

The Voice of the Working Woman

**India's Unemployment Rate at
45-year High**

Agrarian Sector in acute distress

**3 crore textile workers lose jobs-
many more likely to go**

**GDP
down
to 5 %**

**Is this
VIKAS?**

**Government takes
Rs 1.76 lakh crores
from Reserve Bank**

**Layoffs still commonplace in India,
IT sector worst-hit**

**8-10 lakh contract employees in auto parts industry
lose jobs as auto sales decline by 23.5%**

**Exports down 6% in August
as most major sectors falter**

**Parle may lay off 10,000 workers
amid slowdown, company clarifies**

Against the
Anti-Worker Anti-People Anti-National Policies
of the BJP Government
National Open Mass Convention of Workers
30 September 2019, Parliament Street, New Delhi

Scrap the Anti-Worker, Pro Employer Labour Law Amendments & Codes
No Privatisation
No 100% FDI in Railways, Defence, Coal and other CPSEs
No Merger of Banks
Increase Purchasing Power Create Jobs, Stop Retrenchment
National Minimum Wage Rs.18000 p.m. Pension to All

**REVERSE ECONOMIC POLICIES TO STALL ECONOMIC
SLOWDOWN**

**INTUC
TUCC**

**AITUC
SEWA**

**HMS
AICCTU**

**CITU
LPF**

**AIUTUC
UTUC**

Independent Federations,
Associations
Unions of Workers and Employees

Fight Back!

*The **Voice**
of the
Working Woman*

Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)

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100 Days - Just a Trailer...

In sabhi mamlon mein, desh ne abhi sarkar ka bas trailer dekha hai, puri film toh abhi baki hai (The country has just seen the 'trailer' of the functioning of the government, the entire film remains to be seen). These are the words of Prime Minister Modi on his government's 100 days' performance.

Let us have a glimpse of the 'trailer' -

- Economy has slowed down to 5%; entire financial system is under threat, a situation not witnessed in the country in the last 70 years, according to Rajiv Kumar, chief of Niti Aayog.
- Tens of lakhs of workers are losing jobs in automobile manufacturing, textiles and garments, construction, IT/ITES and many others. No new employment is being generated
- Code on Wages Bill passed; consensus recommendations of ILC on the formula for minimum wages totally ignored. Minimum wage of Rs 4700 per month declared by the Labour Minister contradicting the government's own committee's recommendation
- Corporatisation of Railway and Defence production units; moves to privatise all strategic public sector undertakings including defence production, railways, insurance, banks, public road transport, ports, coal, electricity, steel, petroleum, Air India, BSNL, MTNL etc
- 100% FDI in defence, railways, coal etc
- Merger of 10 public sector banks. Pensioners income reduced due to decline in interest rates
- Right to Information Act amended to dilute the autonomy of the Commission to serve its political exigencies
- Unlawful Acts Prevention Act has been amended to make it more draconian and enable targeting of government's ideological opponents
- The National Register of Citizens list in Assam excluded over 19 lakhs. Similar exclusionary exercise through NRC is contemplated in different states
- Abrogation of Article 370, dividing the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories by imposing clamp down on the people in the state
- Efforts to impose Hindi
- Democratic rights under attack
- Increased kowtowing to US imperialism

If that was the trailer, what will be the climax of the film?

- Loss of sovereignty, independent manufacturing capacity and self reliance of the country
- Workers, the real 'creators of wealth' become modern day slaves without any rights or guaranteed benefits
- Unbridled power to Corporates, domestic and foreign, to loot the country's wealth created by the workers
- Our nation divided on the basis of religion, language, region etc

This is the 'film' produced and directed by the BJP and its mentor the RSS, enacted by Modi and Shah.

This is not acceptable to the working class. It cannot be tolerated by the working class. The workers who build the nation and protect the nation will not keep silent when the nation's interests are being mortgaged. The huge struggles erupting spontaneously in different sectors, the coal workers' strike on 24th and of the bank officers on 26-27 of September, and others in the pipeline amply prove this.

The central trade unions (except the BMS affiliated to RSS) are all set to announce their future plan to intensify the struggle against these policies in the open mass convention in the national capital on 30th September.

Working class has to send a clear message, through heightened united struggles, that it is determined to reverse these anti worker, anti people and anti national policies and save the nation.

Economic Slump: Modi Govt Re-Arranging Furniture When House is on Fire

Savera

Measures announced by the finance minister are mere concessions to industry lobbies and stock market, and don't address lack of demand.



The raft of measures announced by India's finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman for supposedly boosting a sinking economy are unlikely to rescue flagging economic growth and don't even address the key problems of lack of purchasing power with the people and raging unemployment. It's rearranging the furniture when the house is on fire.

Sitharaman's announcements were welcomed by everybody from prime minister Narendra Modi, and home minister Amit Shah to party leaders, ministers, chief ministers and even ex-chief ministers of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. They were also welcomed by some of the automobile industry tycoons and share market players. Even the US-India Business Council praised it extravagantly. The measures can be boiled down to: roll back of enhanced surcharge on foreign portfolio investors, lifting ban on government purchase of new cars, allowing BS-IV vehicles to ply till their registration time gets over, allowing an additional 15% depreciation rate for vehicles, infusing Rs.70,000 crore in banks and Rs.20,000 crore for housing finance companies through the National Housing Bank, completing all pending Goods and Services Tax refunds to MSMEs (medium, small and micro enterprises) in 30 days, removal of angel tax on start-ups, etc.

"The finance minister is simply trying to talk the economy out of the ongoing slowdown. It's not going to work," said Surajit Mazumdar, professor of economics at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University.

"The key problem with the Indian economy is that there is declining demand. This is not being addressed at all by the present government. They are hoping that these and other such measures will give a fillip to private sector investment, which in turn will lead to better growth, and more employment. That is putting the cart before the horse," Mazumdar explained.

Commentators in the mainstream media were cautiously welcoming the measures – appreciating the signal that the government has a *"listening capacity"*, as Anand Mahindra, chairman of giant auto-maker Mahindra Group said in a tweet. What he meant was that the government was responding to the corporate sector's pleas for help and bailing them out. Now they are waiting for more concessions, which Sitharaman promised when she said that more announcements were coming in the coming weeks.

Concessions to Auto Corporates

The concessions given for the automobile sector illustrate the case neatly. The sum total of measures announced for this sector, which is staring at a two- decade low of car sales, and a loss

of lakhs of jobs, is that government will buy new cars, companies can replace old cars with new ones taking advantage of higher depreciation rates, and vehicles need not be upgraded to more stringent BS-VI norms till March 2020. Is this sufficient to boost demand for new cars, even in that minute fraction of Indians who want to buy cars? Very unlikely.

What it conveys – as Mahindra correctly emphasises – is that government is kowtowing to what the auto-makers want. And, under present circumstances, all that they want is that their profit margins are somehow sustained, despite sales revenue being in virtual free fall.

Bank Capital Infusion

As far as the Rs.70,000 crore infusion of capital is concerned, this was already part of the Budget, points out Mazumdar. All that the government has done is to frontload it – that is, put it in right now instead of over the year. The purpose is to enable the banks to lend more, which in turn would – theoretically – boost productive capacities and employment.

