

Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)

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# **The Voice of the Working Woman**



**ON TO  
GENERAL  
STRIKE**

**8-9 January 2019**

# JEJAA Protest

Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (JEJAA) will organize a week long protest campaign and actions including Demonstrations and Public Dharna at the district level across the country from 22 to 28 October, 2018.

## JEJAA demands

- ◆ a JPC probe into the Rafale deal and
- ◆ the resignation of the Defence Minister Nirmala Sitaraman

The trade unions, kisan organizations and movements of students, youth, women, dalits, tribals, minorities and all other sections who are part of JEJAA will participate in the week long campaign from 22-28 October, 2018 across the country, demanding the resignation of the Defence Minister Nirmala Sitaraman and a Joint Parliamentary Committee to investigate the deal to unearth the corruption involved. Demonstrations and Public Dharna will be organized in all the district centers during this period.

The Rafale scam is a clear example of high level corruption involving none other than the Prime Minister of the country. Media reports and evidence available in the public domain, including the Parliament of India, suggest that the loss to the Exchequer by this deal could be around Rs. 41,205 crore. By allowing the private sector to target the defence sector as yet another area to loot, this government is not only putting the security of the country at risk, but also endangering the lives of our soldiers.

## Mid Day Meal Workers will March to Parliament on 19 November 2018

Mid Day Meal Workers Unions affiliated to INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, MAICCTU, UTUC have decided to organise a March to Parliament on 19 November 2018 to protest against the neglect of the 26 lakh mid day meal workers of the country by the Narendra Modi Government. The government, which came to power promising that "Mid-day meal scheme would be revitalized", has betrayed not only the mid day meal workers but also nearly 12 crore children who are the beneficiaries of the scheme by continuously cutting down the budget for the MDMS scheme which is covered under the Food Security Act. The mid day meal workers are agitated because even in the recent announcement by the Prime Minister increasing the remuneration of anganwadi and ASHA workers the mid day meal workers have been ignored. Since 2009 there has been no increase in the remuneration of the mid day meal workers who continue to be paid only Rs 1000 per month, and that too for only 10 months in the year.

*The Voice  
of the  
Working Woman*

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### **Inside**

	<i>Page</i>		<i>Page</i>
Two Day Strike	4	Supreme Court Judgements	18
October Revolution	7	New Poverty Numbers	20
After #MeToo	8	Crony Capitalism	22
Women on the Move	10	Press Statements	24
India Today	13	Deshar Katha	26

Total pages - 28  
(including cover pages)

# #MeToo: No to Sexual Harassment at Workplace and Discrimination

India is witnessing a new era. Women are no longer ready to weep in the dark corners of their homes, silently undergoing the trauma of sexual assaults at their workplaces. They are determined to speak out and come out of that trauma of being sexually assaulted. The 'MeToo' campaign which shook the Western world last year has reached India. What started with one film actress speaking out about the harassment she faced in the film industry ten years ago, has become a storm now with many women from media and film industry speaking out about the harassment they have had to face at different points of time in their lives. Many have named and shamed the perpetrators, of whom many are celebrities. The Central Minister Mr. M J Akbar is among them. Twenty women media persons are ready to testify against him about harassment while he was chief editor of a newspaper, thereby forcing his resignation.

Sexual harassment is yet another form of violence against women reflecting patriarchal mindsets and gender based discrimination. It is humiliating, harmful to physical and mental health and is a crime. It violates the human rights of the victim and the right to a dignified work atmosphere.

Nearly four out of five women (79 %) in India have experienced some form of harassment or violence in public, but it is under reported, with more than 70% of the women who faced sexual harassment never reporting it. Of those who reported it, 25% took more than a year to do this. In such a situation, the 'MeToo' campaign has given confidence to many victims including those who have not yet spoken out, and helped them to come out of years of trauma they were going through. It has helped in creating an atmosphere in society where sexual harassment has become one of the major workplace issues.

In the Me Too campaign, till now it is only the educated English speaking middle class, social media savvy, economically independent women who have spoken out. This is only the tip of the iceberg. What about the 94% of women workers in India who are in the unorganized sector? The more violent harassment they face needs to be addressed urgently. A survey shows that 70% of women in the construction sector face and tolerate sexual harassment due to financial compulsions.

The increasing commodification of women with the advent of neoliberal policies and the aggressive penetration of communal forces into various walks of life, incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace and violence against women are increasing at an alarming rate. This is not an issue of women only but a question of workplace safety. It has more to do with power relations in the workplace than sexuality. It is not only an issue of the women's movement but also very much a trade union issue. More women are being forced to join the workforce in more vulnerable work conditions. It is necessary for the trade union movement to address this issue urgently.

CITU had recognized this much earlier and has continuously been taking up cases of sexual harassment at workplaces and also issues like loopholes in the law against sexual harassment, effective implementation in both organized as well as unorganized sectors etc.

The women who have spoken out risking their social status, personal relations and even their lives, need to be applauded. They are facing slut shaming in the social media, legal notices and even life threats from perpetrators and fan clubs of these celebrities. They need to be supported in all ways.

The trade union movement has to take the lead for improving the legal provisions and to ensure their effective implementation.

It is equally important to take the lead in countering the retrograde ideological offensive by rightwing forces as manifested in Kerala in the protest against the implementation of the Supreme Court order on entry for all women to the 'Sabrimala temple'.

It is our duty to take the lead in bringing new ideas to challenge retrograde practices, social oppression and discrimination in all forms and to fight for a working class egalitarian culture.

# Two Days' Countrywide General Strike on January 8-9, 2019

Hemalata

The joint national convention of trade unions, held in Mavlankar Hall in New Delhi on September 28, 2018 gave a clarion call to the entire working class of the country to join the two days' country wide general strike on January 8-9, 2019 against the anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national policies being pursued by the BJP government at the centre led by Prime Minister Modi. The national convention was called by 10 central trade unions which have been consistently fighting the neoliberal policies jointly since 2009. It is to be recalled that the BMS, guided by the Sangh Parivar along with the ruling BJP, abandoned the joint trade union movement after the BJP came to power, arguing that the Modi government was 'positive' to the demands of the trade unions. The joint declaration which outlined concrete campaign programmes culminating in the two days' strike, placed by G Sanjeeva Reddy, president of INTUC, was unanimously adopted by the convention amidst thunderous slogans.

More than a thousand national and state level leaders of the various unions affiliated to the central trade unions – INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF and UTUC – and independent national federations of workers and employees, attended the convention from all over the country. They represented all sectors, industrial, services and agriculture, public and private, organised and the unorganised sectors. The leaders of organisations of central and state government employees and teachers, postal, defence, railway, insurance, bank and telecom employees participated in the convention. National and state leaders of trade unions of oil, coal, electricity, medical and sales representatives, organised and unorganised segments of road transport, domestic and home based workers were also present. The employees in the health and education sectors and the scheme workers were also represented by their leaders.

The convention expressed its anger at the arrogant neglect of the demands unanimously raised by the entire trade union movement of the country, including the BMS though it has now withdrawn from joint struggle, obviously under pressure from its parent body, the RSS. It strongly castigated the BJP led government for blatantly pursuing policies to serve its corporate masters, both domestic and foreign. Despite stiff opposition from the workers and their trade unions, the BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi is going ahead with its neoliberal agenda totally unconcerned about their disastrous impact on the people, their livelihoods and on the environment. The convention termed the BJP government as anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national and called upon, not only the working class, but the entire people, to ensure its decisive defeat in the ensuing elections so that the struggle for pro-people, pro-worker policies can be heightened.

Speaking in support of the declaration, Tapan Sen, general secretary, CITU, said that the BJP government, which came to power with the slogan of '*sab ka vikas*' is implementing policies that are causing '*vinash*' of toiling people, '*vinash*' of our indigenous manufacturing, and of our self reliant economy. While supporting the need to defeat the BJP led Modi government in the elections, he emphasised the need to strengthen united struggles aimed at the reversal of the anti-worker, anti-national policies. He urged upon all the participants to start preparations for the strike immediately after going back and to carry the message of the convention to the grassroots level. Amarjeet Kaur, general secretary, AITUC, Harbhajan Singh Sidhu, general secretary of HMS, Satyavan from AIUTUC, GR Shivshankar from TUCC, Sonial George from SEWA, Rajeev Dimri from AICCTU, Pechi Muthu from LPF and Ashok Ghosh from UTUC addressed the convention and supported the declaration.

The convention was presided over by Ashok Singh (INTUC), Ramendra Kumar (AITUC), SN Pathak (HMS), Hemalata (CITU), RK Sharma (AIUTUC), Praveer Banerjee (TUCC), Lata Singh (SEWA), Santosh Rai (AICCTU), K Natarajan (LPF) and Shatrujeet Singh (UTUC).

### **Excerpts from the Declaration adopted in the joint national convention:**

The National Convention of Workers jointly called by the 10 central trade unions, in association with all independent national federations of workers and employees, of both industrial and services sectors, viz. banks, insurance, central government and state government employees, defence production employees, telecom employees etc expresses serious concern over the deteriorating situation in the national economy due to the pro-corporate, anti-national and anti-people policies pursued by the central government, grievously impacting the livelihood of the working people across the country.

The convention notes with utter dismay that the government has been continuing to arrogantly ignore the 12 point charter of demands. Despite numerous nationwide joint strike actions the most prominent being those on September 2, 2015 and September 2, 2016 participated in by crores of workers, the ruling regime at the centre has increased its onslaught on the rights and livelihood of the working people of the country.

