

# The Voice of the Working Woman



## Workers National Mass Convention





## Ninth Conference of AIFAWH

The 9<sup>th</sup> National Conference of All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH) will be held on 17-20 November 2019 at Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry), Andhra Pradesh. Around 700 delegates representing a membership of 473777 from 25 states and UTs will participate in the conference. The conference will start at 10am on the 17<sup>th</sup>, when a rally of around 25,000 red volunteers will be held in Rajahmundry.

The conference will review the movements activities and functioning of the organisation in the last three and a half years after the 8<sup>th</sup> conference held in January 2016. It will chalk out the struggles and movements in the current situation where there is a move for large scale privatisation of the scheme and to dismantle the pre-school component. The conference will also discuss on how to strengthen the joint movement of scheme workers. State conferences are being organised prior to the all India conference. Project and district level conferences are completed in almost all the states. 12 conferences are already over. The rest will be held before the all India Conference. AIFAWH working committee has decided that at least 25% of the delegates shall be anganwadi helpers.

## Countrywide General Strike on 8 January 2020

The National Mass Convention of Workers organised by the major central trade unions and independent, held on 30 September 2019 at Parliament Street, New Delhi gave a call for a nationwide general strike action as a consolidation of all ongoing sectoral struggles.

Action programme for the next three months:

1. **Joint Conventions of Workers** at Sectoral Level, at State Level, at District Level during the two months of October and November, 2019
2. **Widest possible circulation of Declaration** down to factory, establishment, institution and base level through the above activity during December, 2019
3. **Country-wide General Strike On 8th January, 2020**

The National Convention called upon working people across the sectors and throughout the country irrespective of affiliations to make the strike action a grand success and further appealed to prepare for bigger actions if the government fails to pay heed to our demands. The Central Trade Unions called upon the people at large to support the strike action.

### *The Voice of the Working Woman*

*Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)*

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# Serious Economic Slowdown

The country is in the midst of the serious economic slowdown, which is having drastic impact on the livelihoods of lakhs of workers and other sections of the toiling people.

Production has been cut down in many automobile units because of a drop in automobile sales. 286 show rooms have been reported to have closed down. Around 3.5 lakh workers have lost their jobs. In addition it is estimated that around 10 lakh workers in the ancillary units will be losing their jobs. Almost all the major automobile manufacturing units have announced no work days ranging from 3-19 days in a month.

Parle company has announced that it was retrenching 10000 workers because there was no demand even to purchase its Rs 5 a pack biscuits.

The MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) sector is facing the brunt of the crisis even before it has recovered from the devastating blows of demonetisation and GST. Thousands of enterprises are closing down; lakhs of workers are losing their jobs. Many other sectors – the real estate, construction, IT, hospitality, tourism and even the media, both print and electronic are reported to have been gripped by the crisis in the country, resulting in loss of tens of lakhs of existing jobs. There is no new investment; there are no new jobs.

This drop in production in turn is having its impact on the transport sector. Thousands of trucks are standing idle with consequent impact on the transport workers. The advertisement revenue of both visual and print media is affected and thus are also journalists.

The vice chairman of NITI Ayog, Rajiv Kumar was compelled to say that this is a situation unprecedented in the last 70 years. Prachi Mishra, chief economist at Goldman Sachs said that the present slowdown in the country is protracted and bigger than the 2008 crisis. She said that 40% of the pain is from the slump in global trade and over 30% from consumption slowdown.

But the BJP government led by Modi is absolutely in a denial mode. It is refusing to even acknowledge the slowdown. Mohan Bhagwat, sarsangh chalak of RSS, the mentor of BJP has said in his Vijaya Dashami address that unnecessary talking about the slowdown would discourage investors. So people should not talk about it.

The government, instated of addressing the basic issue of lack of demand and taking measures to put money in the pockets of common people through job creation and improving their incomes, the government has been doing just the opposite. The government has announced a series of incentives to the big corporates including big foreign companies, worth around Rs 2.15 lakh crores.

Eminent economists have pointed out that handing over doles to the corporates will not help in addressing the issue of slowdown and loss of jobs, or improve the economy. Unless people's purchasing power improves and demand improves, investors will not be ready to invest, whatever incentives the government provides. They will only pocket the money to use in share markets and protect their profits through other means.

The responsibility and the ability to force the government to reverse its policies lies in the united strength and struggles of the working class. The working class has to understand this responsibility and get ready to discharge it effectively by intensifying struggles.

# **NATIONAL OPEN MASS CONVENTION OF WORKERS**

## **30 September 2019, Parliament Street, New Delhi**

### **Declaration**

The Modi-led BJP Government has completed its 100 days of its second term in Office. And the country and her people are facing a continuing economic slowdown, continuing job-losses, sky-rocketing unemployment, widening and deepening impoverishment, faster decline in average level of earnings, reckless privatisation and foreignisation of national productive assets, destruction of indigenous manufacturing capabilities leading to deindustrialization and abnormal rise of economic inequality in the society to an obscene level- mocking at the slogan of “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas”. Now, with greater arrogance, the same destructive economic policies targeting the democratic rights and livelihood of the mass of the people are being pursued, setting in motion a further worsening of the situation. And more undemocratically than ever before – be it the passing of Wage Code Bill, introduction of Code on Occupational Health, Safety and Working Conditions, amendment to the RTI Act to cripple it, amendment to Unlawful Activities Prevention Act to make it even more draconian and vindictive, abrogation of Article 370 without consulting people of J & K, in fact by gagging them, or rendering lakhs of people homeless/ stateless through the NRC process. Now many BJP ruled states have been advocating for NRC process to divide people on communal lines. This ongoing destructive process must be combated for the unity of the people.

Each and every demand in the 12-point charter, of the Central Trade Unions, independent federations and associations, supported by the Joint National Forums of Peasants’ Organizations and highlighted through various agitations with a continuity such as nation-wide strikes on 2nd September 2015 2nd September 2016, the three day Mahapadav, on 9—11<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2017 before the Parliament, the nationwide Strike by Scheme Workers on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018, Satyagraha and protests in almost all the states on varying dates beginning from 23<sup>rd</sup> January to 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018 and the two-days’ strike on 8-9 January, 2019, adoption of ‘Workers’ Charter’ in a joint national convention of trade unions on 5<sup>th</sup> March on the eve of the general elections, have simply been ignored by the BJP Government. The budget presented on 5<sup>th</sup> July was out and out pro-corporate and anti-common people. The Government has announced its intention to introduce the remaining two Codes: Code on Social Security and the Code on Industrial Relations, all together aiming at imposing conditions of extreme exploitation of the working people.

The Central Government not only failed to respond to the genuine demands of the working people, but continued its brazen aggression against the rights of workers, in the interest of their corporate masters. Bipartism and tripartism is given a go-by. Labour laws are being sought to be overhauled in favour of the employer class. The BJP Government continues to vindictively deprive the biggest Central Trade Union in the country, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) from all representation. No Indian Labour Conference has been held after July, 2015. Pre-budget consultations have become a sham.

Continuing phenomenon of alarmingly increasing unemployment along with job losses across sectors, declining GDP rates, increasing gap between the rich and the poor- all revealing a terminal slowdown in the national economy are sought to be brushed under the carpet by fudging figures. The phenomenon of closure and shut-down of automobile industries and the ancillaries and the forecast of huge job-losses including in the IT sector is adding fuel to the fire. Price-rise of essential commodities including public transport, electricity, medicines etc is mounting miseries on daily lives of the people in general, both in urban and rural areas, leading to widening as well as deepening impoverishment. Drastic cut in Government expenditure in

social sector and various welfare schemes has made the conditions of workers, particularly those in unorganized sector, more precarious.

The anti-labour authoritarian character of the Government is all the more evident in its refusal to implement even the consensus recommendations (in which the Government was also a party) of the successive Indian Labour Conferences in respect of equal pay and benefits for equal work for the contract workers, formulation of minimum wage and workers status for the scheme workers viz., Anganwadi, Mid-Day-Meal and ASHA workers etc. have not been implemented. Shockingly, the Labour Minister in the Modi Government contradicted their own Committee's recommendation on National Minimum Wage (which in itself was in contravention of the recommendations of the 15<sup>th</sup> ILC) by declaring a ridiculous figure of Rs.4628/-pm instead ! Replacing gradually the workers by apprentices through NEEM, Fixed Term Employment etc, to grossly alter the employment-relations towards slavery, amendments in Prevention of Child Labour Act to allow employment of Child Labour, reduction in ESI contributions and the move for pro-employer Amendment of EPF&MP Act, including attempts to corporatize the EPFO and the ESIC— all such anti-worker steps are justified as incentives to employers for ease of doing their business at the cost of workers. The Government stubbornly refuses to implement the recent judgments of the Supreme Court on issue of “equal wage and benefits for same work” and on EPS, 1995 on contribution and calculation of pension on actual pay and dearness allowance. On the other hand, the Government is misusing the tax-payers money to incentivise the defaulting employers to implement laws such as the Maternity Benefit Act and the EPF Act.

