH, Raghunath Singh, general secretary Punjab CITU, Harjeet Kaur, president and Subhash Rani, general secretary of AMU and several other state leaders of AMU and CITU, congratulated the workers for their victory. The speakers called upon the workers to prepare themselves for another struggle on the demand to cover all the scheme workers under the Minimum Wages Act and all other labour laws.

Mid Day Meal Workers in Odisha

Mid Day Meal Workers Unions in Odisha jointly organised protest in Bhubaneswar demanding better wages, social security and pension.



Third National Convention of Women Bank Employees

The 3rd National Convention of Women Bank Employees was held successfully in Chennai on 17th and 18th December, 2017 under the auspices of Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI). The venue was named Com Sukomal Sen Nagar and the auditorium was named after Com Naresh Paul, the pioneer of bank employees movement on the occasion of his birth centenary



year. A colourful procession wound its way through several streets and reached the venue where the Red Flag of BEFI was hoisted by J Guria, Vice President of BEFI and floral tributes were offered by leaders of BEFI and fraternal organisations to the martyrs.

The Convention was inaugurated by Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA, who expresses, Mariam expressed anguish over the growing incidents of atrocities on women in various parts of the country. She called upon the women bank employees to come forward and play an effective role in fighting against the anti people policies of the BJP government at the centre. The inaugural session was also addressed by CJ Nandakumar, President, BEFI and representatives from other fraternal organisations.

41 delegates, the majority of whom were new entrants in the industry, spoke on the report placed by Kalyani Chakraborti, the Convenor of the Women Sub-Committee. The Report and all Resolutions were adopted unanimously.

After completion of discussions, Pradip Biswas, General Secretary, BEFI, addressed the convention and detailed the situation in the banking industry and the role to be played by the women employees, whose number has increased considerably in the recent period after a gap of more than two decades of no recruitment in the industry. A 27 member new sub-committee was elected with Nupur Roy as the new Convenor. The Convention ended with slogans taking a vow to carry forward the struggle for gender equality, protection of women's rights at the work place and to continue to remain a part of country's working class movement.

Telengana Anganwadi Workers and Helpers



At the call of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (CITU), anganwadi workers and helpers of Telangana, organised a dharna before ICDS Directorate on the following demands.

Scrap GO No.19, amend GO No 14 , Stop cash transfers in place of cooked food in anganwadis, Implement minimum wage as Rs.18,000/- pm for anganwadi employees, Implement ESI, PF to anganwadi employees.

A memorandum was submitted to the Director. He assured that he will take up the demands with the government.

Thousands of Kisans hold Novel Kisan Sansad

Hannan Mollah

In a historic protest action, thousands of farmers representing more than 184 organisations came to Delhi for the Kisan Sansad/Kisan Parliament held on November 20-21, 2017. On November 20 they marched in a colourful procession from the Ramlila Maidan with tens of thousands holding red flags and banners with an accompaniment of green, blue, yellow and pink flags winding their way to the Parliament Street. The most distinctive feature of this rally and Kisan Sansad was its truly pan-Indian character, and almost every state in the country was well-represented.

The enthusiastic march was led among others by AIKS president Dr Ashok Dhawale, AIKS vice president Amra Ram, joint secretaries Vijoo Krishnan, KK Ragesh, Badal Saroj and finance secretary P Krishnaprasad and leaders of state Kisan Sabhas along with VM Singh, convenor,

AIKSCC, Yogendra Yadav and Avik Saha, Jai Kisan Andolan, Rajaram Singh, general secretary, AIKMS, Prem Singh and Kartik Rai, AIKMS, Ashish Mittal and Chandrashekhar, AIKKMS, Raju Shetty, Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana and others. Since morning, thousands of farmers started marching with



flags and raising slogans, from Ambedkar Bhavan, Gurdwara Rakabganj and different railway stations to reach the Kisan Mukti Sansad at Parliament Street. The contingent of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in this rally and Kisan Sansad was the largest, but many other kisan organisations had also mobilised in strength.

On November 20, the Kisan Mukti Sansad started after completing the Kisan Mukti Yatra of more than 10 thousand kilometers, conducted by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee in 19 states. The Sansad started with tributes to the farmers martyred in Mandsaur and other police firings, to farmers who committed suicide, and to farmers of Yavatmal, who died due to pesticide poisoning.