‘The central government not only refused to respond to the just and genuine demands of the organised agitation of the working class, but has been increasing its aggression on the rights of workers, employees and trade unions. Bipartism and tripartism are being undermined. The government is dragging its feet on wage negotiations of the public sector. Four subcommittees were formed by the government to address issues raised by central government employees such as scrapping of the New Pension Scheme, review of the minimum wage and fitment formula, restoration of allowances and allowing option no 1 as one of the pension fitment formula. But nothing has been done. This National Convention extends full support to the struggles of the central government employees’ organisations including the defence and railways and upholds all their demands.

This National Convention unanimously condemns in strongest terms the conspiratorial and authoritarian attack of the present government to deprive the biggest central trade union in the country, the INTUC from all representation in the tripartite and bipartite fora and committees, including the international forum. This is nothing but a severe and heinous onslaught on the rights of the entire trade union movement. It will be unitedly fought back.

The unemployment situation is getting aggravated with employment generation practically turning negative even in the most labour intensive sectors. The forecast of huge job losses in the IT sector is adding fuel to the fire. 3 percent compulsory annual surrender of regular posts in government establishments is continuing. Estimates by independent surveys and those sponsored by employers’ organisations reveal loss of 70 lakh jobs with closure of 2.34 lakh small factories in the first few months of demonetisation. The livelihood of another six crore people in informal economy were also affected.

Price rise of petroleum products and essential commodities is mounting pressure on daily life of people. GST has further impounded the hardship. Even lifesaving medicines have been subjected to hefty GST. Drastic cut in government expenditure, on social sector and welfare, has worsened conditions particularly for the workers in the unorganised sector. The government has introduced Fixed Term Employment through the back door for the establishment of modern labour slavery system. It has brought pro-employer changes in the Apprentices Act.

The anti-labour authoritarian character of the government is all the more evident in its refusal to implement even the consensus recommendation of successive Indian Labour Conferences in respect of equal pay and benefits for equal work for the contract workers, formulation of minimum wage on the norms agreed by the 15th ILC and Supreme Court judgment, workers’ status to scheme workers etc. The present government even refuses to implement the Supreme Court judgment on equal wage and benefits for equal work and on EPS 1995 on contribution and calculation of pension on actual pay and dearness allowance.

Despite opposition of all the trade unions in the country irrespective of affiliations, the government has been aggressively pushing through its programme of pro-employer and utterly anti-worker labour law reforms. It has decided to amalgamate 44 hard earned central labour laws into four

labour codes to facilitate employers to 'hire and fire' in the name of 'Ease of Doing Business'. The latest is the 'Code on Social Security' which dismantles and demolishes 15 existing social security Acts, abolishes welfare related cess, usurps the social security fund contributed by the workers amounting to more than Rs 24 lakh crore and makes it available for speculation in the share market. The proposed code on Occupational Safety and Health is very dangerous.

Privatisation of all strategic PSUs including defence production, public sector banks, insurance companies, railways, public road transport, oil, power, coal etc through disinvestment, strategic sale, outsourcing in favour of private sector, and 100 percent FDI in many vital and strategic sectors is increasing. Defence sector privatisation is designed to destroy our manufacturing capability and research initiatives developed over the last six and half decades. More than 50 percent products including weapons and critical equipment so long being produced by the ordinance establishments are being outsourced. The government is determined to close down five ordinance factories manufacturing items used by our soldiers and officers.

Complete privatisation of railways, step by step, is going on. Operating private trains on the existing tracks built by Railways is being permitted. Free access to railway yards, sheds and workshops for maintenance of private coaches, wagons and engines etc is being offered to private operators. Already 23 railway stations, all in metro cities, have been shortlisted for privatisation. More than 600 railway stations along with land around them have been identified for development by private players. A Railway Development Authority has been created under which railway fare and goods freight is poised to be hiked for the benefit of the private profiteers. The central government intends to get the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill passed to allow wholesale privatisation of the road transport sector.

Public sector banks are under attack with the ultimate target of privatisation to extend undue favours to the same private crooks whose loan default has put the banking sector in severe difficulties. Even after Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi have run away with people's money, the government has come out with the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, which is aimed at facilitating the corporate defaulters in the name of 'resolution process of insolvency'. Banks will suffer 'hair cuts' and will get back only a small portion of the due loan amount.

The exposure of various scams by the BJP led government shows the real face of the ruling clique. Rafale deal is the biggest scam being unearthed.

The National Convention extends full solidarity to the fighting farmers, the struggle of adivasis for effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

This National Convention records its strong denunciation against the communal and divisive machinations being carried on with the active patronage of the government machinery. The BJP governments are using draconian UAPA, NSA as well as agencies like CBI, NIA, IT to harass and suppress dissenting opinions. It is disrupting the unity of workers and toiling people so vital to carry forward the ongoing struggles based on the 12 point charter of demands. The working class must raise its strong voice of protest.

This anti-people and anti-national policy regime must be defeated squarely to force pro-people changes in policies, and for that the united platform of working class must heighten its struggles further.

The National Convention of workers therefore adopts the following programmes:

- **State, district and industry/sector level joint conventions to be held during October/November 2018**
- **Joint industry level gate meetings, rallies etc during November/December 2018**
- **Submission of strike notice jointly with demonstrations during December 17-22, 2018**
- **Two days country wide general strike on January 8-9, 2019**

The National Convention calls upon working people across all sectors and throughout the country, irrespective of affiliations, to make the above programme a total success.

# Let us Renew Our Pledge

A.K. Padmanabhan

**C**ITU, as a class oriented Trade Union Organization, from its foundation had declared its objective – that of creating an exploitation free India. Towards that objective CITU raised the slogan of **Unity and Struggle** and has been striving to build up class unity, intensifying the class struggle, working towards strengthening the Worker-Peasant alliance. All these are prerequisites to build up countrywide massive struggles that are required to move towards our cherished goal.

The celebrations related to Centenary of the Great October Revolution, Bicentenary of Karl Marx, were occasions to remind ourselves of the tasks that we pledged for ourselves. Along with these was the 170 years of the release of the Communist Manifesto, which still makes the world reverberate with the slogan – Workers of the World Unite.

This was a period in recent history where questions of exploitation, increasing inequality, Social Justice, Class struggle and Socialism were discussed intensely in different parts of the world. This was happening in the background of the serious and continuing crisis that had engulfed the capitalist system.

CITU, on its part, had called its affiliates all over the country to organize various programmes to commemorate these important Anniversaries of historic importance.

## **The slogans of yesteryears**

On the occasion of completion 101 years of the Great October Revolution what do we observe? India has enshrined in our Constitution that we uphold Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. We have even constitutionally declared ourselves a Sovereign Democratic, Socialist Republic! More than this, during the last 71 years of Independence we have heard the leaders of the ruling classes raising slogans about a Socialist Pattern of Society, Democratic Socialism, Gandhian Socialism, Poverty eradication and also proclamations about total Good days (*Achhe Din*) to come.

What has been the experience of the Indian masses? Increasing disparities in Indian society – as in other parts of the capitalist world – are now staring at us. All the pious talk about social justice has been futile.

## **The reality today**

The crisis as we all know has intensified after 1991 and the neoliberal policies have only resulted in increasing inequality. In 1991 India did not have even one Dollar Billionaire; that is one who has more than Rs.7000 crores, as per today's conversion rate. By 2000 there were eight of them in India. The number increased to 53 by 2012 and by March this year the number is 121. All these are the figures of FORBES magazine. The total assets of these billionaires come to 441 Billion Dollars (Rs.31 lakh crores) which is 22% of the GDP of India.

India's Billionaire number one, Mukesh Ambani, increased his assets from 23 Billion Dollars in 2017 to 44 Billion in 2018. His increase in assets in a year amounts to Rs. 1,19,000 crores! None of the Billionaires in the world would have had such an increase in their assets. Noted journalist, P. Sainath, who specializes in studying rural India, says that through this annual increase of Ambani alone, 8 crores of people can be given work under MNREGS for 365 days; i.e., without a single holiday. In other words, this increase in the assets of a single individual is equal to the wages of 8 crore people!

Rural India's situation is more critical than that of the urban work force. 90 percent of the rural families earn less than Ten thousand rupees per month. The lowest 10 percent of the rural population has had their income reduced by 3 to 5 per cent in 2017 says Sainath.

This is, not, in one way, India specific. Income disparities in the capitalist world are increasing. An Oxfam report released in the beginning of 2018 said that the richest one percent in the world own more than the remaining 99% of humanity. 42 individuals own wealth equalling that of the 370 crores of the poorest. There are 2043 Dollar Billionaires and the year 2017 saw the highest increase, with '*one being added to the list every two days*'. But the bottom 370 crores saw no increase in wealth at all.

This cruel exploitation, resulting in sharply increasing inequalities, is the basis on which the Capitalist system thrives. And, every crisis in the system is used to heap more miseries on the toiling people. All the tall claims about growth and development are not reflected in the lives of the vast majority of the Indian toilers, both rural and urban.

Even the latest report of the ILO on wages, points out the sorry state of affairs in India. That report is on the basis of the figures for the year 2011-12 and we all know, out of our own experience, that the situation has become more grave since then. 62% of the wage earners in India were employed as casual workers and got only 36% of wages received by regular or salaried workers. The last 7 years have only made the situation more grim. Even in the wage structure, the urban and rural divide and the divide between men and women is also increasing. All out efforts are being made by the ruling class to further attack the working people, in various ways.