Another assault has come through the move for amendment of the Trade Union Act 1926. The Government intends to change the definition of the Central Trade Unions and their recognition procedure as per discretion of the executive. The *malafide* intention is also to have Government interference in the functioning and internal matters of trade unions.

Aggressive move for Privatization of even all the strategic PSUs and government sector through different routes, including Defence Production, Public Sector Banks and Insurance and also Railways, Public Road Transport, Ports, Coal, Power, Steel, Petroleum etc through disinvestment, strategic sale, outsourcing in favour of private sector, promoting 100 per cent FDI in defence, railways, coal, and many vital, strategic sectors is increasing day by day. Deliberate and vindictive weakening of Air India, BSNL, MTNL, not allowing them a level playing field, is being carried on with a destructive zeal in total disregard to the human sufferings (no salaries for months together). Plundering and looting the RBI reserves to contain budget deficit caused by tax concessions to the Corporates is going to destabilize our economy further. Defence Sector privatization move is actually designed to destroy the indigenous Research initiatives and manufacturing capability, demonstrating a betrayal of national interests. The dubious plan to outsource more than 50 per cent products including weapons and critical equipment, being produced by the Ordnance establishments is finally followed up by move to corporatizing the Ordnance Factories to facilitate complete privatization. Complete privatization of the Railways, step by step, is going on. Operating private trains on the existing tracks built by Railways and free access of railway yards/workshops/sheds for private players is being permitted. Railway Printing Presses are being closed. Railway production units are being corporatized to facilitate privatization. Besides the railway employees becoming the worst victims, mass of the common people will suffer more owing to inevitable hike of railway fares and increase in freight charges owing to elimination of subsidies in passenger fares and freight on essential commodities.

The Government has announced another round of merger of 10 Public Sector Banks into four despite the negative impact of previous rounds of merger, on banking services and employment. The reasons being offered for merger are utterly false and deceptive. The lowering of interest rate on deposits of common people will make them suffer, particularly the senior citizens who depend on it in the absence of any meaningful pension. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code,

2016 (IBC) procedure legitimizes the loot of the bank money by the defaulting corporate besides neglecting the dues of the workers of the bankrupt companies. In addition to all these the Government is entering into free trade agreements with different countries and group of countries like Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which is detrimental to our economic sovereignty.

The plight of the unorganized sector workers is even worse, as they bear the brunt of the ongoing economic slowdown despite their sizable contribution to GDP. Their number will swell as the workers lose employment in formal sectors. Construction workers, beedi workers, street vendors, domestic workers, loading/unloading workers had separate laws/welfare boards. Instead of making them functional, they are sought to be abolished through social security code exercise. The Government has made a cruel joke on them promising first pension under PMSYPY of Rs.3000 pm in the year 2039 ! It is even forcing this so-called voluntary scheme on the scheme workers. The government employees are demanding scrapping of NPS and restoration of the old Pension Scheme. Sections such as home based workers, waste recyclers, salt workers have no legal protection whatsoever.

But the workers have not accepted these measures meekly, as shown by the surge of struggles all around. Workers of 41 ordnance factories across the country went on total strike from 20<sup>th</sup> August for a month against the corporatisation move, forcing the Government to step back for the time being just after five days of the complete historic strike. The Government's plan to corporatize seven Railway production units was immediately responded to by protest actions by the mass of the workers and their family members. The bank merger news was denounced by nation-wide protest demonstrations of bank employees and officers. Now, strike action is being planned in the banking sector. The coal workers have staged a massive strike action on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2019 against allowing 100% FDI in coal sector. There have been agitations in various CPSUs, including the core and strategic sectors like Energy, Petroleum, Telecom, Metal, Steel, Mining, Machine Building, Road, Air and Water Transport, Port & Dock against the government plans to privatise them. The Convention extends full support to these struggles.

The Convention notes with dismay that this Government, spinelessly surrendered to threats and pressure of their private corporate masters, indigenous and foreign, by shamelessly withdrawing the measures for making the shortfall in CSR spending by private corporates a criminal offence and also withdrawing the surcharge on speculative profits of foreign portfolio investors. Shri Modi had to placate them in his 15<sup>th</sup> August speech, saying they are the "*wealth creators*" and cannot be viewed with suspicion. This is over and above the budget announcement of the huge sop of reducing the income tax rate by 5% for the 99.3% of the corporates. Now in the name of addressing the economic slowdown, the Finance Minister has further announced cutting back taxes on corporate from 30% to 22% whereas the workers and employees have to pay the same 30% income tax. The stimulus package to the tune of Rs.1.4 lakh crores, a bonanza to the corporates, that does not increase the purchasing power of the working people, does not create any jobs or even does not ensure job security to the workers being retrenched every day, will further aggravate the recession.

Now the BJP Government is facing a backlash from the common people as the draconian measures of the newly passed Motor Vehicle Act are put into practice. The federations of transport workers had repeatedly warned against these measures during the last five years of BJP Government, through various mass actions.

Now that the euphoria of a phenomenal win in the elections is fading, jingoist claims on abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A recede, NRC turns out to be a hoax, the people are waking up to the bitter truth of a failing economy – caused entirely by the pro-employer, anti-worker, anti-people and utterly destructive anti-national policies of this BJP Government. Relentless crisis in jobs and bread cannot be camouflaged by any amount of rhetoric.

This National Convention of Workers appeals to all the workers, irrespective of their affiliations, to join hands and co-ordinate their sectoral struggles into a mighty countrywide movement to force the government to reverse their anti-national policies. Let us send a clear message to the powers that be, that WE ARE THE WEALTH CREATORS. The wealth that we create is being looted by the corporates in connivance with the government, that has caused suppressing of effective demand and consequent economic slowdown. We demand equitable redistribution of the wealth that we create. We want National Minimum Wage of Rs.21000/- pm (as per the current Cost of Living Index), Rs.10000/-pm minimum pension for all by Government funding, we want effective Employment Guarantee Act to cover all rural and urban households, implementation of MGNREGA with increased number of days and budget allocation, increased public investment to mitigate rural distress, remunerative price as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendations for the agriculture produce with procurement facilities and loan waiver of the peasantry, we want permanency of employment in decent work, we want Worker status for all Scheme Workers as unanimously recommended by the ILC, abolition of contract system and regularisation of contract workers, equal pay and benefits for equal work and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.






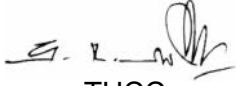
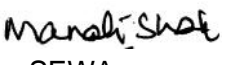

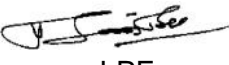

This National Convention of Workers records its strong denunciation of the Communal forces which are cultivating an atmosphere of conflicts within the society on non-issues, giving an opportunity to the government to deflect the attention of the masses from core issues of unemployment, run away price rise etc. They are seeking to disrupt the unity of the workers and the toiling people in general, so vital to carry forward the ongoing struggles based on our 12-point Charter of Demands. The working class must raise their strong voice of protest against these divisive forces which are threatening the very social fabric of our society and endangering the basic ethos and core values of Indian Constitution.

The task before the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and independent National Federations and Associations is to further intensify the surging struggles in various sectors through a concerted united agitation and mobilization for action. The National Mass Convention of Workers calls for a countrywide general strike action as a consolidation of all sectoral struggles. This Convention therefore adopts, inter alia, the following programmes for mobilisation of workers for the grand success of the strike:

Programme of Action over the next three months:

1. Joint Conventions of Workers at Sectoral Level, at State Level, at District Level during two months of October and November, 2019
2. Widest possible circulation of Declaration down to factory, establishment, institution and base level through the above activity during December, 2019
3. **Country-wide General Strike On 8th January, 2020**

The National Convention calls upon working people across the sectors and throughout the country irrespective of affiliations to make the strike action a grand success and further appeals to prepare for bigger actions if the government fails to pay heed to our demands. We call upon the people at large to support the strike action.