A special feature of this programme was the Mahila Kisan Sansad with 543 women representatives. Medha Patkar was the speaker. Kavitha Kurganthi introduced the objectives of the Mahila Kisan Sansad. It discussed the grim situation of farmers, and especially women farmers, in the country. There were several widows, mothers, sisters and daughters of farmers who had been forced to commit suicide due to indebtedness. Some of them spoke about their plight, but at the same time they courageously declared their resolve to combat the disastrous policies of the government that had led to the suicide of their husbands. Women activists from all over the country also spoke. They included Sudha Sudararaman of the AIDWA and Annie Raja of the NFIW. The Mahila Kisan Sansad gave its consent to table two crucial bills in Parliament.

In the Kisan Sansad that followed, Hannan Mollah, AIKS general secretary, presented the '*Farmers' Freedom from Debt Bill, 2017*' and Raju Shetty, MP, presented the '*Farmers' Right to Assured Remunerative Prices for Agricultural Produce Bill, 2017*'. The bills will be discussed in every state with a drafting committee visiting states and will be tabled in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha after incorporating necessary amendments. After getting the amendments from across the country, both these Bills will be finalised by two standing committees headed by Hannan Mollah and Raju Shetty.

The Kisan Sansad also felicitated the AIKS vice president Amra Ram for the historic victory of the Kisan Sabha struggle in Rajasthan as well as Raju Shetty, MP for quitting the NDA and coming out against the Narendra Modi led BJP government betrayal of promises made to farmers.

Hannan Mollah, AIKS general secretary, while placing the bill, said that the BJP government and traders have looted the farmers by continuously paying them less and forced them into debt. This in turn has caused the suicide of more than four lakh farmers in the country. Farmers have united to fight this exploitation now and will not allow the government or traders to loot them any longer. He also said that farmers' organisations from all over the country have consistently demanded a loan waiver but it is unique that now they are also presenting the bill for the parliament to discuss and approve. Comprehensive legislations to ensure freedom from the debt cycle as well as assured remunerative prices for farmers, will have to be passed by the parliament, he said. The nationwide united farmers' struggle for these demands will continue relentlessly.

Dr Ashok Dhawale, AIKS president, attacked the Narendra Modi-led BJP government for betraying farmers and called it the most anti-farmer government in independent India. He condemned the BJP regime for giving loan waivers of lakhs of crores of rupees to a handful of corporates, while denying these to crores of farmers in distress. He also said that neither the Congress nor the BJP governments at the centre had implemented the recommendation of MSP at one and a half times the cost of production, made by the National Commission of Farmers that was headed by Dr MS Swaminathan. Narendra Modi and the BJP had, in fact, betrayed their election promise to do so. He said that the fighting unity of the farmers will defeat both the repressive tactics of the anti-people government and its diabolical conspiracy to divide the people on communal lines.

Amra Ram, vice president, AIKS and Dr Ajit Nawale, general secretary, Maharashtra Rajya Kisan Sabha drew attention to the victory of the peasant struggles in Rajasthan and Maharashtra respectively and expressed confidence that this historic movement will also emerge victorious. VM Singh, Yogendra Yadav, Atul Anjaan, Medha Patkar, Sunilam, Pratibha Shinde, Rajaram Singh, Kodihalli Chandrashekhar, Ashish Mittal, Satyawar, Avik Saha, Kiran Bassa and many other kisan leaders and activists also addressed the Kisan Sansad. Leaders of different class and mass organisations were present in solidarity. The insensitive BJP government, the prime minister and the agriculture minister refused to meet a delegation of the AIKSCC.

The Kisan Sansad also decided to conduct a two month campaign from November 26, 2017 to January 26, 2018 on the two bills and against the anti-farmer policies of the BJP government. The first public hearing (*jansunwai*) on the two bills will be held in Gujarat at the end of November. This campaign will be followed by intensified nation-wide action in a coordinated manner by bringing in more organisations and holding state level conventions. Resistance will be organised unitedly at the local level to ensure that MSP is given to all crops and also to ensure that debt-ridden farmers are not harassed by the banks or private money-lenders.

The farmers returned with a firm resolve to fight against the insensitive BJP government and carry on the struggle until victory. The Kisan Sansad concluded amidst great enthusiasm with the singing of the National Anthem.

Citizen Shambhulal is the New Face of Hindutva

Shiv Visvanathan

The only way we can confront him is by rebuilding our democracy into one which protects the likes of Afrazul and Akhlaq.