The increasing disparities are a reflection of the all out aggressive push by the corporates in capitalist countries to garner ever higher profits. In many parts of the world today there is an unholy nexus between the big corporates and governments, who together loot labour and exploit natural resources, leading to the immiserisation of workers and environmental degradation. This political nexus is utilizing reactionary, right wing regressive ideologies to divert and divide the people, along with attacks on the democratic rights of the populace.

In such a situation we have to build up unity, strengthen struggles, not only on day to day issues, but also related to the policy alternatives. The recent Mazdoor-Kisan Sangarsh Rally in New Delhi and the related countrywide campaign were designed towards that.

The present day challenges can only be met by such unity of working class and other sections of the toiling people and by building up powerful and sustained struggles. This Anniversary of the Great October Revolution is an occasion to renew our pledge to strive for a Revolutionary change and establishing an exploitation free society.

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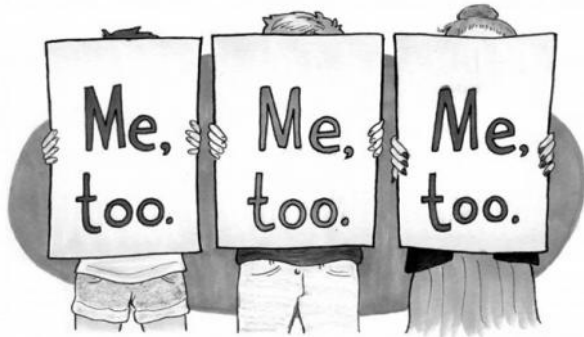
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# After #MeToo Legal System Needs Change

*Actions of individual women are a brave step forward, but a larger social movement is needed to bring justice for millions of not so privileged women.*

Subodh Varma



In recent weeks, #MeToo protests have shaken up the media and Bollywood worlds, with one case – MJ Akbar’s – spilling into the political domain since he was an editor earlier but now graces the Modi government as a minister. The women who have come forward to name their tormentors are undoubtedly brave and have rendered a public service.

But there is a vast world beyond this where

women lead lives of quiet submission to such predatory oppression. This world spans all spheres of life, from homes to educational institutions, to factories and fields, and offices. They are submissive because of deeply entrenched patriarchal ideas and systems from which individual rebellion is virtually impossible. They are dependent, fearsome and alone in their suffering.

It would be deeply unfair and inhuman to demand that they step forward individually in the manner of #MeToo. What is needed is a social response that rises up and protests against such injustice collectively. And, such protest has to have both men and women as partners in it.

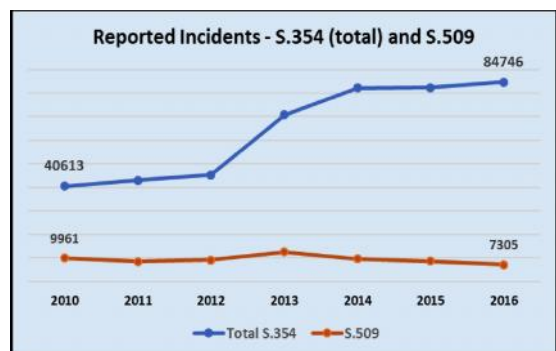
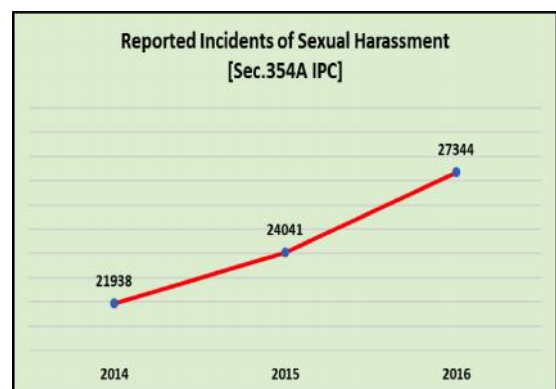
One of the focuses of any collective protests has to be the mechanism of redressal that is currently made available through the police and courts. This aspect is not a solution to the whole issue of women’s subjugation, but it certainly helps in the fight for justice. Sexual harassment at the workplace is a specific category within the larger experience of violence by women.

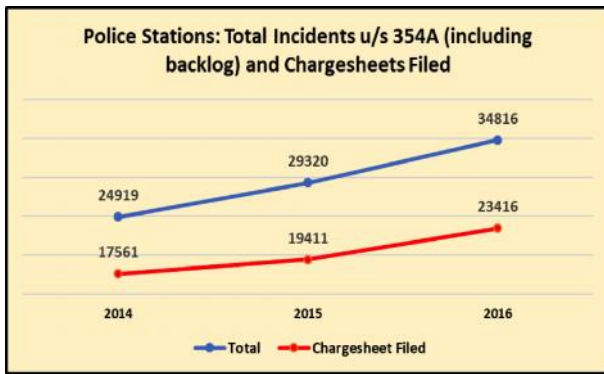
And, it is here – in the way our legal justice system works for complaints of sexual harassment by women – that a fatal weakness exists. The women’s movement in India has repeatedly pointed this out, fought for a better system, but the more things change, the more they remain same. Have a look below.

## The Law Against Sexual Harassment

After the Nirbhaya case in 2012 and the massive outrage it sparked, the Justice Verma Commission recommended a slew of changes in relevant laws in 2013. The government amplified section 354 (assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty) to include, among others, section 354A which spells out sexual harassment. Cases registered under this section have jumped by 25% between 2014 and 2016 as per NCRB.

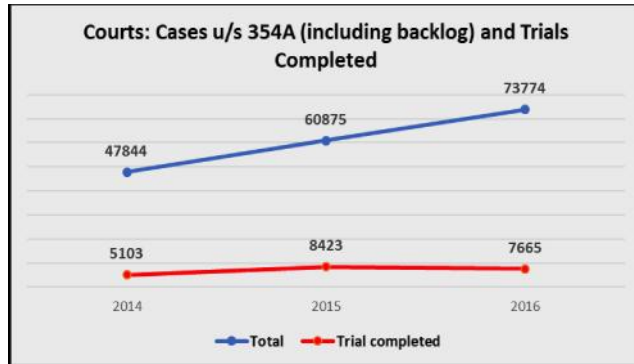
Prior to 2014, the generic S.354 was applicable. Total cases under this section (including the added sub-sections since 2014) have zoomed up by over





difficulty they had with the police. As shown below, each year's case load at the police station is increasing while the number of charge sheets filed is lagging far behind at just 67% in 2016 (23416 out of 34816 cases).

When it comes to the courts, the situation is forbiddingly bleak. As shown below, 73,774 cases under section 354A were pending in courts in 2016, up from 47,844 in 2014. That's a staggering jump of 54% in three years.

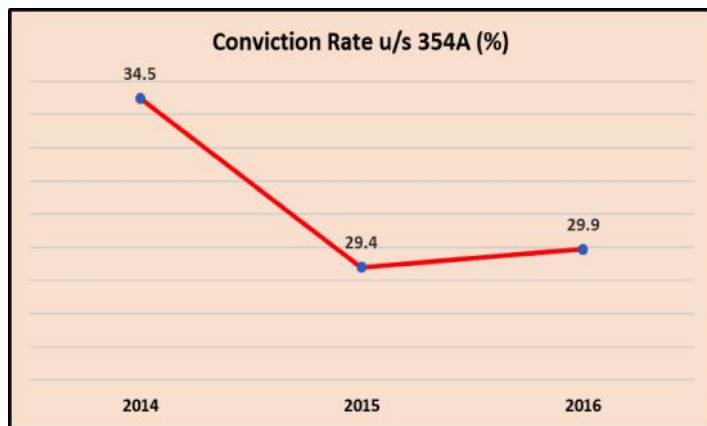


Completion of trials is even more abysmal. In 2016, trials were completed in only 10% of the pending cases – in 7665 out of 73,744. With this kind of record it is small wonder that women don't have much faith in the legal system for getting them justice in cases of sexual harassment.

And, as a result of all this delay, and probably indifferent investigation (hence weak prosecution), the conviction rate has been going down – in three years it has dipped from an already shockingly low of 34.5% to about 30%. In other words, two out of three accused in sexual harassment cases gets away scot free.

What all this shows is that the law is failing the people, it is not offering redressal, it is too limited in its ambit and its implementation is too discouraging, even hostile. This is what forces women who are better placed to adopt the social media for #MeToo. But for the rest of women, there is no such option.

This can change provided the larger social collective moves in defence of women who are survivors of sexual violence. Its demand will be for better laws more diligently implemented. But this social movement will also have to take up larger but inter-related issues of women's employment, equal pay and other rights, along with the issue of violence because only then can real empowerment of women as part of all working people take place.



(Courtesy: Newsclick)

# Maharashtra Domestic Workers' Conference

The second conference of the Coordination Committee of Domestic Workers Unions affiliated to CITU in Maharashtra was held at Gandhi Bhavan, Pune on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2018. The venue was named after Radhabai Waghmare, one of the founder members of the Pune Zilha Gharkamgar Sanghatana (CITU). Around 100 delegates from Solapur, Mumbai, Nashik, Kolhapur, Satara, Beed, Aurangabad, Jalna, Nagpur, and Pune participated in the conference.