But this is an egregious () mistake. The problem of flagging investment is not because of credit squeeze. It is because of lack of demand. Just making more credit available can lead only to NPAs (non-performing assets or bad loans) growing as banks will ease lending and unscrupulous applicants will take the money and blow it up, as was happening till now.

The infusion of Rs.20,000 crore in housing finance companies is also just a confidence-building measure, not a step that will revive the real estate sector which is in the grip of a death spiral. The crisis in the shadow banking system – remember IL&FS and DHFL – has spooked the corporate sector and this infusion is meant to reassure them.

Expediting pending GST refunds to MSMEs is a good step, but it is not going to help the sector which has been in crisis after the twin shocks of demonetisation and GST. Bank credit flow to this sector has been declining and a large part of the unemployed are arising from this sector's crisis. GST refunds is like putting a band aid on a festering wound.

Concessions to Foreign Hot Money

The scrapping of surcharge on foreign investors' capital gains (what they earn by selling shares) and the exemption to start-ups from angel tax are primarily meant to please hot money managers abroad. In the past weeks, since the surcharge was announced by the government in its Budget, over Rs.23,000 crore was withdrawn by foreign investors from the market leading to high volatility and uncertainty. Now, they will be reassured, and may start investing once again. But, so what? FPI does not help expand productive capacities in India, nor does it create jobs. It only likes the pockets of foreign investors in stock markets. Small wonder that bodies like the USIBC and US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPIF) are going ga-ga over these measures.

What Should be Done Instead?

What should be done to boost the economy? The primary thing is to boost public spending, according to Mazumdar. *"Sectors like health, education, infrastructure, agriculture are facing resource crunch and government investment in these would not only directly help the people, it would create jobs and boost incomes which would help revive the economy,"* he said.

But the government's commitment to so-called fiscal prudence, that is, curtailing government spending and keeping fiscal deficit down, prevents it from doing so. This albatross of the neo-liberal dogma that the Modi government is carrying around its neck, is spelling doom for any effective steps to revive the economy.

In the coming days, as promised by Sitharaman, more such measures will be announced. Expect more of concessions to corporates, even bail-outs. And, in the absence of any substantial increase in public spending for increasing the buying power – like raising wages, increasing spend on welfare schemes, etc. – expect unemployment to rise further, and the economy to sink further.

Article 370 and Kashmir's Land Reforms

Prabhat Patnaik

Jammu and Kashmir was the first state in the country to introduce land reforms. There were two components of J&K's land reforms. First, the system of absentee landlordism that had prevailed during the Maharaja's time was completely done away with. The land of the absentee landlords was taken over *without any compensation* and simply distributed among the tenants; whoever was cultivating whatever amount of land on the absentee landlord's estate as tenant was simply given ownership of that much of land *without having to pay any amount of money for obtaining ownership*. Secondly, a land ceiling of 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres (182 kanals) was imposed. A household with one adult male at its head could not keep more than this much of land. Ceiling-surplus land was taken over *without compensation* and distributed among the poor tenants and the landless, again *without demanding any payment*.

These land reforms were not without their limitations. By the very nature of the legislation, the land reforms brought lesser benefits to smaller tenants. Since they cultivated smaller amounts of land in the absentee landlord's estate, they got ownership rights over correspondingly smaller amounts of land from the estate. And the landless did not get much benefit out of these reforms. Whatever land came their way was ceiling-surplus land, which typically tended to be of poor quality; it was also paltry in amount, since ceiling laws were often circumvented, as the responsibility for implementing land reforms was entrusted not to peasant committees, as in Revolutionary China, but to the state bureaucracy. But even though the benefits conferred by the land reforms were uneven across the peasantry, *the land reforms did succeed in breaking feudal landlordism in J&K*. And this happened in the early 1950s, with The Big Landed Estates Abolition Act being enacted in 1950 itself.

One of the main reasons why J&K could carry out land reforms that were more thoroughgoing than anywhere else in India until then (Kerala's land reforms were to be enacted after the Communist government came to power in 1957), was Article 370 of the constitution, which Amit Shah, ironically, said the other day in parliament, had been an obstacle to "development" in the state!

The Indian Constitution, unlike that of J&K, had included the right to property among the fundamental rights, and when land reform legislations were introduced in UP, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, they were challenged before the High Courts in those three states as violating a constitutionally-guaranteed fundamental right. The High Court judgements sided with the landlords, and the matter was taken to the Supreme Court.

At this point, as a pre-emptive measure, before the Supreme Court could give its verdict, Jawaharlal Nehru's government introduced the First Amendment to the Constitution, which not only exempted the legislations in those three particular states from judicial review, but, additionally, introduced the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. All legislations put into the Ninth Schedule were exempted from judicial review.

Even this however was not the end of the matter. In a quite unrelated case that came before it, the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that in all instances of private property being taken over by the State, compensation had to be paid at "market value", which meant that for land taken over from the landlords under land reform legislation, the State had to pay compensation at "market value". Since this put a huge burden on the exchequer, the Nehru government brought in the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution that exempted the State from having to pay full compensation at market value in cases where land was taken over by it. And this amendment too was put into the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution making it immune to judicial review.

One consequence of this long legal tussle was that the takeover of land from the landlords could not be *gratis* (free) as in J&K; some amount of compensation had to be paid to the landlords even if not at market value. Correspondingly the distribution of land to the tenants too could not be entirely *gratis* as in J&K. The tenants in the rest of India had the optional right to purchase the land which they had been cultivating as tenants earlier; otherwise they continued as before as tenants, but now to the State which had taken over the land from their erstwhile landlords.

J&K could both take over land *gratis* and distribute it *gratis*, because it had its own constitution whose autonomy was guaranteed by Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and which did not give this pre-eminence to the right to property. J&K's land reform measures therefore could be far more thorough-going and comprehensive than in the rest of India, at least in the sense of dispossessing the erstwhile feudal landlords. And J&K remained for long the sole shining example of land reforms among the Indian states until Left governments came into office in some states at a later date and picked up the unfinished agenda of land reforms.

Land reforms in J&K, apart from their impact on the social structure and land distribution, also contributed greatly towards keeping income inequalities in check in that state. Additionally, they also helped to restrict the incidence of rural poverty there. According to *official* poverty estimates put out by the Planning Commission, *among all the Indian states*, J&K had *the lowest proportion of the rural population below the poverty line in 2009-10*. Its rural poverty ratio was 8.1 per cent; only the union territory of Delhi had a marginally lower ratio, 7.7 per cent, while the rural poverty ratio for the country as a whole, including J&K, was 33.8 per cent. But since Delhi is a gigantic metropolis, its rural areas can hardly be considered typical of India's countryside, and hence cannot be compared with the rural areas of any state; J&K therefore held the record for the lowest rural poverty.

Interestingly, the rural poverty ratio for Gujarat, the home state of both Modi and Shah, was, according to official figures, 26.7 per cent in 2009-10, which is why before Amit Shah pontificates to J&K about its special status coming in the way of its "development", he should ponder over these figures, *all of which are official*.