On December 12, I read Syeda Hameed's article in the Indian Express on Mohammed Afrazul and my blood ran cold. There was something stark and surreal about the event, a dance macabre dismissed as another banal case. Afrazul was a Bengali worker from Malda, a migrant – and Muslim – working to earn a living in Rajasthan. An ordinary, faceless, nameless man who would have lived anonymously if not for Shambhulal.

Shambhulal is not faceless. He is a middle-class avatar of hate and confusion. Our country today is not a collection of people. We are a collection of symptoms of hate and revenge, much of which is surreal. It is based on a sickness of history where our mind and our memories are still overcoming the Mughals. This generates a series of diseases like love jihad, the lynch squad or people trying to protect the virginity and purity of Padmavati. Our history itself seems to have become a disease because it is no longer historical. It is a narrative of melodrama drawn in thin air where a middle-class man can play Shivaji or Rana Pratap purging the land of alien invaders and infidels, pretending the Muslim worker is a Mughal infidel.

The Muslim is no longer the neighbour we lived with. Islam is no longer the religion which provided the creative syncretism of the Sufi culture and the poems of Kabir. The Muslim is the enemy we want to exterminate. The Hindu in the Hindutva movement virtually feels that unless he has brutalised a Muslim or some member of a minority community, his rites of manhood and citizenship are not complete.

The monster in us is banalised, following predictable social science categories where the victim as a target is already boxed into categories like Muslim, minority, meat eaters, perpetrators of love jihad. Daily violence – normalised as routine – has become as banal as a weather report. The language of description and closure has become common enough to erase the event from memory. The next murder has the same brutality and yet sounds disconnected. There is little sense of memory, or of remembrance. There is no painter, poet or playwright to mark the event. No Picasso with his Guernica, no Wilfred Owen to condemn the brutality of it.

Yet, it is almost as if memory and violence have become acts of consumption. Today, almost every public act of violence is accompanied by a video. So whether it is Akhlaq or Afrazul, the replay of the violent imagery becomes a crucial part of the act itself. As an acute observant suggested Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Padmavati was an incomplete film. Padmavati, the historical piece, was the part before the interval. The second part was the modern day reaction, the making of the Karni Singh Group, the confrontation between English accented broadcasters and the women fighting for a ban.

What really completes the drama is the emergence of Shambhulal as the new Hindutva Indian. In contrast what one confronts is the weakness of the liberal-radical critique, and the very effectiveness of the protests. Shambhulal is now the new hit, not Deepika Padukone. His hate does not need explanation. Even a recitation of gibberish is enough. The contemporary response is an inversion and one realises as the full narrative comes out that Citizen Shambhulal is the play, the spectacle we are watching. He does not need a script. Any hurried telegram of words juxtaposed will do. Love jihad, Babri, anything.

As one confronts a closed mind and a closed majority, one realises that a parallel world of categories is being created before which words like democracy and human rights carry little meaning. The great Indian movie is Citizen Shambhulal. He has a solidity, power and presence which push even the great classic Citizen Kane disappear into the margins. Citizen Shambhulal is the other face of the BJP era. As long as Shambhulal is in the majority, the Modi regime is intact. The Shambhulals, in fact, exude a piety they call patriotism and project a machismo where a lynch squad confronts a random victim. Citizen Shambhulal has emerged from our unconscious. He is the middle-class protagonist of Hindutva who destroys our secular dreams and our plural worlds. Padmavati, the film, is like those wall paintings. As you erase the surface, a new picture emerges and below Padukone lies Shambhulal. The modern Indian has come of age. He is the custodian of imaginary histories and an ethic cleanser. He seeks to exorcise history to create a home for his imagined self.



Shambhulal is the middle-class protagonist of Hindutva who destroys our secular dreams and our plural world

Shambhulal is not new. He comes in many avatars. Last year his hit movie was not Afrazul, it was Akhlaq. Shambhulal lives with impunity in the Ram rajya created by a majoritarian democracy. Neither modern human rights nor modern radical social science has an answer to him. One needs the power of absurd drama, a touch of a Kafka to confront him. He is the common man as the new genocidal self, the new idea India has built for itself. Citizen Shambhulal is us. He has an epidemic everyday quality. As one stands to protest against him or write about his brutality to Afrazul, one realises his almost mythic, folkloric power. It stems not from him but from the billion hates that we, as a population, have sustained.