Inaugurating the Conference, M H Shaikh, General Secretary of the Maharashtra CITU, reiterated CITU's resolve to reach out to every worker, and particularly the unorganized sections such as domestic workers. He urged them to strengthen their resolve to gain not just the status of a 'worker' but also to defend the benefits they have gained through their militant struggles in the past, that are now under severe attack by the Modi government. He appealed to the delegates to go back to their districts and mobilize domestic workers to participate in the forthcoming national strike called by all the national trade unions on 8 and 9 January 2019.

After the Secretary's report on the situation of domestic workers in Maharashtra, the struggles waged by the unions in different districts as well as the organizational situation, the delegates broke up into groups and discussed six topics, namely "Working Conditions", "Forms of Discrimination", "Issues Regarding the Welfare Board", "Membership and Organisation Building", "Charter of Demands" and "Sexual Harassment at the Workplace". Thereafter delegates spoke on the basis of their lively and fruitful group discussions.

The thrust of the discussion was that it was time for the Union to move away from being a medium of delivery of Welfare Board schemes, to now bring on board and focus on the issues of domestic workers as a **class** of workers. In other words, the Unions have to shift focus from registration with Welfare Boards and access to schemes and programs, to taking up basic issues related to the working conditions of domestic workers, viz. minimum wages, a weekly off, paid leave of different categories, severance pay, and social security protections such as health and life insurance and pensions. Organizationally, we need to inculcate worker consciousness in the domestic workers. While there was agreement that this was particularly difficult because of the peculiarly gendered and fragmented nature of domestic work, with multiplicity of tasks, employers, locations, etc, and its link to housework that has been traditionally excluded from the category of productive work, this is the only way forward.

With both Central and state governments withdrawing from welfare programs, there is a sense of despondency amongst domestic workers who feel that their struggles are leading them nowhere. We need to strongly counter this trend and this can be done only by focusing primarily on demands related to working conditions and organizing struggles around them. We also need to take up the general issues of domestic workers as women (for example their cases of domestic violence) and as citizens (PDS, water, sanitation, housing etc) so that they continue to associate with us even if they are not getting any direct benefits as domestic workers.

The Charter of Demands was adopted and the Conference gave a call for programmes all through October to December 2018 culminating in the 8-9 January strike.

Resolutions were adopted on "Making Efforts to Implement the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act for Domestic Workers", "Uniting to Protect Working Class Unity", "Against Rising Violence against Women" and "Measures to Curb Rising Prices and to Strengthen the PDS".

A 20 member State Committee was elected with Armaity Irani as President and Kiran Moghe as Secretary. Shubha Shamim as Working President, Mangal Thombre as Treasurer and Sindhu Shardul as Joint Secretary were also elected as office bearers. *(Report from Kiran Moghe)*

## Two day Mahapadav in Lucknow by Anganwadi Workers and Helpers

Before the elections last year, in a big rally of scheme workers BJP president Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, many MPs, CM Adityanath, deputy CM Keshav Maurya had promised in writing to regularize these scheme workers within 120 Days of government formation in UP and in return asked for their vote. The BJP, in its election manifesto, in the called 'Sankalp' part had also promised to regularize AWWs and helpers within 120 days after oath taking. The BJP government under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath was



formed in 2017. Even after one year of being in power and making continuous false promises, nothing was done. The unions of anganwadi workers and helpers, with different affiliations, held a meeting and decided to form a joint forum to fight against the false promises of the Yogi government.

So, the Anganwadi Bachao Sanyukt Sangharsh Morcha was formed, as the joint forum of anganwadi unions affiliated to central trade unions AITUC, INTUC, HMS and CITU. Veena Gupta was elected as Convener, Girish Pandey as President, and Shobha Sharma, Usha Sharma, Neelam Pandey, Chaman Ara as members of this forum.

This forum decided to hold a massive two days Mahapadav in Lucknow. It began on October 2 which is the foundation day of ICDS in 1975, in the country. For the preparations of this Mahapadav, Save ICDS conventions were held in 18 commissionerates comprising of 74 districts. From June 12, 2018 commissionerate level joint conventions were held in all the commissionerates and these conventions culminated in the successful 2 day Mahapadav in Lucknow.

The Mahapadav was presided over by a four member presidium which included Shobha Sharma from INTUC, Chaman Ara CITU, Girish Pandey HMS and Usha Sharma from AITUC. The main speakers were Usha Rani, national president of All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers, national secretary of CITU A R Sindhu, national secretary AITUC Sadarruddin Rana, national secretary INTUC H N Tiwari and national secretary AIRF Shiv Gopal Mishra. Other who spoke were state office bearers of central trade unions and anganwadi unions who detailed and opposed the anti anganwadi policies of the Yogi government.

Earlier the CM's office had promised to give an appointment to meet the Chief Minister on October 3, but in the morning when contact was made, it was cancelled. At this all the workers decided to hold a procession to the CM's house. After a long discussion talks were held with the chief secretary of the state. But they failed as there was no assurance regarding wage hike.

On 5th October the CM gave an appointment to meet the forum leaders. He heard them patiently but on the question of wage hike he suggested that they should leave the job and take another job for money. When the delegation tried to persuade him by saying that other states are paying higher wages than Uttar Pradesh, CM Yogi Adityanath said that the workers can migrate to other states and join the job there. This response infuriated the delegation and they asked him to take votes from other states.

The Mahapadav ended with the message of conducting a more intensive campaign against anti ICDS policies and to make the strike on 8, 9 January 2019 a total success. Near about 15 thousand workers and helpers participated in the Mahapadav, coming from 50 out of the 74 districts of UP.

*(Report from Veena Gupta)*

## In UP, Rat-eating Musahars Battle Starvation, Death

In Kushinagar, UP, the two sons of Sonwa Devi were very ill and hungry for days until they died, almost together, on September 14, unaware of the fact that the government, far away from their wretched lives in the eastern UP district, had celebrated September as National Nutrition Month to mark India's fight against malnutrition.

Meanwhile, government officials insist the deaths were not hunger-related.

It took the death of her children, one 16 and the other 22, for Sonwa Devi to receive some food from the administration. In the last week of September, a mass of people had gathered in front of the one-room shack of Sonwa Devi, with walls of bare brick in Musahar Basti, a squalid locality in Jungle Khirkia village, 23 km north of Kushinagar city. They were there to marvel at what for them was an unusual sight: a stack of food grain inside the unlit, damp room. One of them giggled that Sonwa Devi was a lucky woman. Starvation has haunted the community for as long as it can remember. A few kilometres away, in Rakba Dulma Patti village, Virendra Musahar and his family are devastated. His wife Sangeeta, who was just 30, and six-year-old son Shyam died on September 6. His daughter Geeta, two months old, passed away five days later. *"We survive on anything that is eatable,"* said Virendra, still in trauma.

He had sold off his handcart a few months ago to feed his family. The daily wage labourer has hardly got any work since. Sangeeta, too, had registered with MGNREGA in 2017, but her card is empty because she did not get any work.

Just like with Sonwa, officials left stacks of food grain with Virendra after his wife died. But they won't last forever. *"My 10-year-old son Laxman died some years ago in a similar manner. These packets of food and some money will delay our deaths for some time,"* he said.

The government record states that Sangeeta and her kids died of diarrhoea. Officials insisted that the deaths have nothing to do with hunger.

According to Kushinagar's chief medical officer Haricharan Singh, Sonwa Devi's boys died of cardiorespiratory failure and had pulmonary tuberculosis, while one of them also had poliomyelitis. *"The two brothers didn't die of hunger but from TB."*

*"Senior officials have been warning me not to reveal the truth,"* he added.

Next door in Semara Hardo village, tiny Arjun and the other Musahar children don't go to school. They spend the whole day looking for rats. As soon as they catch a couple, they roast and eat the rodents. On days that they catch more, they bring the food home. That's dinner. And breakfast the next morning too.

### ***Kiska Saath Kiska Vikas?***

**R**eliance Industries' second quarterly profit of fiscal 2019 increased 17% to Rs 9,516 crore on higher earnings from its petrochemicals, retail and digital services businesses. Revenue in the September quarter rose nearly 55% to Rs 1,56 lakh crore compared to 1,01 lakh crore a year ago.

Operating profit of its traditional petro chemicals business- the biggest contributor to RIL's earnings, zoomed nearly 64% to Rs 8,120 even as new ventures retail and digital services (Reliance Jio) made healthy contributions to its earnings.

The retail division's operating profit rocketed 273% to Rs 1,244 crore, while that of the digital services business zoomed 682% to Rs. 2,042 crore. RIL Chairman Mukesh Ambani said that the operating profit of the company's retail and Jio units have grown "threefold" and nearly "2.5 times" respectively on a year-on-year basis.

(Courtesy – The Times of India)

## Trigger Happy UP Police

Uttar Pradesh is presently convulsed by shock and horror. A father of two was shot by a police constable late on the night of September 29, reportedly for not halting his car when signalled to do so. Vivek Tiwari, a white-collar worker with Apple, died shortly after the bullet tore through his chin. His female colleague, who was with him, testified that the constable shot without provocation.

Since the Yogi Adityanath government took charge of the state, the police force has come under accusations of high-handedness on several occasions. Besides cases of arbitrary actions—last month, for instance, when a lady constable in Meerut was seen in a video slapping a Hindu woman for allegedly having an affair with a Muslim man, there has been a spate of deaths in police encounters under Adityanath's rule. In the one-and-a-half years he has been at the helm, there have been, by the government's own admission, close to 1,500 encounters in which 67 people have been killed. Opposition parties and rights groups claim that most of these so-called encounters were staged and the government is killing Muslims, Dalits and OBCs as part of a nefarious design. The most recent case of death in an encounter happened in Aligarh on September 20, where, bizarrely, the police invited media persons to come and film the incident live. Two young men, Mustakeem and Naushad, were killed, allegedly in the encounter.