Official poverty figures grossly underestimate the actual poverty ratio; but even if one makes a direct estimate of the proportion of the rural population that cannot access 2200 calories per person per day, the benchmark for rural poverty, the relative positions of the states hardly changes. J&K remains among the lowest rural-poverty-ratio states of the country.

What is true of poverty estimates, also holds if we take a whole range of other social indicators: J&K's record is among the best among all the Indian states, and this fact owes not a little to the land reforms undertaken in that state, which in turn were made possible by its remaining outside the Indian Constitution under Article 370.

Lest it is thought that J&K had always been a state that was less afflicted by poverty than other Indian states, and that the above relative figures only capture a pre-existing historical reality that has nothing to do with the implementation of land reforms or with Article 370, I should emphasize that J&K had been the site of a highly oppressive feudal regime which, like other feudal regimes, had kept the (mainly Muslim) peasantry in an abject state of poverty and ignorance. Local lore has it that the Maharaja's tax collectors were so ruthless in pursuing their task that when the peasants complained of lack of means to pay the exactions of the state, they would ask the peasants to open their mouths to see if there were any grains of rice sticking to their teeth: if the peasants could afford to eat rice then they could afford to pay taxes, so their argument went.

The transformation of such a feudal economy to one which has among the lowest poverty ratios in the country today is an achievement that may not impress Amit Shah, but it is a considerable one by any criterion; and so is the role of Article 370 in making it possible.

Ninth Conference AP State Anganwadi Union

The 9th Conference of AP Statenganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (CITU) was held on 14-15 September at Guntur. The conference started with the hoisting of the flag by P Roja, senior leader of the union. The conference was inaugurated by Shri Lakshman Rao , MLC. He narrated the challenges before ICDS in the state. The inaugural session was presided over by Babyrani, President of the Union and national Vice President, CITU.



In her address, A R Sindhu, General Secretary, AIFAWH exposed the Government's policy to dismantle the ICDS. The Poshan Mission is nothing but a campaign mission for the Prime Minister, she said.

She called upon the delegates to strengthen the union and be ready for intensified struggles. The General Secretary's report was presented by Subbaravamma. During the last four years, the membership of the union has increased from 64,050 in 2014 to 74,040 in 2018. The union membership is 75% of the workforce in the state. The report reflected the militant struggles conducted since the bifurcation of the state and the achievements of increase in wages and ex gratia. The report also gave a picture of systematic organizational work with cadre development, democratic functioning and financial transparency. Systematic efforts of cadre education with TU classes at various levels were made in the past years, the report stated.

15 delegates took part in the discussion. The accounts were placed by Vanisree, Treasurer. After the discussion, the report and accounts were adopted.

The conference was addressed by M A Gaffoor, CITU state General Secretary, Dhanalakshmi, leader of the ASHA workers union, Rema, leader of the Mid day meal workers union, CITU district secretary and leaders of construction and panchayat workers.

The conference elected a 43 member committee with 23 Office bearers with Babyrani as President, Subbaravamma as General Secretary and Vanisree as Treasurer.

A R Sindhu gave the concluding address.

The conference was attended by 325 delegates from 13 districts.

A colourful procession of anganwadi workers and helpers from the district was held in the afternoon which culminated in a public meeting. In spite of the order of the DC for conducting project level rallies in connection with the 'poshan month', more than a thousand workers and helpers participated in the rally. The public meeting was addressed by A R Sindhu, M A Gaffoor, Babyrani and Subbaravamma.

First State Conference Assam State ASHA Union

The first State Conference of the Assam State ASHA Union was held on 8th September 2019 at Bishnu Nirmala Bhawan, Guwahati. The union flag was hoisted by the Union Vice President Sahida Begum. The CITU flag was hoisted by Chaya Rani Das, State Committee member of the Union and CITU Sonitpur District Secretariat Member. A procession had



been planned but could not be taken out because of last moment cancellation of permission by the police authority due to Home Minister's visit in the State on that day.

The Conference was presided over by union Vice Presidents Sahida Begum, Iva Rani Phukan and Deepali Debi. On behalf of the reception committee, Transport Union President Biren Sarma welcomed the delegates, guests and leaders of fraternal trade unions like Asom Rajjik Anganwadi Karmi Sahayika Santha and Nursing Home Employees Union.

Ranjana Nirula, Convenor of the All India Coordination Committee of ASHA Workers inaugurated the Conference. She spoke about the unpaid labour of women, especially ASHA workers, their arduous conditions of work and poor payment. Explaining the government policies, which are geared to privatization, especially in the health sector, she urged the delegates to expand and strengthen their union and organization in order to fight for their rights and for a change in these policies.

The report of the Conference including the Treasurer's report, were placed by the Asstt Secretary of the Union Com Likson Phukan, as the General Secretary had to rush to the hospital to meet the delegates who had met with an accident on the way to the conference. A total of 17 delegates discussed on the report. The report was adopted unanimously.

The Conference adopted 3 resolutions: For regularisation of ASHA Workers, Against deduction of Rs 1000 per month from the payable amount, Against price rise of commodities.

167 delegates from 7 districts participated in the conference. 22 delegates from South Kamrup District were unable to join the conference due to the accident. The conference elected a 29 member committee including 11 office bearers, with Tutumoni Lahon as President, Noni Likson Phukan as General Secretary and Minara Begum as Treasurer. The conference also elected 5 members as delegates and 4 alternate delegates for the forthcoming 13th CITU Assam State Conference.

Tapan Sarma, General Secretary, CITU Assam State Committee, in his concluding speech, highlighted the divisive rising wave of communalism and the need to campaign for a scientific temper. He demanded decent payment for decent work and urged the ASHA workers to unite under the CITU banner to save the NHM.

Third Conference UP State Anganwadi Union

The third conference of the UP state Anganwadi Karmachari Union (CITU) was held on 31 August -1 September 2019 at Lucknow. The conference started with an open forum on the "Crisis of ICDS and the Way Out"

The open session was presided over by Umashankar Mishra, leader of HMS and Meenakshi Khare, Vice President of the Union. The open meeting which was attended by the members of both Angnawadi Karmachari Union (CITU) and Mahila Angnawadi Union(HMS) from 13 districts, was inaugurated by Usharani, President AIFAWH. A R Sindhu, General Secretary AIFAWH was the main speaker. The meeting was addressed by Neelam Pandey, General Secretary and Maya Singh, President of Mahila Angawadi Union (HMS) apart from Chaman Ara President and Veena Gupta General Secretary and Dileep Shukla , Secretary of the Anganwadi Karmachari Union.

The delegate session started in the afternoon on 31 August with Veena Gupta placing the report. A R Sindhu spoke on the AIFAWH perspective on organisation and the possibilities before the anganwadi movement in UP.

The conference was attended by delegates from 8 districts. 10 delegates spoke on the report and the accounts placed by the General Secretary. Conference elected 27 member committee with Veena Gupta as President, Meenakshi Khar as Working President, Chaman Ara as General Secretary and Babita as Treasurer.