How does one confront Shambhulal? The human rights approach of speaking a minoritarian language, seeking compensation, has little appeal in the era of Shambhulals. Gandhians look more irrelevant because Shambhulal like Godse seeks to exorcise Gandhi from history. Shambhulal carries a certain sense of impunity. He is the new patriot who, in destroying or brutalising a helpless Muslim, believes himself to be every man's Rana Pratap.

Activists have to continue the fight but one needs a new ethical, moral and political imagination to understand how modern society factory farms the Shambhulals. One needs a new kind of storytelling where the artist and the poet lampoon Shambhulal. The storyteller has to begin with Modi because Modi and Amit Shah are who have made Shambhulal possible. In establishing this link and challenging it, the forces of concern might create a new dream of citizenship where the other is sacred and a democracy which is never complete without protecting Akhlaq and Afrazul.

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(Courtesy: The Wire)

WFTU Working Women Asia Pacific Regional Conference

A R Sindhu

The WFTU Asia Pacific regional conference of women workers was held in Hanoi, Vietnam on 6-8 December 2017 as a prelude to the World Working Women's Congress scheduled to be held in Panama on 8-10 March 2018. The conference was hosted by the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL). 14 women trade unionists from seven countries - Bangladesh, India, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Sri Lanka, representing 10 affiliated unions, participated in the conference. From India, A R Sindhu from CITU and K Mallika from AITUC attended the conference.

The conference which was held at the Trade Union Hotel in Hanoi was inaugurated by Bui Van Cuong, Vice President, WFTU and President VGCL. He called for more initiatives for trade unions to play a stronger role in consulting, proposing and supervising the implementation of women worker related policies as well as to have more effective activities for women workers in the region. He also explained the achievements of Vietnam and VGCL in defending women workers legal and social rights. Vietnam is 18th in the world in representation of women in the national assembly. He expressed the hope that the conference will enrich the Vietnamese trade unions to face the challenges of still existing discrimination in wages, working conditions, opportunity in training and promotion etc in the country.

In her speech, Anda Anastasaki, General Coordinator, WFTU headquarters, explained the general conditions of women workers the world over, under the capitalist production system with discriminatory working conditions, lack of healthcare and social security, vulnerability and violence including sexual exploitation and racial discrimination faced due to migration, double burden of domestic work, domestic violence and violence against women, lack of maternity benefits etc. She put forward the WFTU perspective of the leading role of women in trade unions and called for a unified fight on the demands of working women and expressed the hope to develop a common strategy at the working women's Congress to be held on 8 March at Panama.

The CITU representative pointed out that the Asia Pacific region has been the hub of surplus extraction by exploitation of the working class as well as through primitive accumulation. In the background of the aggravating systemic world capitalist crisis and the efforts by the imperialist countries to pass the burden of the crisis to the developing countries, it is going to be aggravated. Women workers being the biggest victims of this exploitation in Asia Pacific, it is of utmost priority to unionise them for the class oriented trade union movement. It is equally important for us to expose and demystify the unpaid labour done by women in various forms and to reiterate their role as a part of the working class, in the struggle to end exploitation.

Narrating the impact of neoliberal imperialist policies of the ruling dispensation in India, she said that according to McKinsey Global Institute report, improving gender parity at the workplace can help India add a whopping 2.9 trillion dollars to its GDP in 2025!

She also explained the advance made by CITU and the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) in organising working women under the banner of CITU, increasing the percentage of women in CITU from 7.7% in total membership in 1985 to 32.36% in 2015. Now CITU has 26.2% women as national level Office Bearers.

She suggested that WFTU affiliates must take up indepth studies on newer forms of economic and social oppression, on global chains, their interlinkage, on utilizing feudal patriarchal values for exploitation in various parts of the world. They must disseminate the information, strengthening

their networking to popularize the issues and demands among the working class in general and working women in particular, unionise them and take up higher forms of militant struggles