Activists say the targeted killing of people from certain communities in staged encounters is being carried out to crush the morale of political party workers from these communities. Of the first 50 deaths in encounters under this government, 21 were Muslims, and most of the others were from backward classes.

The culture of excesses is orchestrated from the top leadership in the state. After assuming office, Chief Minister Adityanath had said that if people committed crimes in UP, they would either be in jail or be shot dead. Wasn't it Adityanath who formed anti-Romeo squads and told them to strike wherever they saw a boy and a girl together? The constable was doing just that. Tiwari was killed by a mindset that has been cultivated by Adityanath. (Courtesy – Outlook)

## Attack on Migrant Labour – Hate and Rule

Large numbers of migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have fled Gujarat fearing violent backlash in the state against non-Gujaratis, after a 14-month-old girl was raped on September 28. The arrested accused is a migrant labourer from Bihar. Following the incident, migrants in six north Gujarat districts were beaten up as hate messages circulated on WhatsApp and social media.

No doubt, the incident of alleged rape on child is condemnable and the guilty should be punished, which is essentially the responsibility of the state government. But making this incident a plea for an organised attack and witch-hunt on the entire community of migrant workers in Gujarat speaks volumes about the divisive and parochial policies and politics being practiced in the state by the ruling polity. This is utterly condemnable.

Already more than 50,000 migrant workers were forced to leave Gujarat during the span of a week or so. The exodus is continuing. While the policies being pursued by the government are the culprit for lack of employment generation and loss of employment, witch hunt and attacks against the migrant workers in Gujarat are being carried out with the slogan of "locals are deprived of job opportunity because of the migrant workers from other states". It is to be noted that divisive and parochial entities like Thakore Sena and others nourished and promoted by the same brand of politics and policies are the ones raising such slogans.

## Kerala : Facing the Challenge



This year there were unprecedented rains and floods in Kerala, causing havoc and resulting in terrible destruction of infrastructure, homes, property and livelihoods. At the same time the country also witnessed an outstanding example of effective and efficient rescue and relief work by the state government, the armed forces, fishermen, organizations and associations and the people themselves.

Solidarity with the affected people of Kerala was seen in an outpouring of help from all over the country. Whether it was workers and employees contributing one days wages, voluntary work by students and young people, judges and lawyers, teachers and professionals across the country, a huge fund collection programme by a media channel... the list is endless.

The visual of a fisherman kneeling in the water so that women and old people could use his bent back as a stepping stone in order to get into a rescue boat is unforgettable. In New Delhi, thousands of miles away, a single woman pensioner handed over a cheque of Rs 21,000 and a domestic worker gave Rs 1000 from her earnings.

These and countless other such acts demonstrate that the people are still united and will rally around to help others in distress, despite the desperate efforts of the ruling party and its supporters to divide them on religious and caste lines.

### Relief workers take up 'Home Challenge' build house for Kerala woman in 15 days

Shaju Philip

When she lost her hut in the flood, T Rama from Chendamangalam in Ernakulam pleaded with relief workers to bring her a plastic sheet so she could use it as a tent. However, the relief workers, imbued with the state's post-flood motto "build back better", floated a WhatsApp group called "Home Challenge", mobilised Rs 2.5 lakh from its 61 members, with contributions ranging from Rs. 500/- to 35000/- and constructed a pucca house within 15 days. On Monday, 64-year-old Rama stepped into the 600-sqft house — perhaps the first to be constructed by an instant social media group.

Rama, an MGNREGS worker and wife of late Sreenivasan, said, "When I came back after the flood, my hut was gone. There was only a mud foundation in its place. Several youths were cleaning houses in the neighbourhood, so I asked one of them to bring me a sheet for me. I wanted to spread it on my three cents of land and restart life there."

Rama said she didn't know who they were. "I gave them details about the lost hut. They promised me a new house. They came one after another and constructed a house for me within 15 days. All of them are strangers to me," she said.

"The construction was well-planned so we could complete the work in 15 days. Group members and paid workers joined the construction of the house, which has a tiled floor.

(Courtesy: The Indian Express)

## Where Are the Jobs?

All the claims made by Prime Minister Modi and his government about the number of jobs being created have proved to be baseless. The harsh reality of rising unemployment is being seen every day.

Recently, on September 17, 1.9 crore applicants appeared for the Railway Recruitment Board exam to fill 62,907 vacancies for jobs at Level I (equivalent to Group D). These are jobs such as gangman, gateman, helpers in electrical and mechanical departments etc. A large number of those who appeared were postgraduates.

Earlier, in Uttar Pradesh, 23 lakh people applied for around 400 Class IV jobs, of these 50,000 were graduates. Similarly in West Bengal, in 2017, for 6,000 jobs in Class IV, or, Group D category, 25 lakh candidates appeared for the examination, many of them graduate, or, postgraduate degree holders. More than two lakh candidates appeared for 1,137 vacancies for police constables in Mumbai. The basic qualification required was 12th standard, but among those who applied were 543 postgraduates and 425 engineering graduates.

What is striking about these figures is the huge number of job seekers and, secondly, a large number of those who applied are over-qualified for the posts. This shows the enormity of educated unemployment.

This is a fact confirmed by a study conducted by the Azim Premji University in its report "State of Working India". The study found that unemployment rate among the graduates is three times the national average of all unemployed. It also found that unemployment among young and highly educated Indians is the highest in twenty years. The report has quantified this as of the total 2.3 crore unemployed, 90 lakhs are graduates, or, those with higher levels of education.

The other feature is that a growing number of job seekers prefer government employment. According to a national youth survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, between 2007 and 2016, the number of respondents who preferred government jobs increased from 62 per cent to 65 per cent.

The reason for this is that the jobs available at present are in the informal sector where there is no security of jobs, low incomes and poor quality of work. This is what compels even postgraduates and engineers to apply for Class IV jobs in the railways, or, other government related sectors. At least they hope to get a permanent job and various social security benefits. Contrary to the claims of the Modi government of generating jobs in various sectors, it is the policies of the government which have resulted in destruction of jobs. Chief among them was the demonetisation of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes in November 2016. According to a widely cited study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 35 lakh jobs were lost due to the impact of demonetisation.

The CMIE report also shows how female labour participation fell sharply due to the impact of demonetisation. India has one of the lowest female labour participation rates in the world.

After four and a half years of the Modi government, the data on employment confirms a basic fact – neo-liberal growth does not generate employment. According to government statistics, India's GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in the first quarter of this financial year, i.e., from April to June 2018. However, during the same quarter, employment declined by one per cent.

While the growth rate of GDP appears rosy, the unemployment rate rose to 6.4 per cent in August this year. This is higher than the 5.6 per cent rate in July and far higher than the 4.1 per cent unemployment rate recorded in August 2017.



This attests to the all-round failure of the Modi government in generating sufficient employment to meet the requirements of the new job entrants every year which is estimated to be 1.2 crore. Modi government's policies have perpetuated the agrarian crisis resulting in high rural unemployment; 50 per cent of the workforce in India is in agriculture. The policies of privatisation and opening up of all basic services to the market have resulted in a bulk of employment being in the informal sector. It is here that there is maximum exploitation with no minimum wages, job security and social security benefits.

The only other option open is to be "self-employed" – an euphemism for those who can find no other means of livelihood. It is to these desperate people that Modi has dangled the prospect of "*making pakodas*" as a decent livelihood.

If India has to provide its youth with worthwhile jobs and the growing workforce of men and women with a productive livelihood, it would require a reversal of the neo-liberal economic policies. What is to be put in place, instead, are a whole set of alternative policies with the generation of employment as the centerpiece.

## **Entry for all Women to Sabarimala Temple**

**T**he Kerala Left Front Government Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has clarified the position of his government on the issue of the Supreme Court order allowing women of all ages to enter the Sabarimala temple. He said that his government will implement the Supreme Court decision and give protection to all women devotees who want to go to Sabarimala.

The Left Front Government of Kerala took the position in the Supreme Court that the decision on the temple entry of women of menstruating age will be decided taking into account the opinions of all concerned sections. At the same time it said that the government has no objection to the entry of women of all ages in Sabarimala and whatever may be the decision of the apex court, the government will implement it.

The RSS and BJP and also the Congress(I) national leadership supported the entry of women of all ages and welcomed the Supreme Court judgment. But the Kerala units of the BJP, RSS and Congress(I) have taken a position opposing it and started struggles including road blocks etc. But none of these organisations approached the court for a review petition. Instead, they said that they are not against the Supreme Court but against the LDF government of Kerala. Many fringe elements declared that they will stop the women and one BJP leader went to the extent of saying that they will tear the women into two if they dare to go to Sabarimala. This, while the Central government and the National Commission for Women have asked the Kerala government to make arrangements for all women who want to visit Sabarimala.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared that Sabarimala is a place of worship and all those who visit there are going for peace and there shall be all arrangements for all to go peacefully. Anybody who tries to unleash violence will not be tolerated. The government will implement the Supreme Court order and will give all protection to those women who want to go for worship in Sabarimala. The government was implementing the earlier High Court order as well. The government will not go for a review petition.