The conference resolved to strengthen the joint movement of anganwadi workers and helpers in the state.

Jammu ASHA Workers

A deputation of ASHA Workers Union Jammu (CITU), led by CITU leader S P Kesar, submitted a memorandum to the Mission Director, National Health Mission J&K through Dr Jatinder Mehta, State Manager ASHA.

The memorandum appealed to the Mission Director NHM to pay either Rs 10,000 plus 50 per cent bonus as wages at par with Andhra Pradesh Government or minimum wages of Rs 390 per day as per the Central Government notification besides putting a check on harassment of ASHA workers by department staff in general and of Billawar block in particular. The memo further demanded providing smart-phones, identity cards, payment of pending arrears, Rs 5 lakh accident insurance besides other benefits like pension, gratuity and EPF etc.

The deputation included Anita Kumari, Gita Rani, Surinder Kour, Renu Bala, Bilma, Kanta Devi, Raiva Kumari, Om Prakash, General Secretary CITU; Jagdish Sharma and Jia Lal Parihar (State Secretaries).

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Scheme Workers on the Move Thousands Protest Countrywide on 3, 4, 5 September 2019

Thousands of ASHA, Mid Day Meal and Anganwadi Workers and helpers came out on the streets on 3, 4 and 5 September at block and district head quarters, on their long pending demands for regularization, minimum wages at Rs.18000 per month and pension and social security – implementation of the 45th Indian Labour Conference Recommendations. The action was also called against the privatization of the schemes in different ways and against the changes in labour laws doing away with all hard earned rights of the working class. This action was in continuation of the series of struggles including strikes held in the past few years, building a strong movement of 'scheme workers' in the country.

ASHA Workers and Facilitators

The All India Coordination Committee of ASHA Workers (AICCAW) gave a call for protest on 3rd September against the health policies. In India the financial allocation for health, just over 1%, is one of the lowest in the world, and 86% of health expenditure is out of pocket, leading to around 4 crore people being pushed into poverty, every year. The government is rapidly privatizing the public health services as well as introducing a health insurance scheme, thereby ensuring huge profits for the private health industry.

The 10 lakh ASHA workers and Facilitators are the backbone of the NHM but are paid only a pittance.

On 3 September thousands of ASHA workers and facilitators held demonstrations and submitted memorandums at the district and block level in Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu, Kerala, MP, Punjab. In Maharashtra the ASHA workers and facilitators also went on an indefinite strike from 3 September.

The demands are:

1. ASHA/USHA workers should be regularised as 'Health Workers'; They should be paid minimum wages of Rs. 18,000 per month and should get all social security benefits like pension, gratuity, maternity benefits, etc. as per the recommendation of the 45th ILC
2. The budget allocation for health should be increased to 6%.
3. The NHM should be made a permanent health programme of the government, with universal application and adequate financial allocation.
4. Government health facilities and infrastructure should be improved on a priority basis.
5. Privatisation of the public health system should be reversed.

Mid Day Meal Workers

27 lakh Mid Day Meal workers in the country are very agitated that the Modi-1 government which had increased the remuneration of the anganwadi and ASHA workers, even though nominally, had totally neglected the Mid Day Meal Workers. Since 2009, the remuneration of the MDM workers are not been increased and it remains at a meagre Rs.1000 per month. The Government of India and BJP led state governments are handing over the MDM Scheme to NGOs like Akshaya Patra against all nutritional norms.

The demands are:

1. Increase remuneration of MDM workers immediately
2. Implement the recommendations of 45th and 46th ILC regarding scheme workers-
 - Recognize them as as Class IV school employees
 - Pay minimum wages not less Rs.18,000 per month to all Mid Day Meal Workers for all the 12 months in a year
 - Social security benefits including pension Rs.3000 per month, gratuity, provident fund, medical facilities ,ESI etc should be provided to all Mid Day Meal Workers.
3. There should be no retrenchment of the existing Mid Day Meal workers.
4. Ensure safety of Mid Day Meal Workers and provide medical insurance. Provide compensation of Rs. 5 lakh in case of accident
5. 180 days maternity leave with pay should be provided to the Mid Day Meal workers.
6. No Privatisation of the MDM Scheme in any form. No centralized kitchen in MDMS.
7. Withdraw the anti worker changes in Labour Laws.

Anganwadi Workers and Helpers

AIFAWH has given this call for protest on 5th September, Teachers' Day, to press for the long pending demands of the more than 26 lakh anganwadi workers and helpers in the country and the immediate issue of the government policy and opening up of unscientific pre-schools throughout the country. AIFAWH has also raised the issue of the labour law changes by the Modi government in this protest.

Lakhs of workers in states Assam, AP, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, HP, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, MP, Maharashtra, Punjab, Pondicherry, Rajasthan, TN, UP, Uttarakhand and WB held demonstrations at district and block level and gave memorandum to the Minister for WCD, Government of India. In Haryana and Jharkhand the anganwadi workers and helpers were on strike against the state governments.

The demands are

- Institutionalization of ICDS
- Right to education for 3-6 years old children
- Scientific pre- school education only through anganwadis for the future of the children
- Regulate/ban unscientific pre-schools or convert them into anganwadis
- Regularise anganwadi workers and helpers and all scheme workers as employees; pay minimum wages and pension
- Withdraw the pro employer change in the labour laws

AIFAWH's protest action was synchronized with the AIKS-CITU call for action against the anti labour policies and privatization spree by the Modi government on 5th September 2019, the anniversary of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh rally last year.

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ASHA WORKERS



Haryana



Kerala



Gujarat



Maharashtra

ANGANWADI WORKERS AND HELPERS



Gujarat



West Bengal



Madhya Pradesh



Punjab



Karnataka



Uttar Pradesh

ANGANWADI WORKERS AND HELPERS



Andhra Pradesh



Assam



Bihar



Haryana



Jharkhand

MID DAY MEAL WORKERS



Himachal Pradesh



Assam



Punjab



Haryana



Imphal



West Bengal

70,000 ASHA Workers on 15 day strike in Maharashtra

At the call of the Maharashtra state ASHA Gatparvartak Action Committee for indefinite strike and boycott of work, almost seventy thousand Maharashtra ASHA workers and facilitators went on strike from 3rd September. The strike action program was carried out successfully throughout Maharashtra, barring a few districts of Konkan on account of Ganesh festival. During the strike period ASHA workers participated in almost all the programmes of the union. They created history as it was first time that they participated in such a statewide call and that too for 15 days.

The agitation started on 3rd September with demonstrations in all District Collector offices and boycott of work from 4th September onwards. They sat on dharna, held demonstrations, stayed at *zilla parishad* continuously for 3 days and nights. They blocked highways, gheraoed MLAs, MPs, ministers, and tried to agitate in front of their houses also. About 10,000 ASHA workers attempted to march to the Chief Minister's house in Nagpur. They observed Jail bhara, Maha-Aakrosh programs.