The representatives from other countries, Shahana Ferdousy Lucky of Jatiyo Sramaik Federation and Kormi Barua from BTUC, both from Bangladesh, Anah Dianah from KASBI, Indonesia, Evelyin Chan Siew Yen and Nur Fatihah Suhaila Binti Mohd Noor from NUBE, Malaysia, Rosalinda Gobrin

from Workers For People's Liberation and Dorina Clare Juco Naraval from National Congress of Workers both from Philippines, Visakah Shamalie Suriyabandara Kannangara from All Ceylon Trade Union Federation from Srilanka and Soheila Jelodar Zadeh from Workers' house in Iran all had similar experiences to share. The impact of neoliberal policies; increasing casualisation and underemployment, withdrawal of social security, health education and nutrition and all other public utility services, changes in labour laws to withdraw various rights of the workers including maternity benefits, the story is almost the same in all the countries. The competition to attract investment in Asia Pacific region in various sectors of production like manufacturing, textiles and garments with the cheapest labour is making women workers more prone to exploitation and this process is aggravated by the systemic crisis of capitalism. Increasing violence against women is the order of the day. Distress migration and the resulting vulnerability are adding to it. Very poor representation of women in elected bodies and decision making positions are also common to these countries.

The representatives also shared their experiences of increasing resistance by the workers and the trade union movement in these countries. There were a few achievements and advancements in establishing women workers rights. The first woman Member of Parliament from Iran, Soheila narrated her initiatives to bring some new legislation for more maternity benefits for women workers. She has taken the initiative to bring a social security package for women workers.

The different story was of course from Vietnam. The delegation from VGCL consisted of representatives from various Departments of Women Workers', Organisation, International, Administrative, Information and education, Legal Affairs etc, apart from different sectoral unions of Textile, Information and Communication, Agriculture, Transport, Industry and Trade, Building, Health, Railway and Education. Trinh Thanh Hang, Director, Women Worker's department, VGCL made a presentation in two parts: the role of women workers in socio economic development and the role of trade unions in promoting women's role. 48.23% of the workforce in Vietnam is women. Vietnam ranks 65 out of 144 countries in Gender Gap Index in the ranking of World Economic Forum in 2016. (India ranks 108 in 2016). It has the highest proportion of seats held by women in Parliaments in East Asia and ranks 18 in the world. It has more than 25% women representation in all levels of people's councils and the National Assembly which is on an increase. Women play a significant role in the production and service sectors.



VGCL has more than 50% women membership. It now has 46.4% women in workplace level executive committees, 37.6% at immediate upper level, 27.33% in the VGCL executive committee and 25% Presidium members. VGCL is making conscious efforts to promote women's leadership role and in taking active part in formation of laws and decrees on women workers' rights and also in supervising policy implementation. The union is taking up the challenges of disparities at IZs and EPZs and the gender imbalance situation in some sectors which employ mostly women. In response to a question the VGCL representative said that women's unpaid labour, including housework, is not counted in the GDP of the country. A representative from a workplace union narrated her first hand experience of collective bargaining in an EPZ which achieved maternity benefit and increase in wages.

The participants suggested to take up an intensified campaign and struggles on the demands of equal wages, equality in opportunity, maternity benefits and healthcare, prevention of sexual harassment and violence, more representation in decision making, migrants worker's rights etc. The conference decided to have more coordination and solidarity actions and information sharing and networking for higher struggles. There was a demand for evaluation of women's unpaid labour in every country's GDP. The conference ended with the concluding remarks by Nguyen Thi Thu Hong, Vice President VGCL and vote of thanks by Anda.

The visit to the Ho Chi Minh Museum was an inspiration for the participants. The VGCL had also arranged a tour to Nih Binh Province for them.

Condemn US Step on Jerusalem

The international community including the WFTU affiliates has strongly condemned the decision of US President Donald Trump, to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to shift the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv.

This action goes against the United Nations' and the international community's stand that East Jerusalem is a territory occupied by Israel since 1967. An independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital is the internationally accepted position. The United States has taken the formal step of legalizing the illegal occupation of Palestine territories by Israel. No other country in the world has given recognition to Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The United States is also responsible for scuttling any possible peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. This decision by Donald Trump will trigger further tensions and conflicts in the region, with global ramifications.

Unlike the worldwide opposition to this move, the official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India has scrupulously refused to criticize the US decision. This shows the extent of servility of the Modi regime to the United States.

The WFTU announced a week of active, operative and militant solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people. It has called upon its affiliates to unite their voice with the voice of Palestine's working class! It has called for organising protests etc during this week in front of US Embassies and other International Organizations Offices.

CITU also demands that the Modi government come out strongly disapproving of the US action, as it goes against India's longstanding commitment to the Palestinian cause.