The government stands for equal treatment for men and women.

# Equality and Agency of Women

## Two Supreme Court Judgments

Tara Narula

### Equality in religious worship: the Sabarimala Temple Case

The Lord Ayappa Temple in Sabarimala in Kerala previously banned the entry of women between the ages of 10 to 50 (that is, menstruating women), from the temple. The said ban was held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of India in its judgment titled *Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala*, passed on 28.09.2018. The Court distinguished between what is permissible as a matter of religious practice, versus what constitutes discrimination, and ruled that menstruating women have an equal right of entry and to worship at the Sabarimala Temple. The decision has led to a severe backlash from Hindu groups, and the Kerala Shiv Sena has gone so far as to threaten that members of its group will commit suicide in protest if menstruating women are allowed to enter the temple.

The Court held that the followers of Lord Ayappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination from Hinduism and do not have a right under Article 26 to manage their own affairs. Women have an equal right to worship under Article 25(1) and that right cannot be restricted by any other laws or rules. The exclusion of women cannot be justified on the basis of public order, morality or health. Having decided this, the Court next considered whether the exclusion of women from places of worship could be justified as an “essential religious practice” for Hinduism. Noting that practices founded in superstition or discriminatory belief may acquire religious character, but could not be protected as essential to the religion, it was held that in fact it is essential to the practice of Hinduism that women be allowed in temples as devotees and to offer their prayers.

The Court examined the history of the temple and of followers of Lord Ayappa, who believe that the powers of Lord Ayappa are derived from his asceticism and celibacy. Therefore pilgrims follow celibacy before and during the pilgrimage to the temple and strict vow to abstain from sex, intoxicants, etcetera for forty-one days as part of their purification. The Court rejected the idea that the mere presence of women could compromise the celibacy and austerity of the deity or its followers. Interestingly, the pilgrimage was restrictive only to women between 10 and 50, with no age or faith restriction on men for participation.

Contrary to claims from various groups that the exclusion of women was a “centuries old practice”, the Supreme Court noted that women of all ages had, in fact, been allowed to visit the temple through the years, with accounts going as far back as 1115 M.E. The entry of women between the ages of 10 and 55 was first banned by a Notification dated 21.10.1955, issued by the Travancore Devaswom Board. After that, the State of Kerala enacted the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965, in which Rule 3(b) disentitled “*women at such time during which they are not by custom and usage allowed to enter a place of public worship*” from accessing a place of public worship. The Rules are framed under the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965, which in Sections 3 and 4 in fact preserve the right of all worshippers to access and pray at temples in Kerala. The Court thus held that Rule 3(b) was contrary to the parent Act itself.

The decision of the Supreme Court was ultimately based on the supremacy of Constitutional values and rights over all rules and ideals that are exclusionary. The Sabarimala judgment is a treatise on what it means to be equal, and is a reassertion of the guarantee of dignity, liberty, and equality under the Indian Constitution. The ban on women was held to be derogatory to equal citizenship, as “*The equality of all human beings entails being free from the restrictive and dehumanizing effect of stereotypes and being equally entitled to the protection of law.*” Notions of purity and impurity associated with menstruation fall within the aforementioned stereotypes, which the Court unhesitatingly rejected as a basis for the discrimination.

## Neither the Victim, nor the Accused: a Married Woman's Agency\* and the law on Adultery

The agency of a woman over her person (irrespective of marital status) was asserted by the Supreme Court recently (on 27.09.2018) in *Joseph Shine v. Union of India*. Where it held that Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) and the related parts of Section 198(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC) are discriminatory towards women, outdated, and hence unconstitutional. It is widely thought that S.497 IPC made "adultery" a criminal offence. However, "Adultery" was always a misleading title to the provision, and in fact nothing in Indian criminal law allowed a woman to file a complaint against a husband or man who was committing adultery.

Under S.497 IPC, it was a crime in India for a man to knowingly have consensual sexual intercourse with the wife of another man, without the consent of that man also. The woman / wife was not considered at fault in this offence, and could not be punished for adultery. The provision contained in S.497 IPC is misleadingly titled "Adultery", whereas, in fact, the offence was based on the idea that a wife is property of her husband, and a second man who has intercourse with her, somehow interferes with the custodial and proprietary rights of the husband. The only complainant or aggrieved person under this section, as also under S.498, was the husband (specified in S.198 CrPC), and the only possible offender was a second man.

Section 497 IPC was held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court on the touchstone of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution, as "*Under the existing provision, the husband is treated as an aggrieved person and the wife is ignored as a victim*" (Para 62) and the provision is in fact derogatory and discriminatory towards women and treats them as chattel of their husband. The Supreme Court also considered whether "gender equality" ought to be read into the provision, so that a wife can complain against an adulterous husband. The Court, however, felt that to make adultery *per se* a criminal offence would be an encroachment into the private lives of people.

Adultery remains a ground on which any person can seek dissolution of marriage, and to that extent it is still a legal (and moral) wrong. It is no longer a criminal offence leading to imprisonment or fine for any person, as the court found that, morally reprehensible as it may be, adultery does not fall within the definition of a "crime". In that sense, adultery stands on a different footing from other matrimonial offences such as bigamy (S.494 IPC), domestic violence, dowry harassment, and cruelty (S.498A IPC), dowry death (S.304B) and abetment of suicide (S.306 IPC).

The Supreme Court considered several situations that may result in adultery, and the consequences that may flow from adultery. For instance, adultery may be a consequence of an unhappy marriage. Adultery may break a marriage, or a spouse may forgive the adulterous spouse and choose to preserve the relationship. Adultery, therefore, cannot fit into the unforgiving category of a 'criminal offence,' because even though it can cause immense emotional distress to a man or woman, it does not obliterate the identity of a spouse or cause an assault upon the person and/or their property, like other matrimonial offences.

In conclusion, the following excerpt from the judgment aptly summarises the patriarchal notions previously upheld by S.497 and the reason it must be held to be unconstitutional;

**213.** *Underlying Section 497 is a gender stereotype that the infidelity of men is normal, but that of a woman is impermissible. In condemning the sexual agency of the woman, only the husband, as the 'aggrieved' party is given the right to initiate prosecution. The proceedings once initiated, would be geared against the person who committed an act of 'theft' or 'trespass' upon his spouse. Sexual relations by a man with another man's wife is therefore considered as theft of the husband's property. Ensuring a man's control over the sexuality of his wife was the true purpose of Section 497.*

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(\* agency means capacity of a person to act independently and make free choices)

# New Poverty Numbers – How Real Are They?

*Multidimensional poverty completely ignores income or consumption spending – just as earlier poverty headcounts ignored schooling or health or water. Both ways are unjust for the poor.*

Subodh Varma

The latest report on global poverty is making news because it claims that 271 million people have moved out of poverty in India between 2005-06 and 2015-16. That's a stunning number. It means that poverty rate has steeply declined from about 55% to 28% in that decade. Of course, this still leaves some 364 million people in poverty in India, the highest number in any country and about a quarter of the world's 1.34 billion people living in 'multidimensional' poverty.



The report was prepared by the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford, and published collaboratively with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The results seem counter-intuitive. The period mostly saw healthy GDP growth except for the 2007-2008 period of the financial crisis. But it also saw the infamous 'jobless growth' with jobs being

created at less than 2% per annum. That was a period of unrelenting agrarian crisis, marked by farmers' suicides. Various official surveys, including Census 2011 and NSSO Surveys recorded growth of marginalisation of work, increase in agricultural labour, decline in cultivators, stagnation in wages of industrial workers, etc. So, how come there is this quantum decline in poverty?

The reason could well be in the way poverty is defined and measured, a problem that Indians know very well. To understand this, one will have to step back a bit and look at how the whole academic field of measuring poverty has evolved. A detailed narration is not possible here but in sum, here is what has been going on.

## **Income Poverty**

The conventional way of measuring poverty was through income or consumption expenditure. The World Bank developed and refined this method, hand in hand with the nostrum that only the really poor should be targeted by government policies. Otherwise, fake poor people might get the reliefs offered by government policies and that would be a waste.

This method worked through defining a poverty line – a minimum income/consumption spend – with people below it classified as poor (BPL – below poverty line, as popularly known in India). India had its own share of definitions of poverty starting with the expert group headed by Y K Alagh in 1979, then another one led by D T Lakdawala in 1993, then the Tendulkar formula in 2005, which was used by the Planning Commission till 2011-12 and updated subsequently. Following countrywide outrage at the Tendulkar-based recommendation of just Rs.22 per day as the poverty line in rural areas, the Rangarajan committee was set up to devise a new formula. It recommended Rs 32 in rural areas and Rs 47 in urban areas and estimated that 363 million people were BPL in 2015, making up 29.5% of the population.

Meanwhile, the World Bank and others were using similar methods and recommended a global poverty line of \$1.90 per day calculated on the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), which is a method of making expenditures in different countries comparable.

## **‘Multidimensional Poverty’**

Now, all this number crunching on poverty led to some very valid criticism globally, the crux of which was that poverty is not just lack of cash. A family can suffer from deprivations of other kinds like: lack of schools for children, lack of basic healthcare, lack of safe drinking water or sanitation, etc. Such deprivations are not measured by the income method. Hence a move was made to develop an alternative measure of poverty that considered such issues rather than income or consumption spend.

Thus, a new definition of poverty called ‘multidimensional poverty’ and a new method of measuring were developed, led by the OPHI. A single number or index called the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) was defined through a mathematical exercise to represent this new concept of poverty. The first of these assessments was published in 2010.