Due to their continued struggle the matter came up for discussion in the cabinet meeting held on 9th September. The delegation met the CM in the presence of the state health minister, who tried to give some assurances but we were firm on our demand of getting a government order. So the agitation continued with enhanced intensity. Ultimately on 16th September, late at night, the government issued an order enhancing ASHA worker incentives by Rs 2000 per month, from State funds. However, we noticed that the government gave nothing to Gatpravartak, (Block Facilitators). So the agitation continued on 17 September also.

On the 17th itself the CM and Revenue minister were met and a memorandum was handed over for inclusion of Block Facilitators as beneficiaries and we demanded an amendment in the government order. They accepted their mistake and assured that they would correct it. The next day i.e. on 18th September, we met the Health minister and he also assured that the needful would be done. Hence, in view of the assurances given by the CM, Ministers and the forthcoming election code of conduct at any time, the indefinite strike program was withdrawn by the joint action committee.

The Maharashtra Asha Gatpravartak Federation, CITU, led the program in almost 25 districts of Maharashtra.

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Crime Against Women in UP

The Nation wants to know from Prime Minister Narendra Modi what action has been taken against BJP leader and former central minister Swami Chinmayanand, after a 22-year-old law student of Swami Shukhdevanand Law College in Shahjahanpur, UP, pleaded on social media to save her from his harassment and threats to her family members. She filed a case of rape against him, while in Delhi, under the protection of the Supreme Court, which ordered an SIT to be set up, to investigate the matter. However, days after the rape case being registered, the UP police still did not interrogate Chinmayanand or take him into custody.

Chinmayanand is the director of Swami Shukhdevananda Law College. He was also a three-time Member of Parliament from Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh. He may be an influential local chieftain, but this does not put him above the law. UP Chief Minister Adityanath must also explain why the earlier rape and kidnapping case against Chinmayanand was withdrawn in August 2018. The charges were filed in 2011 by a woman who had lived in his ashram for many years.

In the absence of any clear-cut legal action against Chinmayanand by the UP police, the public only witnessed Chinmayanand's attempts to deflect the wave of protests that erupted against him by claiming that a conspiracy was being hatched against him. He has accused the woman of being in league with four men to blackmail and extort him.

Had it not been for the intervention of the Supreme Court in response to a plea by young women lawyers, the woman who accused Chinmayanand - who had fled Shahjahanpur and was subsequently found in Dausa in Rajasthan - would have been brought back to Shahjahanpur by the UP Police.

This case is so similar to that of the 17-year-old girl in Unnao, who had the courage to levy a rape charge against sitting Member of Legislative Assembly in UP, Kuldeep Singh Sengar from Unnao.

What allegedly happened to the law student is just a continuation of **a rising graph of crimes against women being reported from UP. Adityanath, who holds the Home portfolio in the state, conceded as much when he gave a written reply in the Legislative Assembly on March 13, 2019 in which it is stated that there has been a 25% increase in rapes, 40% rise in incidents of 'outraging modesty', 35% jump in cases of kidnappings of women and a 50% increase in cases of 'eve teasing' between April 1, 2017, and January 31, 2018 as compared to 2016-17**, when the previous government headed by chief minister Akhilesh Yadav was in power.

However, when the UP Director-General of Police, OP Singh, was asked about the alarming rape graph, he denied it vehemently.

On comparing the national crime figures with the figures from the states, it becomes evident that UP has the dubious distinction of having twice the national average of reported cases of rape. The same NCRB data shows that UP has witnessed an exponential rise in cases of child rape with the graph only rising every year. Many cases of child rape end with the murder of the victim, as evidently, the perpetrators believe that by doing so they are destroying key evidence.

(Courtesy: News Click)

There is a widespread feeling amongst the residents of UP that the alarming increase in crimes against women and children, in the frequent cases of mob lynching in the name of the cow and in the beating and killing of innocent people falsely accused of being "child lifters", is due primarily to the laxity of the police and the free rein given to goondas, who are assured of protection instead of prosecution, for their crimes

Roti and Salt as Mid Day Meal

On August 22, Jaiswal, a journalist, recorded a video of only roti and salt being served as the mid-day-meal of a government Primary School. The video soon surfaced on social media. While the UP government has taken action against officials at the school and the district education department, an FIR was registered at the Ahraura police station in Mirzapur against Jaiswal and the Seur pradhan pratinidhi Rajkumar Pal based on a complaint by the Block Education Officer.

The FIR charged Jaiswal and Rajkumar Pal with criminal conspiracy for making the video and *"maligning the image of the state government"*.

Some parents of the children studying in the school also confirmed that roti-salt or rice-salt for the meal was served regularly.

Condemning the police action against Jaiswal, a protest was held at the district commissioner's office by journalists. At the school, meanwhile, the 97 students were served a midday meal of pulses and rice on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters, District Magistrate Anurag Patel, when asked why the journalist has been booked, said, *"He is a print journalist and could have taken photographs. He could have written about what was being done there. He did not do so, and hence his role seems doubtful and therefore, he has been booked under IPC section 120-B (criminal conspiracy)."*

Vijay Vineet, Editor of Jansandesh Times, said that it was a good move by his reporter to record a video of the incident. *"In today's age, it is important to have evidence of your story. If he had not shot the video, then the administration would have said why didn't you shoot a video when you have a phone with a camera,"* he said.

According to the FIR, Pal had information that only rotis were prepared in the school and vegetables were unavailable. However, instead of informing the pradhan, the FIR states that he allegedly conspired with local journalist Pawan Jaiswal by asking him to make a video of the students being served "roti and salt" in the midday meal, which was later forwarded to a TV reporter for further circulation.

Murder Accused Welcomed with Garlands

In UP's Bulandshahr, on December 3, 2018, Police Inspector Subodh Kumar Singh was brutally attacked and killed after a mob went on a rampage after the carcasses of many cows were found. Sumit Kumar, a 20 year old youth was shot dead. The mob had also attacked the police station.

Inspector Subodh Kumar Singh was the investigating officer in the Akhlaq case.

The accused include Shikhar Agarwal, the former head of the BJP's Yuva Morcha's city wing. Seven men accused of inciting violence that killed a police officer and a young man, got out on bail on August 25. In a video that has emerged, the accused were honoured and garlanded and greeted with slogans of *"Jai Shri Ram"* when they came out on bail.

What is more shocking is Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya saying, *"If supporters of someone who have been released from jail welcome them, the government and the BJP has nothing to do with it. The opposition must not make a mountain out of a molehill."*

Draft National Education Policy

Sashwati Mazumdar

The Draft National Education Policy 2019 (DNEP), made public on May 31 this year, is a bombastic and wordy document. In fact, its words seek to cover up the actual actions it proposes. To put it briefly, the DNEP claims to provide a framework to “*bring about the biggest transformation*” that will “*encompass the entire country*” and ensure “*universal access to an education of high quality and breadth*”. But the proposals put forward to realise this goal seek to dramatically expand the grip of private and commercial interests in education from the pre-school years up to higher education. Simultaneously, the policy draft outlines diverse ways that will allow the RSS and its affiliated organisations to infiltrate into the education system. Last but not least, though education is in the Concurrent list, the draft proposes changes in the governance of schools, colleges and universities and the centralisation of control in the hands of the Central Government, thus undermining the role of the States.