 ILC	 AITUC	 HMS	 CITU	 AIUTUC
 TUCC	 SEWA	 AICCTU	 LPF	 UTUC

And Independent Federations, Associations and Unions of Workers and Employees

# The October Revolution or The World Turned Upside Down

Shaswati Mazumdar

When we look back at the October Revolution from today's perspective, it is difficult to imagine the unprecedented nature of the challenge that it represented and how it appeared to onlookers in different parts of the world. But it is also impossible to understand the history of the twentieth century and the shape of things in the contemporary world without registering the signals that the Revolution in Russia sent out and the repercussions it had elsewhere. Though its immediate aim was to establish a new society in Russia, this objective was understood as the first step towards revolution in other parts of the world. With its slogans of **Peace, Land and Bread** it captured the imagination of millions of people across the globe oppressed by exploitative systems and regimes.

Powerful working class movements had developed during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the advanced capitalist countries. But the Revolution did not take place in an advanced capitalist country with a large working class. Flying in the face of the expectations of many contemporary observers in these countries, it erupted and managed to sustain itself in a backward economy with a largely agrarian society. Central to the victory of the Revolution was the alliance between the workers, who were relatively small in numbers and concentrated in a few urban centres, and the much larger masses of the peasants. This specific feature of the October Revolution – a Revolution led by the working class but based on a worker-peasant alliance – found fertile ground in the imagination of the nascent anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles developing in the overwhelmingly agrarian societies of the colonial world. It is also significant that all the revolutions that followed the October Revolution took place in such agrarian societies.

Another specific feature of the October Revolution was its Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia adopted barely a week after the tumultuous capture of power. Russia was a vast multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual empire spanning two continents – Europe and Asia, in which Russians were less than half of the population with the rest of the population consisting of peoples oppressed by Russian domination. The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples adopted by the revolutionary government proclaimed the right to free self-determination, including secession and formation of a separate state, abolition of all national and religious privileges and free development of minorities and ethnic groups. For the many oppressed peoples in the Russian empire, the Declaration became a ground to rally behind the revolutionary government. It also inspired the thinking and strategies of anti-colonial movements seeking to rally peoples of diverse religions, languages, ethnicities, cultures to the common goal of overthrowing the yoke of colonial rule.

Revolutionary Russia's immediate exit from the imperialist world war that had already killed or maimed millions of ordinary working people and its decrees on the rights of workers drew the sympathy and solidarity of workers in the advanced capitalist world in Europe and the United States, though it sent shockwaves through the ruling classes. But it was its ability to draw the active support of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities for the common goal of building a just and equitable society that specifically fired the imagination of people in the colonised world. In this sense, the October Revolution had reverberations that echoed throughout the twentieth century, as the colonial empires collapsed, the Chinese Revolution emerged victorious



and the Vietnamese people successfully defeated the mightiest forces of Imperialism. It is this global impact of the Revolution that has made it the most decisive event of the twentieth century.

The October Revolution created the first worker's state. Its vision of a society based not on exploitation and profit, its successes in dramatically changing the landscape and improving the lives of people of the backward economy and society in which it took root, its subsequent decisive role in defeating Fascism and its global impact in inspiring anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles has also made it one of the biggest events in world history. Its collapse in 1989 cannot erase this history even as it has put demands on successive generations inspired by that vision to learn from both its victories and its failures.



Today, we are faced with a world dominated by an apparently resurgent capitalism that believed it had defeated its mortal enemy in 1989. Much has changed in the three decades since that time. On one hand capitalism has emerged with its fangs bared everywhere, including in the advanced capitalist countries where welfare laws have been systematically eroded. But world capitalism is also shaken by ever more severe crises as the tentacles of global finance spread to all corners of the world, subjecting even the sovereignty of nations to their unyielding grip. The global financial crisis of 2008 (considered the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression of 1929) was the most severe so far. As governments rushed to save the banks that had caused the crisis with their criminal speculative practices, they allowed it to have a ruinous impact on the lives of millions of people. Today, discontent is growing among workers and anxiety about the future among the swelling numbers of those who do not have regular employment. It is becoming ever clearer to people even in the advanced capitalist countries that capitalism is the problem and that there is a need to think beyond it and about other ways to organise society.

In this context, Fascist tendencies are raising their head and seeking to channelise the discontent and anxieties into divisive, sectarian paths. Democracies are increasingly becoming more formal than real. This phenomenon is also visible in developing countries like ours, with the government is kowtowing to Imperialism and corporate finance and pushing an agenda of privatisation of all spheres of society including of basic needs, education and health care. Stoking hatred on lines of religion and caste, undermining the rights of people in a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation such as ours, the rulers seek to sustain their rule on the basis of a chauvinist conception of nationalism that suppresses and oppresses all diversity. Such a formula, once adopted by the Fascists of the twentieth century, caused the greatest destruction and genocide in a short span of history, also bringing ruin to their own societies.

It has been said that behind every Fascism, there is a failed revolution. As we confront the growing dangers of the present, let us look back for inspiration in our struggles to that glorious chapter in history when workers established the first worker's state, won the confidence of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities and set about building a new society radically different from what the world had ever known.

## ‘Hatred and Discrimination’ Free India!

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the ‘Father of the nation’ Mahatma Gandhi. It is also the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ICDS as it was launched on this day in 1975.

The Prime Minister of India had announced much earlier that he has launched the ‘Swachh Bharat’ (clean India) Abhiyan and this year it will be the ‘Plastic Mukh Bharat’ (plastic free India) campaign. Surprisingly, the cleanliness campaign, which has always been attached to the birthday of ‘the Father of the Nation’, has been shifted onto the birthday of the Prime Minister! Now there is even a move to change the father of the Nation himself!

While the country is reeling under the economic slowdown in all spheres, the worst unemployment and large scale retrenchments in various sectors, worst price rise and hoarding of essential items like onions, the RSS- BJP combine is propagating the politics of division and hatred to gain political mileage.

The attacks on the dalits, adivasis and minorities in the country have been rising since the BJP came to power with Modi as Prime Minister in 2014. They have escalated under the Modi 2 regime. Mob lynching has become the order of the day under the BJP RSS regime. Many of these incidents have been taking place with the active participation of the concerned BJP led governments and the administration, while some BJP leaders have been publicly felicitating the culprits. With the propagation of retrograde ‘Manuvadi’ ideology, the RSS-BJP is supporting the atrocities against women and children. BJP leaders involved in rape and murder cases are publicly supported by the ruling dispensation. This has emboldened the criminals, land mafia and Hindutva communal forces operating under the patronage of the RSS.

In this situation, the *All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers (AIFAWH)* has launched a year long Campaign from 2 October 2019 against communal hatred, mob violence and caste and gender discrimination with the slogan **“For real development and freedom; against hate and discrimination; for Harmony and Equality”**.

In various parts of the country, meetings were organised in anganwadi centres and nearby public places on 2 October 2019, in which children, teenagers, mothers etc participated and took the pledge

*“We the people of India, today, on the occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ICDS and the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of ‘the father of the Nation’ pledge that we will fight to uphold the promise we have made to ourselves while adopting the Constitution of India. We will fight **against hate and discrimination; strive for real development and freedom; and establish Harmony and Equality**”*

*We reiterate the pledge in the preamble of our constitution.”*

*(The Preamble is given on the back cover)*

As per the decision, programmes are being organized throughout the country in anganwadi centres with cultural programmes, competitions, events etc involving the children, other beneficiaries and the villagers etc. The village elderly and literary personalities, intellectuals, mass leaders etc are being invited to the anganwadi centre. Songs, plays etc on secular and egalitarian values are being performed.

This will be continued till 14 November 2019 (Children’s Day).

Programmes were conducted in Punjab, UP, Haryana, AP etc on 1<sup>st</sup> October. In other states programmes are being organized.

The best observance from each state will be given prizes at the national conference of AIFAWH to be held from 17-20 November 2019. The conference will chalk out the continuation of the campaign to build a nation on the strong base of trust, love and equality as per the values enshrined in our constitution.

## State Conference of Punjab Anganwadi Mulazam Union

The 11<sup>th</sup> State Conference of the Punjab Anganwadi Mulazam Union was held on 21–22 September 2019 in Mayadevi Nagar, Asha Rani Hall, Sangrur, Punjab. A flag march was organised with red volunteers carrying red flags, which then converted into a rally. Around 3000 anganwadi workers and helpers participated in the rally. The Rally was addressed by Usha Rani, President and A R Sindhu, General Secretary of AIFAWH. Veena Gupta, AIFAWH secretary and President of UP Anganwadi workers and helpers union, Shakuntala general secretary of Haryana Anganwadi workers and helpers union, Raghunath Singh, CITU secretary, Harjeet Kaur and Subhash Rani, president and general secretary of the Punjab Anganwadi Mulazam union also addressed the gathering.

The conference started with hoisting the flag and a tribute to martyrs. 186 delegates from 22 districts of Punjab participated in the conference. Harjeet Kaur gave the presidential address and Subhash Rani placed the general secretary's report. The accounts were placed by Amritpal Kaur. 34 delegates participated in the discussion on the report.