The latest numbers released on September 22, 2018 are of this MPI. It considers three ‘dimensions’ of deprivation – health, education and living standards. Various markers are considered for each dimension: for health - nutrition and child mortality; for education – years of schooling and school attendance; and for living standards – cooking fuel, sanitation (toilets), drinking water, electricity, housing, assets. Each dimension is given a weight of 1/3. Within each dimension, each of the markers (like nutrition or schooling) is given equal sub-weight.

What is the source of this data? This time, the MPI authors have changed their methodology to make it more robust by using one single survey carried out in the country which covered all these markers or aspects. Such a single survey in India was the National Family & Health Survey, done in 2005-06 and 2015-16. Hence for India, a comparison between the two showed the changes in these markers straight away.

### **Flawed Methodology of MPI**

All this sounds fine, but there is a flaw. The MPI does not take into account income or consumption spending at all. It has gone to the other extreme from the initial World Bank type of calculations which used only income/consumption spend data. The implication of this is very vividly brought out by the example of Sylhet region in Bangladesh quoted in the MPI report itself.

As per the MPI report, Sylhet region had the lowest MPI in Bangladesh with a staggering 62% of the population suffering from multidimensional poverty. But according to the Bangladesh Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2010, Sylhet was the least poor regions with 28% poor which further dipped to just 16.2% in 2016! How can there be such an enormous difference in the two poverty measures?

The explanation is that Sylhet region has sent a large number of international migrants who send an average of \$4,282 per year per household, second only to Dhaka. Also, the rate of increase of remittances was the highest in Sylhet at 76% between 2013 and 2015.

So, what is happening is this: people have relatively good incomes thanks to remittances but schools, healthcare, sanitation, drinking water etc. are not available, forcing the multiple deprivations reflected in MPI.

This brings out the flaw in this exercise: measures of income poverty and other forms of poverty have become mutually exclusive. Both give one side of the picture. In India, propelled by various factors, including government policy, education has spread, child mortality has fallen toilets are more in use, and so on. Hence the rise in number of people that are no longer suffering these deprivations. But, the same people are still facing unemployment or under-employment, low incomes, low female work participation, etc. These latter aspects are not reflected in the conventional poverty counts because of its own specific shortcomings.

Another flaw in the MPI is that it is lumping together 10 different markers and assigning arbitrary weights to each in order to fulfil the desire for one number or index. It puts death of a child due to disease and lack of brick walls and water from a well on par. This is highly problematic.

In sum, it is not really the case that 271 million people have been lifted out of poverty in a decade. That would be so if their incomes too had risen to some acceptable levels.

# Building Crony Capitalism and Calling it New Defence Policy

Prabir Purkayastha

The former president of France, Hollande, exposing the role of the Indian government in the choice of Anil Ambani Reliance as the offset partner in the Rafale deal shows that crony capitalism is thriving in Modi's India. It now transpires that the Rafale contract is not the only one in which Anil Ambani Reliance secured the PM's blessings. The Indian government has put together a whole new policy of defence procurement – a Strategic Partnership model – which keeps out all the defence public sector undertakings (PSUs) in favour of the private sector. This strategic partnership policy is initially for four major sectors, all of which are in the process of major acquisitions and floating mega contracts. These are:

- Fighter Aircraft
- Helicopters
- Submarines
- Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) / Main Battle Tanks (MBTs)

However, Amphibian Ships/Landing Deck Platforms also seemed to be included for strategic partnership and reserved for the private sector, though not explicitly mentioned.

No prize for guessing who the lead contender for these lucrative partnerships is. Once again, it is Anil Ambani's Reliance, with major public sector undertakings including HAL, Mazagaon Docks and Hindustan Shipyards being frozen out of the bidding. The amounts involved are staggering – a possible Rs 80,000 crore for submarines, and Rs 60,000 crore for naval aircrafts, the two other areas apart from fighter aircraft, selected for such strategic partnership.

In an embarrassing development for Modi and his love for Anil Ambani's debt-ridden empire, Ericsson, the Swedish Telecom manufacturing company, has now asked the Supreme Court that Anil Ambani not be allowed to do a Nirav Modi, and leave the country. This is for defaulting on a Supreme Court mandated payment of Rs 550 crore that Anil Ambani Rcom had agreed to make Ericsson.

For those who have followed these columns on the Rafale Deal, would know that each step of the Rafale process was shrouded in secrecy and violated existing policies. What the Modi government has now done, with a pliant defence minister, is to convert Modi's violations of policy as the new policy. This policy called "Revitalising Defence Industrial Ecosystem through Strategic Partnerships" was added to the Defence Procurement Policy 2016 (DPP 16), as Chapter VII on May 31, 2017.

The key elements of the policy are i) large scale induction of private sector in defence ii) major contracts for defence to be used to create tie-ups between foreign suppliers and Indian players iii) key acquisition areas will be reserved for such tie-ups iv) existing public sector, even those who have experience and capacities will be kept out of such contracts.

Let us look at the big ticket items now on the anvil and who are the bidders. First is the purchase of another 110 fighter aircrafts, urgently needed by the Indian Air Force because Modi scuttled the earlier deal for 126 aircrafts. The Dassault-Reliance joint venture is now a front-runner for the contract, with Dassault's CEO Trappier stating that Dassault needs an order of 200 aircrafts to transfer technology. He is now in driver's seat, having secured the order for 36 aircrafts thanks to Modi. Indian Air Force has invested considerably in training, integrating such aircraft in its air defence. So 36 was only the thin end of the wedge, preparing the ground for much larger contracts for the "Strategic Partnership".

The second is the contract for four Amphibian Ships/Landing Deck Platforms (LDPs) estimated to cost around Rs 20,000 crore. In 2013, the ministry of defence (MoD) had floated a tender for two such platforms to be supplied by private parties, while two had been reserved for Hindustan Shipyard Limited. This was cancelled in early 2017, and a new tender for all four Landing Deck

Platforms was floated, keeping Hindustan Shipyard out, and asking only L&T and Reliance Defence Systems (Anil Ambani Reliance) to bid. There was no explanation why the contract to Hindustan Shipyard was cancelled, or why it was not allowed to bid. Neither has MoD offered any explanation for keeping Mazagaon Docks also out, the major shipbuilding enterprise in the country. Presumably, though not explicitly mentioned, amphibian vessels are also in the strategic partnership sector, read private sector.

The third is to build six advanced non-nuclear submarines for the navy, with an approximate budget of Rs 80,000 crore. Again, the only two private players are L&T and Reliance Defence Systems. Will Mazagaon docks, which is the only shipyard in the country that has built submarines including the nuclear submarine, be allowed to bid? Not if we read the strategic partnership policy document, which is reserving this sector for building the private sector. Again, Reliance Defence is a contender, even though its finances are no better than Rcom's, in which Ericsson is asking Anil Ambanis' passport to be impounded.

Reliance Defence Systems, is a different entity from Reliance Defence Limited, the entity involved in the Rafale deal. It acquired Pipavav Shipyard in 2016, which itself was staggering under a debt of Rs 6,000 crore, and unable to pay its contractors. Pipavav Shipyard has now been renamed as Reliance Naval (Rnaval), and involved in the Rs 20,000 crore Landing Deck Platform and Rs 80,000 crore submarine orders. By itself, RNaval stands no chance of competing with either Mazagaon decks or Hindustan Shipyards. That is why the DPP 16 and the strategic partnership route allows a backdoor entry of private parties without competing with the public sector units. Modi's blessings are with Anil Ambani, the Force, is in indeed with him!

We have earlier pointed in our columns that the key difference, between Make in India and Made in India, is with respect to self-reliance. The public sector was created primarily to develop self-reliance in critical sectors such as infrastructure and defence. These are what guarantee the ability of the country to be independent of others and preserve its strategic autonomy.

It is the public sector that created India's ability to absorb complex technologies and indigenise them. For those who may not be aware, the Indian public sector undertakings, and organisations such as BARC and ISRO, not only created indigenous technology, but also created an eco-system around themselves. Indian electronics manufacturing came out of BARC and its spin-off ECIL. Similarly, ISRO has created a whole bunch of suppliers with capabilities to manufacture complex satellite systems and rockets. Killing public sector undertakings such as HAL and Mazagaon Docks will not only kill these huge undertakings built with investments in plant and people over decades, but the entire eco-system around them. This is the other destructive element in Modi's policies: it is directed against both the public sector, and the smaller private suppliers that provide Indian industry with its broad base. He is instead, entirely focussed on Indian big capital – Ambani brothers, Adani, etc. This is how policies where state largesse go, not in creating technology or an industrial base, but as gifts to big capital. Of course, such "gifts" could have "return gifts" as well. But with the new policy of elections bonds, all such return gifts from the corporate sector to political parties will now be white-washed and anonymous.

The Modi government has not only opened key strategic defence manufacturing areas to the private sector, but has been reserving it exclusively for them. That too, for companies which have proven ability to take huge loans, and run down their companies to near bankruptcy. For private companies without technology or capability for such mega contracts, the government is promising to find credible foreign manufacturing partners and marry them, in a re-run of Rafale deal. This is what Hollande said on Rafale: it was the Indian government that forced Reliance as Dassault's partner; the French side had no say in the matter.

This is now India's Strategic Partnership Policy – building crony capitalism while calling it "policy".