- ◆ Protest, demonstrate, go on strike against the U.S. President's decision!
- ◆ For the people of the entire world and for the WFTU as well, Eastern Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine, within the 1967 borders.
- ◆ Internationalism is the weapon of the world class-oriented trade union movement.
- ◆ The Palestinian people are not alone.

15 to 21 December 2017

Action now for Palestine!

No to the imperialist plans!

Curb Crimes against Women

The latest report of the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) reveals a steady increase in crimes against women and an alarming rise in sexual assaults on children. In 2016, 3.4 lakh cases of crimes against women were registered. This is a 2.9 per cent increase over the previous year. Of these 32 per cent concerned domestic violence, 25 per cent sexual harassment and 11.5 per cent rape. Statistics relating to crimes against women are always an underestimate as many cases go unreported, or FIRs are not registered. Hence these figures can indicate only broad trends.

As far as crimes against children are concerned there were 1.1 lakh cases in 2016 which amounts to 13.6 percentage points increase over the previous year. There is a shocking 83 per cent rise in child rape cases in 2016; as against 10,934 cases in 2015 and it rose to 19,920 cases in 2016.

These figures highlight the all-round failure to provide a safe and secure environment for women and children, the promise made by the BJP in its Lok Sabha election manifesto. There are a number of factors which have contributed to this dismal situation.

The Nirbhaya Fund was set up in 2015 to build infrastructure and mechanisms to prevent crimes against women. The fund now has Rs 3,100 crores. The nodal agency for this fund is the women and child development ministry. The ministry had said in July that it had recommended projects worth Rs 2,209 crores. But in a petition to the Supreme Court, the central government admitted that actual allocations were just Rs 264 crore, in other words just 8.5 per cent. Apart from this Rs 200 crores were allocated to the states for victim-relief, making it a total of around Rs 400 crores. However, there is no report of the utilisation of these funds.

This shows the lack of priority of the government. The social approach of the government and the dominant ideologies of those in power are also responsible. Laws meant to prevent crime and protect women are being diluted as for example Sec 498A which addresses incidents of domestic violence. The ideology of an ideal Hindu family with the epitome of a good wife demands silence from a victim of domestic violence.

Victim shaming encourages silence and acceptance on the part of the victim which is further compounded because of the lack of social and infrastructural support. Statements by political leaders blaming women for the violence against them with comments about their clothes, their movements and their friends are pillorising and shaming the victim which only encourages crime.

Shamefully, minor girls are becoming victims showing the utter degeneration of values. The recent instances of children being abused in schools is a worrying phenomenon.

Low conviction rates of under 25 per cent in most categories of crimes against women act as an encouragement to criminals. The unhelpful role of the law enforcement agencies who also discourage women from filing complaints and the long delays in legal procedures add to the injustice.

Statements by members of parliament and legislatures blaming women for the crimes against them must not only be condemned, they must also be held accountable for such statements by the legislatures concerned.

The main issue is the lack of political will to deal with crimes against women. The government and the law enforcement agencies must accord priority to tackle crimes against women and children. The Modi government must take up the Verma Committee recommendations to build a strong infrastructure for prevention of crimes against women and support to women who are victims, for their implementation.

There has to be strict implementation of laws against sexual harassment.

On Firing on Tea Garden Workers in Assam

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions expresses shock and vehemently condemns the indiscriminate firing on the tea garden workers by the tea garden owner on 13th December 2017 which is reported by the media.

It is learnt that the workers of Bogidhala Tea Estate in Golaghat district of Assam have not been getting their earned wages since long despite continuously working in the garden. On that fateful day a section of workers went to the Bungalow-Office of the tea garden owners to press for payment of their earned wage pending since long, which is putting the workers in virtual starvation and distress. The arrogant tea garden owner suddenly opened fire on the assembled workers, squatting peacefully before the bungalow without any provocation, injuring at least twenty workers. The injured workers have been rushed to Jorhat Medical College Hospital and at least five of the injured workers are in extremely critical condition.

It is most deplorable that the workers have to face bullets from the garden owner for demanding their unpaid earned wages for the work already done; non-payment of earned wages to workers on time is a serious offence on the part of the employers. The workers and their unions have been complaining against such non-payment and irregular payment since long. But the government, both in the state of Assam and at the centre, have not taken any action against the defaulting employer, maybe owing to their over-occupation in ensuring “ease of doing business”. This enthusiasm of the BJP government over “ease of doing business” has emboldened the employer to such an alarming degree that while deliberately defaulting in regular payment of wages to workers, they launched a murderous assault on the workers demanding their legitimate earned wage. This is nothing but a criminal offence on the part of the concerned tea-garden owners. Such attacks have now, particularly under the new state government, become a regular phenomenon on the tea garden workers in Assam, who contribute almost half of the tea production in the country.