Resolutions on Violence against women, Save ICDS, on issues of working women, 33% reservation for women were adopted.

The report and accounts were passed unanimously. A 42 members Committee was elected with Harjeet Kaur Panjola as president, Subhash Rani as Secretary and Amritpal kaur as treasurer of the union.

Some leaders of the union who were jailed during pre primary agitation of the union were felicitated by A R Sindhu, General Secretary of AIFAWH, and presented a Phulkari and Shield.

On 21<sup>st</sup> September cultural activities (Bhangra and Jago) were organised

The Conference decided to intensify the struggles and strengthen the organisation through increasing membership of the union, democratic functioning and opening of bank accounts at all levels.

*(Report from Amritpal Kaur)*

## M K Kamalamma Memorial Meeting

The Thiruvananthapuram District coordination committee of working women (CITU) organized the 9<sup>th</sup> memorial meeting of M K Kamalamma, former member of AICCCWW (CITU) and one of the founders of the working women movement in Kerala, former treasurer of State CCWW and a leader of the Kerala Artisans union.



The meeting was presided over by Narayani. It was inaugurated by Bhanumathi, former president CCWW. She remembered the contribution made by Kamalamma in organising the rural women artisans, who were under the influence of all kinds of obscurantist practices, in the trade union, to make it the largest union affiliated to CITU. Bhasnumathi said that Kamalamma led a very simple life. Suma PS, convenor, DCCWW, welcomed the participants and Jyoshna V Kumar proposed the vote of thanks.

The meeting was attended by women workers from various sectors in the district.

## Modi Government Gives Rs.1.45 Lakh Crore Gift to Corporates

This bounty for corporate houses comes at a time when common people are reeling under a slowdown, joblessness is at record levels and incomes are stagnating.

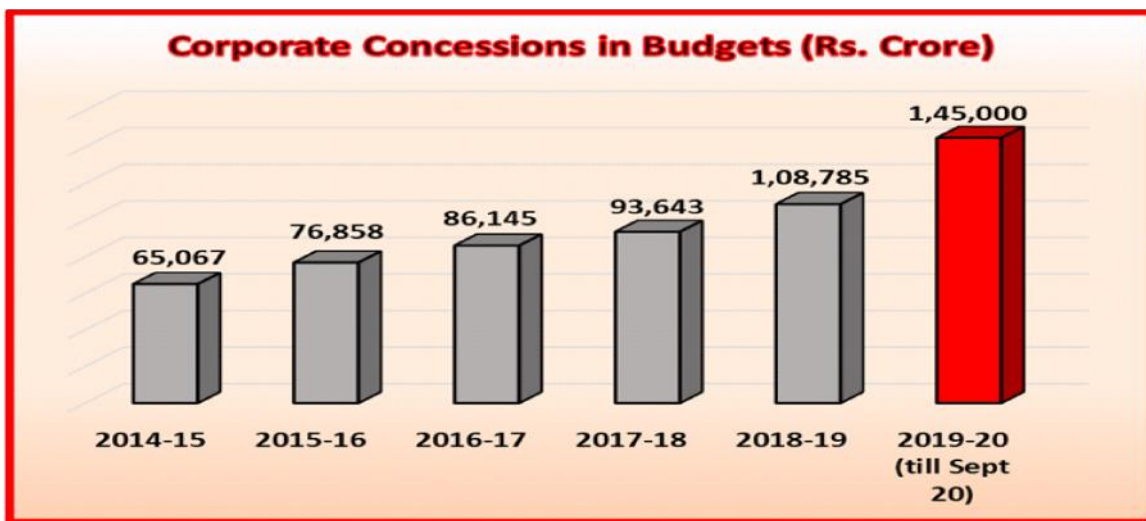
Savera



Continuing her series of press conferences, that are becoming like a treasure hunt for corporates, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced today that corporate tax rates will be slashed from the current 30% (average) to 25.17% including all cess/surcharge. Actually, if no other concession is availed of, then the effective tax rate will be down to 22%. In addition to this massive concession, the finance minister also announced a slew of measures easing taxes on new companies, share buybacks, capital gains, etc.

In all, these concessions add up to a staggering Rs.1.45 lakh crore, which Sitharaman described as a “stimulus” to the economy but which actually means that much loss of taxes.

With this latest announcement, the second edition of Modi government has set a dubious record of giving freebies to corporates – in just 120 days it has announced 33% more concessions than the whole of last year. In the combined five and a half years of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule since 2014, Rs.5.76 lakh crore worth of corporate freebies have been announced.





These latest freebies come after Sitharaman has already announced a series of measures earlier, including a Rs.50,000 crore scheme for promoting exports, a Rs.10,000 crore scheme for helping real estate developers in completing unfinished houses, a rollback of angel tax for start-ups, a rollback of super-cess on foreign portfolio investors, bank mergers, invitation to foreign capital to invest up to 100% in coal mining, easing bank credit regulations to provide more funds for investment, and so on.

The ostensible reasoning behind these moves is that corporate India needs help in these difficult times. Such help in the form of tax concessions would boost their activities, give them a better opportunity of expanding, and thus help employment, the argument goes.

There is a fundamental problem with this approach. It ignores the fact that the slowdown is taking place because of faltering demand, which is arising because there is no buying power in the hands of the people. Over 8% of the working age population is unemployed, industrial wages are less than half of what is the accepted norm for a minimum wage, agricultural wages are declining in inflation adjusted terms (they have increased by about 4% in two years!). In such a situation, producing more will be useless because there are no buyers.

The most extreme example of this is that India is currently holding record stocks of foodgrains (713 lakh tonnes in August) yet there are nearly 20 crore undernourished (hungry) people in the country! This macabre anomaly exists because there are no buyers for food grain in the open market – and the government refuses to sell the grain at subsidised prices in addition to what is the “normal” offtake.

What would be needed in such a dire situation is a stimulus for the people – through increase in wages, through better prices for produce of farmers, through a stronger public distribution system, through increasing government spending on education and health, etc.

However, the Modi government is standing the whole thing on its head. It is giving more and more money to corporates either directly (like spending Rs.10,000 crores in helping real estate tycoons complete their unfinished houses, or like writing off NPAs or non-performing assets of corporates) or indirectly, by reducing taxes (as in the present corporate tax cut and other cuts earlier).

This will have very damaging consequences for the people. Tax revenue is already flagging because of the slowdown. Cutting tax rates will mean an even greater fall in tax revenue. Which will mean that the government will have that much less money to spend on various welfare measures for the people.

In short, the more concessions are given to corporates, the less people are going to get from the government. Conversely, the more freebies are given to corporates, the higher will be their private profit because there is no avenue for them to make and sell more goods. As the chart above shows, massive concessions were given to corporates over the past five years – yet the country has steadily slid into a slowdown today. The lesson is clear: spend money on the people not on corporate houses, this will automatically give a stimulus to the whole economy. Otherwise, you are just lining the pockets of the super rich.

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## Dumb and Dumber: Facing Slowdown, Government Squeezes Expenditure

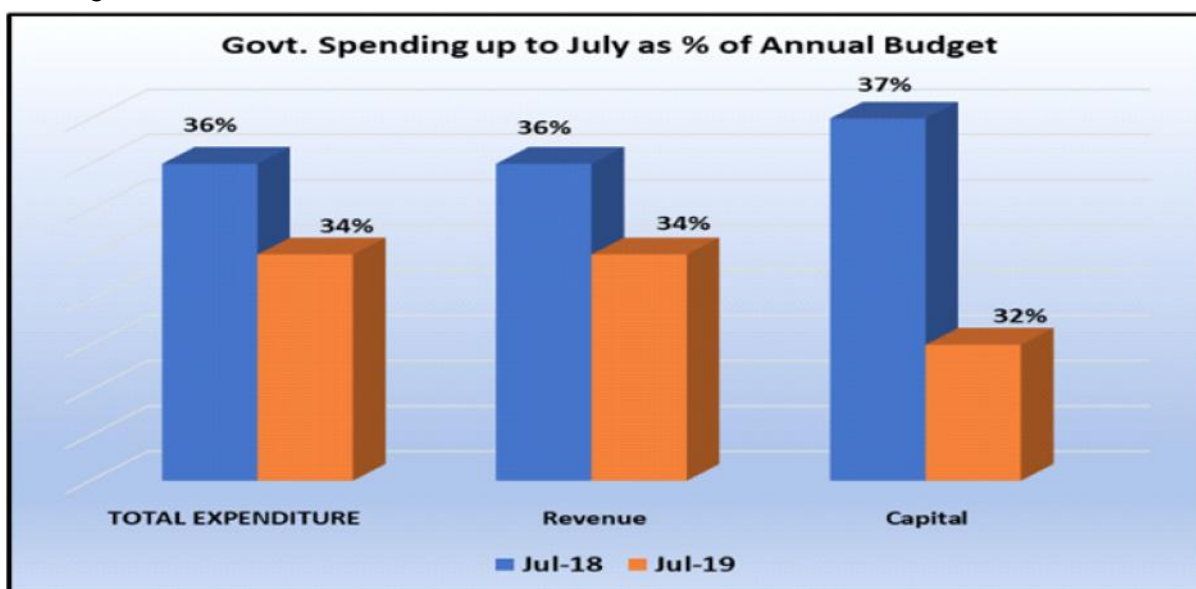
Rather than spending more, government expenditure by July 2019 is less than what it was last year as share of annual budget, with key public welfare related ministries cutting most.