## **CITU Condemns Police Repression on Peasants near Delhi**

**C**entre of Indian Trade Unions vehemently condemns the brutal police action on the peasants who were marching to Delhi to highlight their genuine demands.

The peasants who started their march from Haridwar under the banner of Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) on 23<sup>rd</sup> September were scheduled to reach the Kisan Ghat in the national capital on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. Instead of addressing their genuine demands, the BJP led Modi government chose to use force to stop them from even reaching the national capital. Police resorted to lathi charge, water cannons and tear gas on the peaceful march of the peasants at Ghazipur at the Uttar Pradesh – Delhi border.

This brutal force on the farmers who feed the country exposes the real face of the BJP led Modi government which wants to hide its anti peasant, anti people character using fake promises and false slogans through its media blitzkrieg spending thousands of crores of people's money. It is to be recalled that it was the state government led by the same BJP that has killed six peasants in police firing when they were demanding remunerative prices and loan waiver. It was the state governments in Assam and Jharkhand led by the same BJP that killed peasants earlier.

CITU warns that the working class will not remain a silent spectator if the government neglects the genuine demands of the peasants of the country on whose toil the country depends for its food. CITU demands that the government desist from any attempts to suppress the rising tide of agitations by the peasants who are the victims of the agrarian crisis due to the neoliberal policies being aggressively pursued by the BJP government led by Modi. CITU also warns that the government will be grievously mistaken if it thinks that it can suppress peasants' struggles, or for that matter, struggles by the workers or any section of the people, through force.

CITU calls upon the working class in the entire country to forcefully protest the use of uncalled for force on the peacefully protesting peasants and stand in rock strong solidarity with their peasant brethren.

## **CITU Denounces Continuing Attack on Migrant Workers in Gujarat Condemns Government Inaction**

**T**he Centre of Indian Trade Unions expresses serious concern over the continuing physical attacks and violence unleashed on the migrant workers from Bihar, UP and other states working in Gujarat by the parochial and divisive forces, with the BJP government in the state remaining a virtual indulgent spectator.

No doubt the incident of alleged rape on the child is condemnable and the guilty should be punished, which is essentially the responsibility of the state government. But making this incident a plea for organized attacks and a witch-hunt on the entire community of migrant workers in Gujarat speaks volumes about the divisive and parochial policies and politics being practiced in the state by the ruling polity. This is utterly condemnable.

Already more than 50,000 migrant workers were forced to leave Gujarat during the span of the last one week or so. The exodus is continuing. While the policies being pursued by the government are the culprit for lack of employment generation and loss of employment, witch hunt and attacks against the migrant workers in Gujarat are being carried out with the slogan of "*locals are deprived of job opportunity because of the migrant workers from other states*". It is to be noted that divisive and parochial entities like Thakore Sena and others, nourished and promoted by the same brand of politics and policies, are the ones raising such slogans.

CITU condemns such violence and attacks on the migrant workers in Gujarat and demands that the state government take immediate measures to contain such continuing violence by all means and deal with the perpetrator organizations carrying on such violence on the migrant workers in the state.



CITU also calls upon the trade unions irrespective of affiliation, including those in Gujarat, to protest and oppose such violence and attacks on the workers and to come forward in defending and protecting the migrant workers in the state from the onslaught of the parochial and divisive outfits.

## **CTUs Condemn the Barbaric Atrocities on Haryana Road Transport Corporation Workers by the State Government**

Central Trade Unions condemn the victimization and continuing repression of the Road Transport Employees who are resolutely opposing the anti-people privatization of public transport by the BJP led Government of Haryana. The strike, at the call of the United Platform of Trade Unions, commenced on 16<sup>th</sup> October and was to end on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018. However to protest against the ferocious repressive steps of the Government the strike has been extended and is continuing with an increasing number of employees joining the strike action.

For the last 3 years, the BJP Government of Haryana has been desperately trying to wind up Haryana Roadways and hand over the entire passenger transport operation to private operators. Such a move in 2017 was stalled by the trade unions through a militant strike action. Now, the Government has again initiated steps to engage 720 private buses on lease to operate in state transport routes on 'kilometer' basis. It is obvious that such action of the Government is motivated to ultimately totally privatise the most efficiently run public transport system of Haryana.

It is a matter of shock and anguish that instead of opening dialogue with the striking unions, the Government has resorted to vindictive and repressive action path. Union offices of AIRTWF, AITUC, INTUC in some places like Faridabad depot have been sealed.

Hundreds of workers have been arrested under ESMA and also other various non-bailable false charges. Suspension order has been slapped on nearly 500 employees. About 100 newly recruited employees have been issued termination notice. The government has started the process of new recruitment as well. The Central Trade Unions demand that the government must release all arrested employees and withdraw all cases against them. Further orders of termination and suspension must be withdrawn.

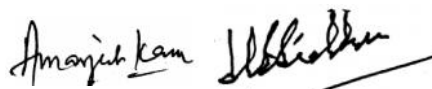
The Central Trade Unions emphatically demand that the Haryana Government must stop all steps to privatise the Public Road Transport operation and immediately start bipartite negotiations with the Joint Action Forum of trade unions to discuss and decide steps to ensure more efficiency of the public road transport operation in the state.

In the meantime the Central Trade Unions congratulate the road transport workers for giving a befitting reply to the draconian repressive measures of the government by extending the strike by two days. The strike has got full public support as well.

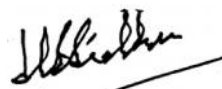
Central Trade Unions appeal to the working class of the country irrespective of affiliations to express solidarity to the striking employees of Haryana Roadways.



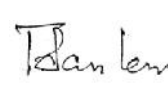
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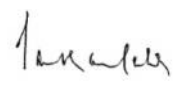
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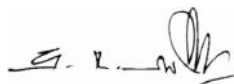
**HMS**



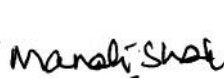
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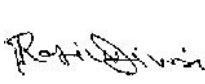
**AIUTUC**



**TUCC**



**SEWA**



**AICCTU**



**LPF**



**UTUC**

# **Draconian Attack on Deshar Katha**

**T**he closing down on October 1 of Daily Deshar Katha, a daily newspaper associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Tripura, is a shocking attack on the freedom of the press and democratic rights.

Cancellation of the registration of the newspaper, which has been in existence for 40 years, by a sub-divisional magistrate on flimsy technical grounds is an unprecedented action which highlights the authoritarianism which has been ushered in by the BJP regime.

In recent years, there were changes in the editor, publisher and ownership of the newspaper. However, the change of ownership (made in 2015) was not registered with the Registrar of Newspapers (RNI). Utilising this, the process was initiated to take action against the newspaper by the district magistrate. Even though the RNI issued a new Certificate of Registration on October 1, on the very same day, the sub-divisional magistrate cancelled the registration of the newspaper and consequent to that, the RNI withdrew the revised certificate.

Normally, when there is some technical flaw in the registration process, time would be given for taking corrective measures. That the district magistrate ordered the SDM to cancel the registration, despite the RNI issuing a revised certificate shows malafide intentions.

The administrative action against Deshar Katha has come as a culmination of a series of attacks on newspaper ever since the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura assumed office six months ago. The ruling party and the government were determined to suppress the widely circulated newspaper. Attacks were launched on the entire distribution network. The bundles of paper were being sent throughout the state through the bus transport network. Within weeks, none of the transporters were willing to take the consignments. Newspaper agents and vendors were physically attacked and bundles of newspapers were burnt or destroyed. Some reporters of the paper were assaulted and badly injured. In Tripura, subscribing to and reading Deshar Katha itself became a crime, subject to vigilante attacks.

It is in this background that the draconian step of ending the registration of the newspaper was taken. This anti-democratic step could not have been taken by a mere SDM without instructions from the political masters.

The Deshar Katha and the CPI(M) will not be cowed down by this anti-democratic attack. The right to publish a newspaper and to convey news and views to the people is a fundamental right assured in the constitution. The CPI(M) will fight legally and politically to get this obnoxious ban overturned.

The attack on Deshar Katha is a warning that no rights are safe under the BJP regime. It is essential that all concerned with democracy and freedom of expression speak out against this danger to press freedom.

*We have now received the news that the Daily Deshar Katha has resumed its publication from October 11. The eagerly awaited welcome moment came as the High Court of Tripura put a stay on the illegal and politically ill motivated order of the DM of West Tripura stopping the publication of the paper. Reports are coming in from across the state that readers are welcoming the order and looking for their copies of the newspaper.*

# 12 POINT CHARTER OF DEMANDS

1. Urgent measures for containing price-rise through universalisation of public distribution system and banning speculative trade in commodity market
2. Containing unemployment through concrete measures for generation of employment with quality
3. Strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measures for violation of labour laws.
4. Universal social security cover for all workers
5. Minimum wages of not less than Rs 18,000 per month with provisions of indexation, including all scheme workers
6. Assured enhanced pension not less than Rs.3,000 per month for the entire working population. Reinstate old pension scheme for employees
7. Stoppage of disinvestment in Central/State PSUs.
8. Stoppage of contractisation in permanent perennial work and payment of same wage and benefits for contract workers as regular workers for same and similar work. No Fixed term employment in any sector
9. Removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of bonus, provident fund; increase the quantum of gratuity.
10. Compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days from the date of submitting application; and immediate ratification of ILO Conventions C 87 and C 98
11. No anti worker amendments in Labour Laws. No codification of existing labour laws
12. No FDI in Railways, Insurance and Defence

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