CITU strongly denounces such an anti-worker attitude of both the tea garden owners and the governments conniving with the employers in repressing and looting the workers. CITU demands immediate arrest of the tea garden owners and initiation of stringent action for their criminal and murderous offence. CITU also demands immediate release of payment of all pending wages to the workers and adequate compensation to all the injured workers, many of them are lying in critical condition.

On the Barbaric Murder of Afzarul

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) condemns the barbaric murder of an innocent migrant worker Afzarul, from Malda district of West Bengal, in Rajsamand district of Rajasthan on 6 December by axing and burning alive; and videographing and uploading the episode in social media as an act of bravery against the purported ‘love jihad’.

The killing of innocent minorities to foment communal hatred and division, has repeatedly been taking place in the country, moreso in Rajasthan, since the BJP came to power at the Centre.

The Rajasthan State government is guilty of ignoring the Supreme Court order on protecting the innocents against such attacks and appointing nodal police officers in all districts. Instead, police in Rajasthan is busy in cover up exercise of such attacks.

Another vital issue involved in the gruesome murder of Afzarul is about protection of safety, rights and livelihood of migrant workers, both inside and outside the country, which have become important issues of the trade union movement at national, international levels and in ILO.

CITU demands that the Rajasthan government immediately arrest the culprits involved in the murder of the migrant worker Afzarul and in the hate propaganda through social media; adequate compensation to the bereaved family; implementation of Apex Court’s order against such attacks and measures to protect all migrant workers in the state.

Save India Convention Calls for United Fight Against Regressive Politics

The Save India National Convention against Assault on Women's Citizenship Rights noted with concern the right wing forces whose regressive politics was resulting in the growing atmosphere of intolerance and increasing violence against women. The protection accorded to these people by those in power has resulted in an assault on women's rights to food, work, health, dignity and security. Women are being



Saistha, daughter of Akhluq

targeted and young women in particular, have to bear the brunt of moral policing, honour crimes and sexual violence. This is being compounded by attacks by the Sangh Parivar on Muslims, Dalits and Christians, causing distress and devastation to the women in these communities in particular. All democratic and progressive values are being attacked and the gains won by the women's movement are sought to be reversed. AIDWA's convention on 8 December 2017 focused on these issues and resolved to mobilize women and right thinking citizens to campaign for democratic action to resist this attack and change this regime of terror and violence.

The Convention was a platform where a section of those who have suffered from and resisted this onslaught on their rights, raised their voice on the behalf of all such women. Those who shared their experiences included **Saira**, mother of Junaid Khan, **Shaista**, daughter of Akhlaq Khan, **Azra and Sumeet** who have been persecuted for inter-religious marriage, **Anita Minz**, a Christian Adivasi from Jharkhand, whose husband was killed by Hindutva forces, **Sompalli**, the Dalit victim from Shabbirpur, **Salma**, a victim of toilet vigilantism from UP, **Gudiya**, sister of Santoshi who died because she was denied food since she did not have an Aadhaar card, **Heena Vanga** from Maharashtra, who spoke about deprivation from MNREGA wages, **Kaushalya**, deprived of widow pension, JNU student **Sharbani** spoke on the dilution of the sexual harassment cell at JNU, **Sonia**, a victim of child marriage and **Gurmehar Kaur**, daughter of a Kargil martyr narrated how she was trolled because she spoke up against war and for peace.

The chief guest Brinda Karat, AIDWA Patron and one of the foremost leaders of the women's movement, addressed the Convention and highlighted the unconstitutional actions of the current BJP-led government and described the ways in which the secular fabric of the country was being attacked. She focused on the impact on women and saluted the courage of all the women who have come here after facing many difficulties and problems. She said that the women of the country have to unite and fight together against this regressive and divisive politics.