Subodh Varma

India is facing an unprecedented slowdown of the economy with GDP growth slumping to 5% in the June quarter, agriculture growing by only 2% and manufacturing by a mere 0.6%. Private consumption expenditure – spending by families on consumption – has slipped downwards, bank credit has decelerated, and there are reports of widespread job losses from across the board while monthly unemployment has climbed to a record 8.3% in August as per CMIE estimates.

This is a situation that is crying for more public spending which would kickstart the economic cycle, put more money in the hands of people to spur demand and pave the way, hopefully, for more private investment. Yet the Modi government, a prisoner of the discredited neo-liberal dogma, is sticking to squeezing public spending. Latest details of government revenues and expenditure as released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) for July 2019 show this in indisputable terms.

Here's the big picture: total government expenditure (as share of annual budgeted expenditure) is down to 34% by July this year compared to 36% up to July 2018. [See chart below] This is made up of two components, revenue and capital expenditures. Of these, the latter is drastically down from 37% last year to 32% this year. Capital expenditure is investment in plant and machinery, buildings, roads and other infrastructure.



Clearly, the Modi government thinks that saving government funds will help the economy better than spending them. Perhaps, the hope is that this will encourage private sector investors to spend more – something that has never happened, and is unlikely to happen now.

What is even more intriguing is the details of where exactly the spending cuts are being implemented. The table below summarises spending data from some of the key ministries and departments.

<b>Spending by Some key Ministries up to July (as % of annual budget)</b>		
	<b>Jul-19</b>	<b>Jul-18</b>
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>DEVELOPMENT OF N-E REGION</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>FISHERIES, AN. HUSB. &amp; DAIRYING</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>HEALTH &amp; FAMILY WELFARE</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Dept. of Drinking Water &amp; sanitation</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>RAILWAYS</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>RURAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>49%</b>
<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE &amp; EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>TEXTILES</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>TRIBAL AFFAIRS</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>38%</b>

Source: CGA

With all the talk of helping farmers through PM-KISAN dole of Rs 6,000 per year and several other announcements, the spending of this important ministry is down to just 26% in the first four months of this fiscal year compared to 43% last year. Similar is the fate of the related animal husbandry and dairying ministry. The food and public distribution ministry looks after the crucial PDS scheme for distribution of subsidised food grain to needy people. Its spending is down from 62% last year to 56%. The ministry of rural development runs a slew of welfare schemes, including the rural job guarantee scheme (MGNREGS), the rural housing scheme (PMAY) and the rural roads scheme (PMGSY). Its spending has come down from 49% last year to 35% this year. This would have a direct impact on rural jobs created through the job guarantee scheme. The textile ministry handles not only the mill sector but also lakhs of handloom weavers. But, by July, it had reduced its spend from 50% of the annual budget last year to just 29% this year, putting lakhs of weavers in jeopardy. Although the prime minister is promising drinking water to every household by 2024, the department of drinking water and sanitation has cut its spending to nearly half compared to last year. Both health and education ministries have squeezed funds with the health ministry down to 31% from 36% and the education (human resource development) ministry down to 24% from 25% last year. Both social justice and tribal affairs ministries, dealing respectively with Dalits and Adivasis have seen huge spending squeeze with the social justice ministry reducing its expenditure from 33% last year to a mere 10% this year and tribal affairs from 33% to 25%. These cuts would be reflected in spending for such key schemes like pre- and post-matric scholarships for Dalit and Adivasi children, and income augmentation programs. Even the ministry tasked with development of the North East region has curtailed its spending.

The women and child development ministry which runs such key schemes as the ICDS (for nutritional support to infants and pregnant/lactating mothers) has reduced its spending from 38% last year to 25% this year. This summary of the government's approach towards the slowdown reveals a macabre thinking that people's welfare and, indeed, life giving policies (like mid day meals, infant nutrition, primary health services, scholarships, jobs) can be sacrificed in the pursuit of some hazy notions of controlling the fiscal deficit. In view of all the concessions that the government has been handing out to corporates – and promising more – in recent weeks in order to mollify them, this other side of government policy is worrying and raises questions about its capacity to deal with the ongoing all round crisis.

## “More of us Will Speak Everyday”

On July 23, an open letter addressed to the Prime Minister read - *“The lynching of Muslims, dalits and other minorities must be stopped immediately. We were shocked to learn from the NCRB that there have been no less than 840 instances of atrocities against dalits in the year 2016, and a definite decline in the percentage of convictions.”* It continued - *“We, as peace loving and proud Indians, are deeply concerned about a number of tragic events that have been happening in recent times in our beloved country,”* The letter was signed by 49 celebrities from various fields, including Ramchandra Guha, Mani Ratnam, Aparna Sen and Shyam Benegal.

[A Muzaffarpur-based advocate](#) filed a case in a Bihar court against these 49 personalities allegedly *“tarnished the image of the country and undermined the impressive performance of the prime minister”* besides *“supporting secessionist tendencies”*. The CJM had passed the order on August 20, accepting this petition. Upon the receipt of the order, an FIR was lodged against these 49 personalities.

Reacting to the FIR, as many as 185 celebrities, including authors, actors and dancers wrote - *“An FIR has been lodged against forty-nine of our colleagues in the cultural community, simply because they performed their duty as respected members of civil society. They wrote an open letter to the prime minister, expressing concern about mob lynching in our country. Can this be called an act of sedition? Or is harassment by misusing the courts a ploy to silence citizens’ voices?”* The signatories said they condemned such harassment, and backed every word the 49 personalities had written in the letter to Modi. They added that *“more of us will speak every day”* against mob lynching, the silencing of people’s voices and the misuse of courts to harass citizens. The 185 signatories included actor Naseeruddin Shah, dancer Mallika Sarabhai, authors Ashok Vajpeyi, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande, historian Romila Thapar, and artist Vivan Sundaram.

This month 1.5 lakh DYFI and SFI members from Kerala also sent open letters to the PM, in support of the two letters detailed above and condemning the FIR.

The CPI(M), many other political parties and film organisations had also demanded that the authorities withdraw the sedition case against the 49 signatories to the earlier letter. The public pressure made its impact and on 10 October the FIR was withdrawn by the police on the basis of its ‘frivolous’ nature.

## Sharp Rise in Hate Crimes in India thisYear

A total of 181 incidents of hate crimes were recorded in the first half of this year — a steep rise since 2015, according to a report by Amnesty International’s India chapter.

The count is almost double that of the same period last year, when 100 such cases were recorded, The Hindu reported.

Over two-thirds of the victims were targeted because they were Dalits, while 40 of them suffered on account of their Muslim identity.

In 37 reported incidents, the victims were killed. In 30 cases, victims were raped or sexually assaulted, with sexual harassment in another 19 cases.



More alarmingly, 72 mob attacks were reported from across India between January and June 2019. Of the 37 such attacks against Muslims, the victims were lynched to death in five cases. Bollywood celebs request Modi to take action against Muslim lynching in India

Dalit victims were lynched to death in eight of the 28 mob attacks targetting them. There were also seven honour killings and 12 cases of violence against Adivasis.

Amnesty's website was launched in September 2015 after the murder of Mohammed Akhlaq on the suspicion of beef consumption in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh.

It has recorded a total of 902 reported incidents of hate crime since then, of which 621 were related to caste discrimination, while another 113 were motivated by cow vigilantism.

A quarter of all hate crimes since 2015 took place in Uttar Pradesh, with 216 in total.

Other states with a high incidence of hate crime include Tamil Nadu (80), Gujarat (79) and Haryana (61).

Official government data is not available, as Indian law does not recognise a hate crime as a separate offence. *"For India to be committed towards ending hate crimes — where people are targetted because of their identity stemming from race, religion, caste and gender amongst others, it is essential for the penal laws to first recognise the bias behind such crimes and document the occurrence of such incidents — both of which remain absent currently,"* Amnesty International India's executive director said in a statement.