A characteristic feature of the DNEP is the use of new terms that conceal the real intent. One such term is Underrepresented Groups or URGs which is used to categorise women and transgenders, SCs, STs, Muslims, migrant communities, people with disabilities, and the urban poor. The Draft proposes measures for their “Upliftment” rather than to ensure they get their rights. Lip Service is paid with such terms and the proposed measures to those who constitute large sections of our society. It is noteworthy that there is absolutely no mention of the Constitutional provision for Reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs.

Enhancing the grip of private and commercial interests

Though the DNEP is at pains to repeatedly emphasise that “*education must be a not-for-profit activity*”, the game is given away in its far greater emphasis on the importance of “*philanthropic organisations*” who are to be encouraged to play a bigger role by removing obstacles that hinder their activity. The DNEP systematically uses the word “*philanthropic*” in its effort to cover up the negative connotations of “*private*”. “*Philanthropic*” organisations must be encouraged to build schools, to open colleges and universities, to fund research, etc.

Towards this objective, the DNEP proposes review of the Right to Education Act to make it less restrictive for private schools in two significant ways: first, review of the clause that private unaided schools must reserve 25% of seats for children from Economically Weaker Sections and disadvantaged categories; second, shifting focus from inputs (physical and infrastructural) to outputs (educational outcomes) in assessment of schools. In accordance with this shift from inputs to outputs, schools that have few students are seen as unsustainable and the DNEP proposes that they be “consolidated” with other larger schools, even if this takes the school far away from the neighbourhood of its students. The proposal for restructuring school curriculum in a new 5+3+3+4 design – Foundational, Preparatory, Middle and High Stages with semester system in the final stage – provides what are called multiple exit and entry options for those who are unable to complete school at one go.

The real intentions of the DNEP become particularly clear in the section on “Financing” that follows the main chapters where the role of private investment in education is emphasised as is the need to treat private institutions on an equal footing with public institutions. Private institutions will have to arrange for their own financial autonomy, but on all other matters private and public educational institutions will have identical status and freedoms. In matters of regulation, the DNEP underlines that private institutions will be treated on par with public

institutions. This parity also applies in regard to access to funding for specific purposes. Private institutions will thus have equal access to funding for research as public institutions.

If granted autonomy, another major proposal of the DNEP, both public and private higher educational institutions will have the right to charge fees. The DNEP expresses concern that the very word 'autonomy' has come to mean 'reduction of public funding', but this has happened precisely because the autonomy envisaged is in essence the freedom, and that only for managements, to start courses without expecting public funding for them, in other words the freedom to commercialise.

Creating avenues to facilitate infiltration by the RSS and its affiliates

One of the objectives of amending the RTE Act is also to allow alternative models of education such as *gurukulas*, *paathshaalas*, *madrasas*, and home schooling and to encourage funding from religious institutions (Hindu Mutts and Ashrams, Christian Missionary Institutions, Islamic trusts, Buddhist and Jain community initiatives, Gurudwaras, etc.). Such institutions will enjoy flexibility to choose their curriculum as long as they are in line with the National and State Curriculum Frameworks. They will be “*enabled to deliver a quality education and participate in the education system*” including in the proposed Boards of Assessment that will conduct the assessment for the school leaving certificate and certify the same.

As regards curriculum, the DNEP emphasises that all textbooks will aim to have a national and Indian flavor, “all stages will *heavily* incorporate Indian and local traditions”.

Among the proposals for the “Upliftment” of girls is the creation of a “Gender-Inclusion Fund” consisting of two funding streams - formula and discretionary grants. While formula grants will be for implementing Central Government schemes, discretionary grants are to be used by the States to support community-based interventions. A similar proposal has been made in regard to adult literacy and education – creation of a “Fund for Literacy” to support States, community organisations, and NGOs and with the same division into formula and discretionary grants. One can well imagine how these discretionary grants will be used to channel public funds towards activities by the RSS and its affiliated organisations. Similarly, school education will be supported by the proposed National Tutors Programme (students) and the Remedial Instructional Aides Programme (mainly women from the community) for whose work too there will be two modes: Conventional or paid and Volunteer.

Increasing authority of Central Government

The DNEP has proposed two apparently contradictory changes in governance. It has on one hand suggested that “*regulation, provision of education, accreditation, funding, and standard setting, will all be done by separate entities*”. It has simultaneously proposed the setting up of a Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog (RSA)/National Education Commission (NEC) with the Prime Minister as Chairman and the Minister for Education as Vice-Chairman. This RSA is envisaged as the apex body that will have the authority to oversee the widely diverse institutions and departments of the government both at the Central and State levels.

The centralising tendency inherent in the DNEP and the Government that has sponsored it is revealed by the approach to the language question. The original DNEP had a proposal to make Hindi compulsory in non-Hindi-speaking states. Following protests by several states, a revised DNEP was released after amending the concerned clause. However, the pursuit of this centralising language agenda continues as demonstrated by Amit Shah's recent remarks that

the entire country should have one national language and that should be Hindi since it is the most widely spoken of the Indian languages.

Expanding private and commercial interests in multifarious ways

Frequent testing is integral to the idea of education outlined in the DNEP. With the proposal to introduce a semester system in the last four years of school, testing requirements will further expand to include “modular Board Examinations” to be held each semester for each subject. While the National Testing Agency has been set up exclusively for the purpose of conducting tests, it may partner with other private agencies to meet the increasing demands. The DNEP also envisages a further expansion at all levels of institutional assessment and accreditation processes and proposes the setting up of appropriate institutions and revamping of existing ones. Here too, as with the RTE Act, the proposal is to shift from inputs to outputs (or to ignore whether institutions have adequate inputs and focus instead on educational outcomes). Equally significant is the fact that private agencies are to be encouraged for such work too.

Not surprisingly, the introduction of ICT and various kinds of software in education is a central concern of the DNEP. The expansion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is also a major objective – the current policy makers have great hopes from such courses to solve the crisis of education for the millions in India, although their effectivity has been questioned. But the massive expansion of technology involved provides ample scope for hiring or partnering with private agencies.

The Government is in a hurry to implement it

The BJP-Government started moves to formulate a new education policy in January 2015, soon after it began its first term. It set up a *Committee for Evolution of the New Education Policy* in October 2015, which submitted its report in May 2016. The MHRD then brought out a document based on this report titled *Some Inputs for the Draft National Education Policy, 2016*. These earlier documents became inputs for the *Committee to Draft the National Education Policy* set up in June 2017. The report of this committee was finally released to the public in May 2019. In fact, during this entire period, the Government has been introducing major changes in keeping with its agenda, some aspects of which even go beyond what is spelt out in the DNEP.

Universities, for instance, are being forced to sign MoUs with the MHRD and the newly instituted Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA), under which they will be given funds for infrastructure not as grants but as loans, which they will have to pay back through their own resource generation. Such resource generation will inevitably lead to hiking of fees. A UGC Regulation has already been put in place for grading universities in three categories and granting autonomy to start new courses and take other initiatives, *all in the self-financing mode*.