The resolution of the convention was placed by the AIDWA General Secretary Mariam Dhawale. Subhashini Ali, Durga Swami, and Neena Sharma AIDWA leaders, conducted the different sessions. Kirti Singh, advocate, Supreme Court, addressed the convention on the dilution of laws crucial for the establishment of the democratic rights of the women. The convention was presided over by AIDWA President Malini Bhattacharya. The Convention issued a call for:-

- a) Signature Campaign against dilution of Sec 498A of IPC.
- b) Observance of Savitribai Phule birth anniversary on 3 January, 2018 as a day of protest against regressive ideology.
- c) Observance of 30 January, 2018 as a Communal Harmony Day.
- d) Building struggles to protect our rights to food and work.

Comrade Shibani Sengupta



Veteran trade union leader Shibani Sengupta passed away on the night of 10th December 2017 in a private nursing home in Kolkata. She was 80 years old. She has left behind a daughter.

Comrade Shibani Sengupta was born in 1938 in Delhi. Later she moved to Kolkata where she spent the rest of her life. She pursued her studies in Kolkata where she started her public life as a student activist.

After completing her studies, she joined the Calcutta State Transport Corporation (CSTC) where she started her trade union activities. She

devoted her entire life till her death in organising employees, especially the road transport workers. She became active and was elected as the joint secretary of the CITU affiliated CSTC Employees Union, a position that she held for many years. She was a member of the General Council of CITU and also a member of the Secretariat of the West Bengal state committee of CITU.

She joined the CPI (M) and was the secretary of CPI(M) road transport zonal committee for a long time. She was elected as a member of the Calcutta district committee of CPI (M) and later on she became a member of the district secretariat of CPI(M).

She was one of the founder members of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) when it was formed in 1979. Comrade Shibani Sengupta was a remarkable organiser and became a leader of the road transport workers trade union at a time where there were very few women leaders. She was felicitated, along with other senior leaders of West Bengal CITU, at the 50th session of the state council which was held recently.

On Assembly Election Results

The **Gujarat** assembly election results show that the BJP has nothing much to celebrate. Although it has won a majority to form a government, it has got the lowest number of seats in the last two decades. It has won only 99 seats compared to 115 last time - a big fall from the "Mission 150" declared by BJP President Amit Shah. The erosion in support can also be seen from the fact that in the Lok Sabha election of 2014 the BJP had led in 165 assembly segments.

The discontent of the people against the BJP could have been channelised more effectively if there had been a credible opposition with an alternative programme.

In **Himachal Pradesh**, the BJP has won the election comfortably routing the ruling Congress. The verdict in Himachal has been against the corruption and misrule of the Virbhadra Singh government. The CPI(M) has won an assembly seat and will be represented in the state assembly after a gap of twenty years.

Inauguration of P R Bhawan

The CITU inaugurated its P Ramamurti Trade Union Education and Research Centre on 15th December 2017, in the presence of hundreds of its members, supporters, well wishers and leaders of central trade unions. The trade union education centre, envisaged to be developed as a permanent school for CITU cadres, is named after the founder general secretary of CITU and a legendary leader of the working class movement of the country, P Ramamurti. The day was the 30th death anniversary of P Ramamurti. Comrade PR's daughters, advocate R Vaigai and Dr Ponni and his two grandsons were present at the inauguration ceremony. Panudda Boonpala, Director, ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office for India, was also present.

The programme started with the hoisting of the CITU flag by its president, Hemalata. AK Padmanabhan, vice president of CITU unveiled the statue of P Ramamurti. Sitaram Yechuri, former MP, Rajya Sabha, who was the chief guest, inaugurated the building and delivered the address as the main speaker in the meeting presided over by Hemalata. Swadesh Dev Roye, secretary, CITU welcome the gathering and introduced the team of architects, engineers and others who helped in the construction of PR Bhawan. Tapan Sen, general secretary of CITU and R Vaigai also spoke. Amitava Guha, working committee member of CITU proposed the vote of thanks.

Highly appreciating the efforts by CITU to provide political and ideological education to its cadre and constructing a trade union education and research centre, to fulfil the dreams of P Ramamurti, Vaigai promised to extend support through endowment for taking up research. Dr Ponni presented a cheque for Rs 10,000 in the meeting for working women related activities of CITU and promised to donate the same amount every month for this cause. On behalf of CITU Hemalata thanked both of them.

A calendar with PR's photo, sponsored by COTEE (Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees) was released on the occasion by A Soundararajan, vice president of CITU. Tapan Sen released a booklet on PR authored by R Vaigai and N Ramakrishnan.

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