## MP Dalit Kids Murdered for Defecating in the Open

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## India Ranks 102 Out of 117 on Hunger Index

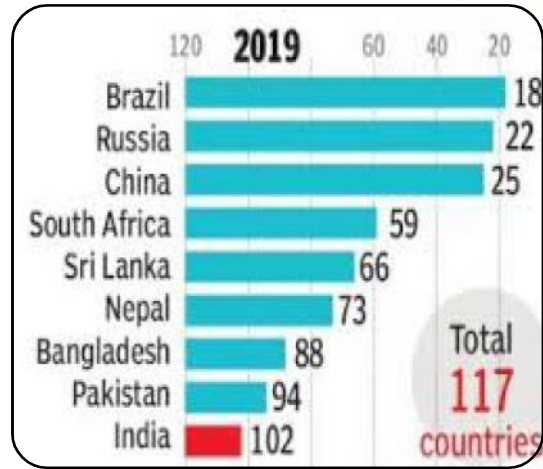
The latest Global Hunger Index (GHI) has ranked India a **lowly 102 among the 117 countries** it has mapped

India fell from 55 in 2014 to 102 in 2019 in the GHI. India ranked 55 out of 76 nations in 2014, 100 out of 119 countries in 2017, and 103 out of 119 countries in 2018.

This year's report calculated the index from a sample of 117 nations and India came on 102..

Most of India's neighbors fared better on the hunger index except Afghanistan.

Pakistan is at 94, Bangladesh 88 and Nepal 73 in this year's GHI report. India ranks below even Yemen, Rwanda and Ethiopia.



This low ranking suggests high rates of malnutrition and hunger in India. The report was based on four critical factors: undernourishment, child mortality, child wasting, and child stunting.



A GHI score of between 20 and 34.9 points reflects serious hunger levels; between 35 and 49.9 is alarming, and the situation is extremely alarming if it is over 50.

The report indicates that more than 20% of Indian children under the age of five have lower weight in relation to their height (wasting) and about 33% are too short as per their age (stunting).

India's child wasting rate is extremely high at 20.8 percent — the highest wasting rate of any country in this report. Its child stunting rate, 37.9 percent, is also categorized as very high in terms of its public health significance. In India, just 9.6 percent of all children between 6 and 23 months of age are “fed a minimum acceptable diet,” states the report.

The reason for mapping hunger is to ensure that the world achieves “Zero Hunger by 2030” — one of the Sustainable Development Goals laid out by the United Nations. It is for this reason that GHI scores are not calculated for certain high-income countries.

While India continues to linger at the lowest rungs of the global hunger index, its godowns are so overstocked with food grain that the Food Corporation of India has asked the government to lift stocks. It appears that we are ready to donate food grains to other countries while our own children starve.

# **NRC Process and Connected Issues**

The Chief Ministers of various BJP-ruled states have demanded a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in their states. The NRC was part of the Assam Accord and was specific to the state of Assam. It was under the direction of the Supreme Court that this process was conducted. Nearly 20 lakh people have been left out of the NRC in Assam. No genuine Indian citizen can be excluded. All the appeals by those excluded must be considered and adjudicated by a judicial authority without any discrimination. The detention centres where those declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunal are housed lack basic amenities and the conditions are abysmal, violative of elementary human rights. These must be closed down and people allowed to stay as they did so far till their appeals are adjudicated.

This government has revived the preparation of the National Population Register (NPR). A gazette notification has announced that a house-to-house enumeration will be done from April 2020 to September 30, 2020. The NPR was initiated during the time of the Vajpayee government, 2003, by amending the Citizenship Act and Rules. This was proceeded with even after a change in the government. But when the issue of Aadhaar came up and its implementation began, the NPR was abandoned since it was a duplication. Strangely, it has now been revived. This is being done in preparation for an all India NRC on the basis of this NPR. BJP Central Government has asked some states to start constructing buildings to be used as detention centres.

Simultaneously, the Election Commission has announced an Elector Verification Process (EVP) by asking voters to register online. This would be impossible in many parts of rural and interior India and will lead to a process of exclusion. There is already a photo identity electoral rolls along with EPIC card issued to all voters. This exercise of the EVP appears once again motivated for specific targeting.

Concurrently, the Home Minister announced that the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) will be passed by the next session of parliament. He thus assures the non-Muslims who do not figure in the NRC list that they would be granted citizenship while denying the Muslims even if they are genuine citizens born and living in our country for generations.

All these four processes put together are clearly an indication that it is meant to sharpen polarisation by targeting certain sections of the people. Granting citizenship on the basis of religion violates the fundamental foundations of the Indian Constitution which guarantees not only citizenship but also fundamental rights “irrespective of caste, creed or sex”.

All these exercises are unnecessary as the Aadhaar cards have been universalized in the country. The EPIC with the photo identity electoral rolls has the list of all voters of the country, which is routinely revised every year. When all these already exist, the simultaneous talk of extending the NRC beyond Assam, enumeration of the NPR, duplication of the electoral rolls by the EVP and the assurance of passing the CAB all indicate the efforts to sharpen polarization in the country in order to consolidate the RSS's communal vote bank.

As the existing mechanisms of Aadhaar, EPIC etc. are already in place, these new processes initiated by this government are unnecessary duplication costing thousands of crores of expenditure which the country can ill-afford at a time of economic recession. These must be halted.

# Venezuela Reverberates with 'Trump No More'

R Arun Kumar

Nearly one in every two people in Venezuela has signed on a petition stating 'Trump No More', expressing anger against the interference of imperialist US in the internal affairs of their country. This petition is going to be submitted in the United Nations General Assembly. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro announced that he will not attend the UN General Assembly, but in his stead, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez and Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza will represent the nation and hand over the 'letter of condemnation and accompanying signatures' to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Compare this with our prime ministers' visit to the US, where he too addressed the UN. Our prime minister and his shenanigans were gung-ho that a meeting with Trump was arranged and that they – birds of the same feather – would be sharing the dais in an event called Howdy Modi. After all, Trump is a 'dear friend', in spite of all his coercive policies that are ruining our economy. While the Venezuelans are preparing to expose Trump and his interventionist policies that are harming them, our prime minister was eager not to rub the US on the wrong side by raising Indian peoples' concerns – the growing racial hatred crimes in the US and resultant attacks on Indians or the H1B visa issues or the rise in tariffs on Indian goods or question the coercion on India to stop purchasing oil from cheaper sources. Notice the glaring difference between patriots and pseudo-patriots!

## TIAR – ANOTHER WEAPON TO DESTABILISE

Since the election of Hugo Chavez as the president of Venezuela, the US had been trying to destabilise the country by various means. It had used many of its tricks to topple the governments led initially by Chavez and now by Maduro. These include – funding opposition parties and groups, sneaking in para-military groups to unleash violence, imposing economic sanctions, waging an economic war, encouraging military to carry out coups and now trying to asphyxiate Venezuela by further tightening the screws of economic sanctions and threatening military intervention. The latest weapon to be unleashed by the US from its arsenal is the threat to apply Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR).

TIAR is a colonial era treaty, which the US coerced various countries of Latin America to sign in 1947. TIAR guarantees military assistance to those countries that feel threatened by any power in the region or outside the region. This was signed in the Cold War period, to 'legitimise' the military interventions carried out by the US for ideological reasons. According to this treaty, *"an armed attack by any State against an American State will be considered an attack against all American States"*. And hence, *"each of these contracting parties undertakes to help cope with the attack, in exercise of the immanent right of legitimate individual or collective defence"*. This treaty is another expression of the infamous Monroe doctrine, that declares US free to intervene in any country in the region.

US is now threatening Venezuela with this treaty, as Colombia had recently complained in a meeting of the Organisation of American States (OAS) that Venezuela is allowing its soil to be used by armed groups against Colombia. Incidentally, the OAS had voted on September 11 (remember the US military intervention in Chile that dislodged the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende on the same day in 1971), castigating Venezuela as *'a threat to the security of the region'*. Colombia is unable to substantiate its claims with any concrete evidence, as nothing exists on the ground to support its claims. Moreover, in this one year, there were nearly 44 incidents of aggression from Colombia on Venezuela across



the long border between the two countries, Instead of putting a stop to such incidents, Colombia is acting like a US stooge in the region.