The DNEP notes that many countries, both advanced and developing, spend far more on education and have made great strides in access and quality, while “*the annual public investment in education in India over the last 5 years has been hovering around 3% of GDP*”. The DNEP therefore cautiously calls for gradual increases of 1% each year over a 10-year period to eventually increase public funding from the current 10% of overall public expenditure (or 2.7% of GDP in 2017-18) to 20%. The DNEP expresses enthusiastic confidence that such a gradual increase in public spending is a realisable goal because of two trends in the Indian economy: First, the Indian economy is expected to become a ten trillion dollar economy. Second, the tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to improve, continuing the trend of the past 4 years. It remains to be seen how these expectations will play out now that a significant economic slowdown has gripped the country with lakhs of job losses.

The Fires in the Amazon

Ana Rivera



A member of the IBAMA forest fire brigade fights fires set in the Amazon rainforest in Novo Progresso, Brazil,

The world is watching in horror as pictures circulate of huge stretches of the Amazon rainforest in flames, but these are no ordinary wildfires. They were set on purpose to generate immense profit for a few multinational companies and the bourgeois governments that support them. Urgent action and mobilization of working people and activists around the world is necessary to put an end to the capitalist exploitation that is destroying one of the Earth's most important ecological regions. Here's what you need to know about the fires and those responsible for them:

Deforestation Fires Have Burned the Amazon for Decades

The peoples who inhabit the Amazon have suffered the destruction of the rainforest for decades. The Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964-1985 seized 6 million hectares of land from indigenous populations, in part to construct the immense Trans-Amazonian highway. Forest fires were used to clear the land, displace its ancestral inhabitants, and to build cattle ranches and farms. From the beginning, multinational companies such as McDonald's were involved in this devastation, funding suppliers who destroyed and continue to destroy large swaths of the rainforest to grow products like soy in large quantities for export. The fires were so great that in 1987 they destroyed a territory equivalent to the total area of Switzerland. During the land seizures, ranchers and large landowners organized armed gangs to subjugate the communities and leaders of the resistance against the destruction of the Amazon, among them Chico Mendes, the activist and founder of the rubber workers' union.

Fires Have Increased by 85% Under Bolsonaro's Government

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who calls himself "Captain Chainsaw," made an inflammatory speech against the protection of the environment, no doubt in an appeal to the agricultural and livestock producers who make up a fundamental part of his support. In Congress, the power of the rural representatives is linked to agribusiness (most of them are members of the Democratic Movement of Brazil) and is a decisive force in the government. When he first came to power, Bolsonaro said very clearly to this sector: "*this government is yours*" and he has kept that promise. Bolsonaro's Minister of Agriculture, Tereza Cristina, comes from this same sector. Both the president and his administration have spoken out against taking forest protection measures and have favored greater commercialization of the Amazon territory. Even Bolsonaro's

Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, defends this policy. In the last decade, the forest fires have increased steadily, and so far in 2019, there have been more than 70,000 fires. In August alone there were more than 30,000 fires.

A Handful of Multinational Companies Are Helping to Destroy the Amazon

Bolsonaro and the agricultural bourgeoisie of Brazil are not the only ones who want to destroy the jungle for their capitalist enterprises. Important imperialist companies are behind the deforestation as well: Credit Agricole and BNP Paribas (France), financial groups like Blackrock and Capital Group (United States), and pharmaceutical companies like Johnson & Johnson also have business in the area. Other multinational companies responsible for doing business with this devastation are grain producers; Cargill, Bunge and Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) control 60% of the soybean industry in Brazil and directly benefit from the forest fires, as do agrochemical companies such as Monsanto and Bayer. France and Germany also have direct interests in mining in the region. The involvement of these companies reveals the hypocrisy of the apparent opposition to Bolsonaro's policies by governments such as that of Emmanuel Macron in France. Imperialist capital gains millions by setting the Amazon on fire.

“Green Capitalism” Won’t Save the Rainforests

The Amazon has become a disputed territory for different capitalist sectors; some of them use the rhetoric of environmental protection to describe their business in the region, but all of these companies are ultimately only interested in continuing the exploitation of commodities in the Amazon basin. They produce certified wood, regional products and eco-tourism, all of which take their toll on the environment. In addition, these “green” companies also pursue carbon credits, which allow them economic benefits if they show more environmentally friendly production processes. Corporations linked to the pharmaceutical and cosmetic businesses are demanding a “controlled” Amazon, which will allow them to patent their products and regularly use the resources provided by the forestlands. Roche, Bayer, L’Oreal, Unilever, are only a few of these types of companies. The primary materials they extract with only basic regulations guarantees them new products for a public interested in natural or “ethical” products.

More Than a Million Indigenous Lives Are in Danger

The nearly 350 indigenous peoples who inhabit the Amazon basin in Bolivia and Brazil are suffering the devastating consequences of deforestation. They are not only victims of smoke inhalation and burns directly caused by the forest fires, but they are also victims of the diseases spread in the area, such as influenza and measles, and of fraud by swindlers who forge documents in order to sell indigenous lands to other capitalists. The construction of dams and jungle routes also forces them to leave their homes. Some groups, such as the Awá people, are in serious danger of disappearing completely. Those who survive this displacement travel through the jungle to make a living from hunting and fishing. Many of them are subsequently pursued by mercenaries hired by landowners to protect the territory taken from the indigenous people by force. These hired killers have murdered numerous environmental activists over the years.

The Fires Have Disastrous Environmental Consequences

The vast amount of burned territory in the Amazon rainforest will have drastic effects on the environment. To start, the trees in the region produce 20% of the total oxygen in the atmosphere. Their destruction can rapidly accelerate global warming and increase the overall temperature of the planet.

Drought and warming will be very harsh as a result of an increase in the overall temperature of the area, generating new sources of fire in other affected territories. Another direct effect of the fires is the loss of many species of flora and fauna, the cruel consequence of which can be seen in the images of dead animals, burned alive and displaced from their habitats. In addition,

carbon dioxide and other chemical compounds emitted by the fire will accelerate the greenhouse effect.

As indirect consequences of the fires, the Earth's water balance will change: with the accumulation of greenhouse gases from burning trees, more and more energy is retained in the atmosphere. This causes a warming of the temperature of the earth, the oceans and the atmosphere, contributing to the melting of ice surfaces and the evaporation of existing bodies of water. Energetic balance will change as well: smoke particles retain solar radiation and prevent it from returning to the atmosphere, affecting the photosynthesis and inhibiting the growth of plants.

Fires will be more likely to occur because of the change in the hydrological cycle, which means a less dense and humid forest. A less humid forest provides fewer clouds to the atmosphere, resulting in less rainfall. In other words, the amount of rain could be cut in half in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, two of the largest cities of Brazil.

Latin American scientists have explained that it is not possible to fully predict the effects of the fires, but they do know that the fires will undoubtedly result in a profound transformation in the soil and the environment. Climate change deniers like Trump and Bolsonaro are trying to discredit the warnings of indigenous peoples and environmental organizations, but the consequences are undeniable and increasingly dangerous.