Progressive governments like Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, no longer recognise the US-imposed TIAR and they formally withdrew from it in 2013. Encouraged by the US, the self-declared president of Venezuela, Juan Guaido had 'rejoined' this treaty.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza responded to the OAS decision stating: "*It is painful that countries which were invaded by US troops and whose peoples were massacred by the application of TIAR, endorse today a similar crime against a brother country*". President Nicolas Maduro, reacted by saying: "*Any intent to apply the TIAR within Venezuela will be considered an act hostile to national sovereignty and an aggression against the territory, the people, peace and international law*". The Venezuelan Armed Forces, ignoring the appeals of the US to defect to its side, reaffirmed their loyalty to the country and its people. "*The Bolivarian armed force will defend Venezuelan territory against the attempts by very powerful interests to destabilise the government, including such attempts by the United States and the right-wing opposition*".

Countries like Nicaragua, Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay denounced the OAS resolution and expressed their solidarity with Venezuela. The Cuban government stated that invocation of TIAR "*is a deliberate attempt to provoke a situation that could lead to the use of force to overthrow the legitimate government of President Nicolás Maduro Moros, in flagrant violation of the principles of international law and the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace*". It called upon the "*governments and peoples of Our America and the world to resolutely oppose this measure that pretends to justify, via an artificial legal framework, intervention in the internal affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*". Though Cuba is fighting the impact of the new sanctions imposed by the US, it had declared that "*Cuba doesn't betray its brothers nor its principles*". China and Russia, along with some other countries from the world, joined these countries in denouncing the invocation of the TIAR.

## EMBARGO ON VENEZUELA

US' TIAR weapon closely follows its decision to further tighten the economic sanctions and virtually impose an 'embargo' on Venezuela. In early August, the US administration approved new restrictions against Venezuela, ordering the freezing of all Venezuelan assets in the US, as well as banning commercial and financial transactions. It has imposed a sweeping economic embargo against Venezuela by 'blocking' all Venezuelan State assets in the US and prohibiting them from being "transferred, paid, exported, withdrawn, or otherwise dealt in". Most importantly, this decision authorises the administration to sanction 'non-US third parties' deemed to have "materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to the Venezuelan government". The present US order expands the 'blacklist' to encompass 'all business', from the already existing sanctions on 'oil, mining, and banking sectors'. It warned foreign companies and governments dealing with Venezuela: "*We are sending a signal to third parties that want to do business with the Maduro regime: Proceed with extreme caution,*" adding that those who flout sanctions "*risk (their) business interests with the United States*".

The US has threatened to impose sanctions against all foreign citizens, companies, institutions or organisations, that are supporting or trading with Venezuela. This is shifting its position from 'sanctions' to 'economic embargo'. Maduro declared: "*Donald Trump says that he is considering imposing an embargo on Venezuela, meaning that no vessel enters*

*or exits. It is a blockade. Criminal imperialism will not cope with Venezuela. The waters of Venezuela will be free, sovereign and independent. We will sail there the way we choose to. Get ready for a fight if you want to introduce an embargo on Venezuela”.*

The government of Venezuela decided to join the fight against the US policies of intervention. It had conducted huge rallies. Starting from August 10, signatures are being collected from the people condemning US policies, under the slogan, ‘**No More Trump**’. The initial target was to collect 6 million signatures, but seeing popular response, the campaign was continued and nearly 13 million signatures were collected.

The reason for this overwhelming response from the people is due to their long suffering from the adverse effects of economic sanctions imposed by the US. Arreaza, in his speech before the UNHRC stated: “A report published by the Washington-based Centre for Economic and Political Research in April found a 31 per cent increase in mortality in Venezuela from 2017 to 2018, equivalent to around 40,000 excess deaths, because of ‘sanctions (that) are depriving Venezuelans of lifesaving medicines, medical equipment, food, and other essential imports’. Sanctions have cost the country billions of dollars in oil revenues while sovereign assets abroad have been seized or frozen”.

US-backed opposition leader Guaido was isolated today because he had openly supported the sanctions. Recently, old documents detailing US advice given to Guaido and his friends, asking them to sabotage electricity production in order to destabilise the government, saw light. These plans were put to practice, causing widespread blackouts, adding to peoples’ hardships. A section of the opposition groups, dejected with the attitude of Guaido and the US, denounced both of them and positively responded to the government’s offer of talks. While, Guaido and his team backed out from the talks initiated by Norway, these opposition groups continued their discussions with the government and had come to certain agreements. These efforts also convinced people about the government’s sincerity to address the issues plaguing the country.

The anti-imperialist consciousness that Chavez tried to inculcate among the people, helped them realise US threats and made them join forces opposing the US and its lackeys. As long as the Venezuelan government takes people into confidence and mobilises them exposing the US interventionist policies, it can withstand any imperialist offensive.

(Courtesy: People’s Democracy)

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## Iranian Female Football Fans

An Iranian woman, Sahar Khodayari, nicknamed 'Blue Girl' (after the colour worn by her favourite football team) was arrested in March when she tried to enter a football stadium disguised as a man as since 1981 women in Iran have been stopped from going to stadiums to watch men's sporting events. After being jailed for three days she was released on bail and waited six months for her court case. When she appeared at court she found out the case had been postponed because the judge had a family emergency.



International

Sahar Khodayari self-immolated in front of a court in Teheran after she found out she could face a two-year sentence for attempting to enter the Azadi Stadium to watch her team play. **She died later, in hospital.** The woman's self-immolation had led to a lot of debate in Iran. FIFA and human rights campaigners increased the pressure on Iran's sports authorities to let women into games after the death of Sahar Khodayari. On 10 October more than 3,000 enthusiastic Iranian women crammed into a special section of a Teheran stadium to watch a World Cup qualifier against Cambodia, after they were allowed to buy match tickets for the first time in four decades.

## Stop Eviction of JNUSU From Office

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) strongly condemns the totally authoritarian move by the JNU Administration, with the active connivance of the BJP government at the centre, to evict the students union of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi from the office allotted to it. On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2019, the Dean of students issued an atrocious notice stating that the JNU Student Union has to vacate the JNUSU office by 5pm today ( 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019) and that they would "double lock" the room immediately. The frivolous pretext given was of 'non-notification' of the Student Union by the University administration itself.

We would like to remind the JNU Administration that JNUSU is a democratically elected students' body and its election process and results were legitimized by the Delhi High Court which had directed the JNU administration to formally notify the new union.

This not only a manifestation of an authoritarian assault on democratic rights in general and student's rights in particular, but also a brazen assault on reason and rationality which is supposed to prevail on the university campuses in any democratic country, worth the name.

The CITU demands that the University Administration immediately rescind the notice of eviction and desist from any undemocratic move which would result in unrest on the university campus.

CITU expresses its solidarity with student community of JNU and assures the support of the working class in their fight for democratic rights.

Press Release

# **Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Act Generates People's Anger, Governments Retreat**

R. Lakshmaiah

A huge increase in the penalties including 10 times increase in the fines and in the provision of imprisonment in the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, even for minor offences like not wearing a helmet, not strapping seatbelt, delayed insurance renewal and license renewal etc, which came into force across the country on 1 September, 2019, has hit the headlines of print, electronic and social media. These penalties will be increasing by 10 per cent every year on April 1, as notified by the central government. Huge anger is generated among the drivers of all kinds of motor vehicles across the country.

Sensing people's huge anger, several state governments including BJP-ruled states and those in opposition-ruled states, who voted in the Parliament in favour of the amendments in the Act, are running for cover. State governments of Congress, TMC in West Bengal, TRS in Telangana, YSR Congress in Andhra Pradesh have already postponed implementation of the revised penalties. The Rajasthan Congress government has reduced penalties. BJP ruled states like Karnataka and Maharashtra have postponed implementation. BJP's Gujarat and Jharkhand governments have already cut the penalty rates. Bihar's BJP-JD(U) government has kept it in abeyance.

The essence of the amendments is that fear is the key to enforce safety mandates and that drivers are exclusively responsible for the accidents.

But what is the reality? Lack of traffic infrastructure, bad road conditions, defects in construction of the roads etc are major factors for accidents. Further, non-availability of adequate public transport and encouragement to private vehicles by giving low or interest-free loans have flooded the roads with motor vehicles. All these are contributing to the accidents. Without addressing all these issues mere enhancement of penalties will not reduce the accidents.

It is not only increased penalties alone in the amended Act. Seizure of vehicle, suspension of driving license and increase in penalty for the second offence are part of it. When these will be implemented, the unrest will increase further.

However, the real purpose of amendment is aimed at handing over the entire road transport sector, both passenger and goods, to giant corporates. There was no provision in the original Act of 1988; but, now, in this amendment in 2019 provision has been made for them in the name of 'Aggregators'. This is the main purpose of the amendment. If the entire road transport sector is taken over by the giant corporates, the workers will be the first victims. The people at large will have to bear the burden of higher fares.

In addition, the provision has been made in the amended Act for the big companies to set up vehicle testing centres. After the notification by the central government, no vehicle can obtain a fitness certificate without the certificate from the corporate testing agencies.

Many new sections have been incorporated in the amendment Act to weaken/dismantle the



state-owned public transport corporations. In fact, according to the government reports, the lowest accident rate is recorded in these public sector road transport corporations.

Further, the activities of the government transport department are going to be handed over to private agencies, which is not only posing a threat to the employees of the department, but in the long run, no accountability will be there and many misdeeds will occur. Even now, in some states, where the power of registration of the new vehicle is entrusted to the dealers, under invoicing is widely reported, causing loss to the exchequer. If all the functions are handed over to private agencies, one can foresee the larger dimension of this problem.

The M.V. (Amendment) Act, 2019 is nothing but a cut and paste exercise from laws of different countries. But many intellectuals have raised the issue that in no country in the world, are the penalties higher than the daily earning of a person. Here, this was ignored. Because, the real intention is that the vehicle owners/drivers will have to leave the profession and depend on the giant corporates.

**Centre State Relations:** India is a federal country. During the Modi regime all the powers of the states are being centralised. Through the M. V. (Amendment) Act, 2019 the central government has taken over many powers of the states or encroached upon their powers in issuing permits formulating schemes etc.

**It is not the case of today:** Modi-1 government had brought the 'Road Transport and Safety Bill, 2014' having almost similar provisions as in the M.V. (Amendment) Act, 2019. From that time onward, the transport workers and all other stake holders across the country are on continuous struggle against the Bill.

For the first time since independence, transport workers went on a nationwide successful strike on 30 April, 2015 against that Bill. Again on 7 August, 2018 transport workers resorted to a nationwide strike with increased participation of the workers. In between, the transport workers also joined the all India strikes jointly called by the central trade unions against the retrograde and anti-people policies of the government. Facing these struggles, the government changed the title of the Bill, but not the main contents.

Due to the workers struggles and stiff opposition by the opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha, the Bill, 2014 could not be passed till the Parliament election in 2019. Along with CPI(M), CPI and DMK; Congress, TMC, AIADMK also opposed the earlier Bill and recorded their dissent during the examination of the Bill by the Select Committee of the Parliament. But, during the Modi-2 regime, when the Left demanded division, except for the CPI(M), CPI and DMK, all other parties voted in favour of the M.V. (Amendment) Bill, 2019 or abstained from voting. Thereby, the Bill was passed with 208 in support and 13 against it.

It is pertinent to demand of the Modi government to forthwith revoke the amendments in the M. V. Act and hold consultation with all the stake holders in the road transport sector including trade unions and the experts in the field of transport, for improving road safety.

However, the experience is that the Modi government will not listen to the people in normal ways. Its prime task is to protect and safeguard the profiteering of the corporates. Hence, it is inevitable that the only way out is to build a strong resistance movement at national level.

*(R. Lakshmaiah is the Dy. General Secretary; All India Road Transport Workers'*

## Begam Rokeya

In 1926, while chairing the Bengal women's educational conference, Begam Rokeya said - *'Although I am grateful to you for the respect that you have expressed towards me by inviting me to preside over the conference, I am forced to say that you have not made the right choice. I have been locked up in the socially oppressive iron casket of 'porda' for all my life. I have not been able to mix very well with people – as a matter of fact, I do not even know what is expected of a chairperson. I do not know if one is supposed to laugh, or to cry'.*

She continued *'The opponents of female education say that women will be unruly...fie ! They call themselves Muslims and yet go against the basic tenet of Islam which gives equal right to education. If men are not led astray once educated, why should women?'*

*'I don't believe that only married life can be the ultimate success for women' - was Rokeya's take on marriage. In her writing she attacked the Muslim orthodox view on women's position in society—'Had God Himself intended women to be inferior, He would have ordained it so that mothers would have given birth to daughters at the end of the fifth month of pregnancy. The supply of mother's milk would naturally have been half of that in case of a son. But that is not the case. How can it be? Is not God just and most merciful?'*



Rokeya, litterateur, educationist, and social reformer, who played a pioneering role in awakening Muslim women, was born on 9 December 1880 into a landed family of Pairaband in Rangpur. Rokeya's father held the conservative view of the time regarding women's education. He sent Rokeya's elder brothers to Saint Xavier's College, Calcutta, but Rokeya and her elder sister were not sent to school. Though not allowed to receive formal education, she learnt both Bangla and English with the help of her brothers.

At the age of 18 Rokeya married Sakhawat Hussain, in 1898. He was a deputy magistrate of [Bhagalpur](#). As a liberal, he encouraged Rokeya to continue learning Bengali and English. He also encouraged her to write, and on his advice, she adopted Bengali as the principal language for her literary pursuit. Her husband died in 1909.

Despite her personal loss, Rokeya did not sit idle but started working for women's education and emancipation. She started a school for Muslim girls at Bhagalpur with only five students, naming it after her husband, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School.

However, unable to continue at Bhagalpur for domestic reasons, she moved to Calcutta where she set up Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School with five students. This school was upgraded to Middle English Girls' School in 1917 and to High English Girls' School in 1931, through her untiring efforts.

The Muslim women of Bengal at that time were backward, neglected and oppressed. Rokeya realised that women could be freed from their shackles only if they were educated and became financially independent. So she worked hard to convince Bengali Muslim families to send their daughters to school.

She wrote on a wide range of subjects: social prejudice, adverse effects of the purdah system, women's education, social oppression of women, women's rights and her progressive views about women's awakening. She also wrote against the traditions of childhood marriage and polygamy.

She founded an organisation called Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam, or the Muslim women's society, in 1916, to make women aware of their rights. The society was in the forefront of the fight for women's education, employment and their legal and political rights.

Rokeya died in 1932.

# Devastating Floods in Bihar



Bihar is ravaged by floods every year and the victims are forced to confront and deal with the destruction and the tragedies associated with these.

The year 2019 will be remembered for two rounds of floods in the state. It was in August that the entire North Bihar, right from East Champaran in the west to Kishanganj in the East, got submerged by the rushing water of many Himalaya Rivers originating from Nepal. Lakhs of people lost their houses and their household belongings and took shelter on highways and other high places. Even those having brick houses, had to take refuge in safer places, leaving everything behind. About two hundred people, young and old, women and children, lost their lives. These hapless flood victims were left to fend for themselves as the government agencies failed to rush relief food materials, medicines and other necessary materials for them.

The only silver lining in the clouds was the work of the RDF people who saved many lives and rescued hundreds of people from drowning.

Belatedly the government announced that it will give 6000 rupees per family in the flood affected areas, as it failed to implement the flood code. According to the flood code every household will be provided one quintal grain, food materials, medicines, milk for the children and money to buy other essentials. As most of the flood victims lost their bank and other documents, the payment of the money got delayed and there was large scale corruption in identifying the flood victims. They were not even provided with good quality polythene sheets and were left to face the harsh weather in the open. But the victims came together and helped each other to survive.

Rampari, the All India Vice President of AIDWA visited the most flooded district Madhubani and dharnas and demonstrations were organised under her leadership to force the district administration to provide relief to the flood victims. Many such demonstrations and dharnas were organised in Darbhanga, Saharsha, East Champaran under the banner of other mass organisations.

But these did not find any place in the news on national channels. Only when in the last week of September it rained heavily and submerged the posh localities of Rajendra Nagar, Patliputra colony, Kankarbagh and other such areas did the national channels start reporting on a daily basis. The Deputy Chief Minister was rescued from his submerged home in Rajendra Nagar and his shaken face with his family members went viral on social media.

The so called smart city of Patna was the scene of a hellish situation, not due to the entry of the swollen Ganga water but due to a heavy downpour for three days. The total lack of any proper drainage facilities exposed the BJP-JDU, contractor and corrupt bureaucrat nexus. Now the city and many other flooded areas are facing the danger of the spread of dengue and other water borne diseases.

(Report from Arun Mishra)



# PLEDGE

**"We the people of India, today, the 1st/2nd of October 2019, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the ICDS and the 150th birth anniversary of 'the father of the Nation' pledge that we will fight to uphold the promise we have made to ourselves while adopting the Constitution of India. We will fight against hate and discrimination; strive for real development and freedom; and establish Harmony and Equality"**

**We reiterate the pledge in the PREAMBLE of our CONSTITUTION**

**"WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA,  
solemnly resolved to constitute India into a  
SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and  
to secure to all its citizens  
JUSTICE, social, economic and political;  
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief,  
faith and worship;  
EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;  
and to promote among them all  
FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the  
individual and the unity and  
integrity of the Nation"**