The Fires Put Working People's Health At Risk

The inhabitants of the Amazon and its surrounding cities also suffer health consequences as a result of the fires. Respiratory problems, loss of oxygen in the blood, and heart disease are increasing rapidly in the region. The dense smoke from the fires mainly affects the poorest families in the affected areas, who live in poorly ventilated houses and cannot afford to flee the fires. As the fires continue, steep decreases in air quality will directly affect working families, particularly children, who cannot afford appropriate medical care. In addition, the dryness and increased heat from the fires put homes at risk of catching on fire and families at risk of being displaced.

The Amazon Isn't the Only Region Being Destroyed for Agribusiness

The magnitude of the fires in the Amazon rainforest is causing a grave crisis, but it is not the only area where nearly unregulated deforestation is being used to generate billions of dollars in profits. Other forests are at serious risk, such as the Siberian forest, where 2.5 million hectares have already been destroyed. The same is true in vast regions of Southeast Asia, where 71% of the region's characteristic wetlands were lost to free up land for the lucrative palm oil industry, used for food and cosmetics.

Demonstrations Around the World Are Calling for the Protection of the Amazon

Throughout Latin America and around the world, there have been several important demonstrations that have denounced the Amazon fires and the part that governments and corporations have played in destroying this region. The youth movement that organizes the #FridaysForFuture, as well as thousands of other people around the world, protested outside Brazilian embassies to demand urgent measures against these devastating fires. Hundreds of thousands of people across the world are expected to participate in the Global Climate Strikes in September. Many agree that the governments and capitalist businesses involved in the region are responsible. A collective response from the working class and youth, indigenous peoples, and peasants affected by this terrible destruction is the only way to end the extermination of entire peoples and the devastation of the environment.

(Article Courtesy: Left Voice; Photo: Gustavo Basso / Nurphoto via Getty images)

CITU Denounces Destructive Decision of BJP Government on Merger of Banks

Calls for United Resistance Struggles

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions denounces the destructive decision of merging 10 public sector banks into 4 entities, thereby reducing the number of public sector banks to 12.

In fact, this disastrous exercise is meant for drastically squeezing the public sector banks' operational areas through inevitable closure of huge number of bank-branches, severely affecting employment and also affecting the spread-over and availability of banking services to the common people, particularly in comparatively remote areas, besides further weakening the concerned PSBs. As a result, the private sector banks including foreign banks will get more open field for their business in the urban areas; and the vast rural areas will be left virtually without any banking services. Also the governments own scheme of direct benefit transfer (DBT) on various welfare measures in the rural areas will get squeezed and infructuous; it will virtually deprive the poor of their legitimate benefits owing to non-availability and/or decline of the bank branches in the rural vicinity.

The experience of previous cases of merger of banks has established the inevitability of such disastrous consequences. After the merger of 5 Associate Banks with State Bank of India, around 1000 branches were closed. Merger of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank with Bank of Baroda is going to shut down around 800 more branches. A substantial section of those closed or going-to-be-closed branches are in the rural areas, where the private banks never tread even by mistake.

Such squeezing of the operational area of banking services is also going to have a damaging impact on channelizing of savings of common people through bank deposits, into the track of developmental activities/projects and employment generating commercial activities. Rather, this is going to be provocation and/or allurements for diverting common peoples' savings either to the speculative market or towards dubious chit-fund instruments.

The merger of banks is being justified by the government on grounds of strengthening and consolidating the concerned banks; but in reality such a merger will further weaken all the banks post merger. Problems of public sector banks emanate from the deliberate default in loan-repayment by the big corporate houses and the solution lies in stern action by the government for outright recovery of the huge loan amounts from defaulter corporates with penalty. Instead, the government is busy legitimizing pilferage of bank money by the defaulter corporates through Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Procedure, forcing the public sector banks to sacrifice a substantial portion of their legitimate dues just to favour the defaulters. The government is actually engaged in destruction of the country's financial service network which got widely expanded post nationalization of banks and the insurance sector. This is detrimental to national interests.

The CITU strongly condemns such a destructive move and hails the proactive move of the United Forum of Bank Unions to launch immediate protests countrywide. They will definitely launch a bigger militant action to resist this destructive game plan of the government. CITU calls upon the working class to also raise their voice of protest in active solidarity with the struggling bank employees.

Vellore Women Revive River

With nearly half of India was reeling under drought and fresh water a dangerously scarce resource, citizens in many parts of the country had taken it upon themselves to correct the bleak situation.

In Vellore, one of the 24 drought-hit districts in Tamil Nadu, women have revived the seasonal Naganadhi river — the primary source of water for the region some decades ago — after it had been lifeless for 15 years. As a result, while much of the country has gone dry, people in many villages there have sufficient water to drink and irrigate their paddy fields.



Miles away, in the hills of northern India, water conservation techniques are gaining momentum. Hundreds of villagers from Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, egged on by children, are constructing reservoirs of various sizes. Many are signing conservation pledges to save rainwater during monsoon.

These serve as an example of how India desperately needs larger engagement of local communities to protect water resources.

It took up to 20,000 women four years to build 3,500 recharge wells and several boulder checks (using pebbles to slow down rainwater flow) to get Naganadhi to flow again in 2018. Through recharge wells, rainwater can be routed into shallow aquifers that enhance groundwater levels. A river flows above the surface only after the groundwater has been replenished. Therefore, reviving a river isn't just about its flow, but getting enough water to seep into the ground. In other words, letting rainwater infiltrate the soil. In the last decade, much of Vellore's agricultural labour migrated to the city as water bodies dried up, leaving nothing for irrigation. Most of those who left were men seeking contract work, leaving the womenfolk behind with little to do. But their lives changed when some volunteers reached the district and suggested they revive the river. Such projects had already registered success in Karnataka, where Vedavathi and Kumudavathi rivers were brought back to life.

A team was employed to mark the original trail of the river using satellite mapping and then an action plan was created based on the area's geology, geomorphology and land cover, catchment area and rainfall data. The river restoration project had government approval so women were registered as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers, which ensured them daily earnings.

Nathiya, 32, among the first batch of women roped in for the project, said that agriculture again became feasible in her village of Salamanatham in Kaniyambadi block after they built 36 recharge wells. A recharge well about 20ft deep, 15ft long and 6ft wide takes at least 23 days and 10 workers to build. *"I can now grow water-intensive paddy in my land, something I could not have imagined a couple of years ago. I can grow crops as well and earn Rs 224 a day if I sign up as an MGNREGA worker,"* said Nathiya. Vellore collector SA Raman said the results encouraged them to expand such projects to other areas.

Meanwhile, in Uttarakhand, where the hills are facing an acute water crisis, people are now signing *"water conservation pledges"* to save at least 1,000 litres of rainwater per person during the monsoon season. Deepa Rawat, 13, from Pauri Garhwal and her classmates are building reservoirs after school hours to conserve rainwater. Government schools are also instructing each student to dig reservoirs that are at least 2 feet deep.



Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi Conference



Andhra Pradesh ASHA Workers