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20 June: Countrywide Protest against Prosecution of Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkhat Hussain under UAPA





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In the Wake of the Historic 2024 Mandate, A Strengthened Opposition Must Rise to the Challenge Ahead



A weakened government back in office and a stronger and more energised opposition to take it on in Parliament. The net outcome of the 2024 elections can perhaps be seen only as a modest pro-opposition tilt in the balance of forces. In a functional democracy it should mean a restrained executive and consequently a restored political equilibrium in society and governance. But parliamentary democracy in India in 2024 is anything but functional. Relentless erosion of democracy has been the new normal in Modi's India since 2014. And it remains so in spite of the shot in the arm delivered by the 2024 mandate.

The Modi government must have had a fair idea of the ground reality while going into the 18th Lok Sabha elections. The prolonged election schedule was presumably to give it maximum possible time to try and minimise its losses by tiring out the resource-starved opposition in an electoral battle that could not have been more unfair and unequal. The regime did everything possible to set the tone for an ambitious and confident campaign which would not reveal any signs of weakness. All the while however it worked hard behind the scenes to firm up alliances, arrange votes and fix the machinery to save its tally from dropping below a certain level.

Without its last-minute alliance with JDU in Bihar, TDP in Andhra Pradesh and RLD in UP, it is not difficult to imagine what the fate of the Modi regime would have been in these elections. The eventual tally of 240 seats for the BJP and 293 for the NDA, including thirty-odd seats won by a narrow margin

of less than 40,000 votes, is actually a product of this elaborate micromanagement and interference. But just as the BJP did not reveal any nervousness before the election - except the evident panic and desperation in Modi's speeches and body language immediately after the first phase feedback - its initial moves regarding the new government are also designed to give a 'business as usual' impression.

All erstwhile key ministers in the outgoing cabinet and advisors to the Prime Minister have been retained to indicate continuity without any change. The sanction granted by the Delhi LG to prosecution of Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkat Hussain under UAPA in a 14-year-old complaint is meant to tell the whole world that Modi is still in control and fear and persecution shall continue to be his biggest tools of governance.

While the BJP, especially the Modi camp, does not acknowledge any real decline or concern about the growing anger of the people as reflected in the defeat of a sizable number of Modi ministers and huge losses in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, RSS functionaries including Mohan Bhagwat have sounded some cautionary notes. This is perhaps more to maintain the image of the RSS as a collective and disciplined organisation which does not approve of any personality cult than to exercise any real check on the BJP. It also probably reflects the fact that both the RSS and the BJP have of late been trying to reassert their job division within the Sangh Parivar - with Nadda claiming political autonomy for the BJP and RSS reiterating its moral guardianship.

Two decades ago Atal Bihari Vajpayee had famously talked about the need to uphold 'Rajdharm' in Gujarat in the wake of 2002 anti-Muslim carnage and Modi had replied by saying that he was indeed doing that. That was his way of telling everybody that overseeing a carnage was his idea of what kind of 'Rajdharm' should be

expected of him. It got him the title of 'Hindu Hriday Samrat' (emperor of Hindu hearts). RSS has benefited immensely from the BJP being in power not just in terms of advancement of its ideological agenda but also in terms of its organisational expansion and it is not likely to do anything to destabilise the BJP's continued stay in power.

True to the Modi government's track record of misgovernance, his third term has begun literally on a disastrous note - with yet another major railway accident and massive scams in the conduct of examinations like NEET and NET. And as always, the government is in denial mode, refusing to take any responsibility for these major policy and governance failures.

Meanwhile, there is a renewed campaign of anti-Muslim violence - from mob lynchings and shop lootings to communal riots and demolitions of homes and places of worship - across India, apparently to teach Muslims a lesson for not voting for the BJP. And there is even a clamour for economic boycott of Ayodhya's 'ungrateful' Hindus who defeated the BJP candidate calling for a new constitution and elected a veteran Dalit leader of the Samajwadi Party from the unreserved seat of Faizabad.

While fascist thuggery and violence escalates on the street with impunity granted by the state, the new set of criminal laws that seek to arm the state with more sweeping and draconian powers in the garb of 'decolonisation' of India's legal architecture, is all set to come into force from the first of July. If Modi 3.0 thus begins on this note of intensified fascist aggression, the opposition must make the fullest use of its increased strength to encircle and challenge the regime both inside Parliament and outside of it through intensified popular protests. It is the alertness and assertion of a united and awakened people that will defeat dictatorship and secure the ultimate victory of democracy. ■

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The 2024 Verdict:

Key Pointers and Takeaways

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The 2024 elections have delivered a major setback to the BJP by stopping it at 240 seats, thirty-two seats short of the majority. What makes this result look almost like a victory for the opposition and defeat for the BJP is that it came in India's most unequal elections till date with the media, the Election Commission and the administrative machinery all playing a highly partisan role.

Also, the number 240 appears disproportionately smaller in scale when viewed against the BJP's repeatedly declared target of 370 seats for the party and '400 paar' (400-plus) for the NDA coalition. The hype had started dying down during the elections and the BJP had recalibrated its target as 'teesri bar Modi Sarkar' or return of the Modi government for the third time in a row. But the exit polls once again rekindled the hype and created an orchestrated surge in the share market (Modi and Shah had already advised investors on Adani's TV channel to buy shares before June 4) only as a prelude to a major crash on the counting day.

Thanks to a major increase in the BJP's vote share in the coastal and southern region (Telangana 15.4, Andhra Pradesh 10.3, Tamil Nadu 7.6, Odisha 6.4, Kerala 3.7), the party has more or less managed to hold on to its 2019 vote share which dropped only marginally from 37.3% to 36.5%. By contrast, the Congress has managed to nearly double its tally of seats by registering a modest 2% increase in vote share (the party however contested only 328 seats in 2024 compared to 421 in 2019).

What made the BJP set the 400-

plus target? Was it to cross the 1984 Congress record of 404 seats? Was it just the expectation of a continued increase over and above the 2019 BJP tally of 303 and NDA tally of 353? Was it based on the Yogi formula of 80:20, expecting an unprecedented consolidation of Hindu support as an electoral reward for the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya? Asked where the 400-plus seats would come from, a smug Yogi had told a TV anchor 'you can count 80 from UP itself'. It was therefore particularly befitting that the BJP suffered its most stunning setback in UP where it lost as many as 29 seats including the very seat of Ayodhya (Faizabad) to a veteran Dalit leader of the Samajwadi Party.

Blunting of Fear and Hate

What are the key takeaways from the 2024 elections? The biggest takeaway is that the BJP's two main weapons - fear and hate - have been blunted. The idea that Modi is invincible has taken a huge beating. The belief that a brazen

anti-Muslim hate campaign can be the most effective vote-catching formula has been exposed to be hollow and false. The BJP lost at least twenty seats where Modi delivered his most hate-filled speeches in this election season.

Veritable People's Movement

The second most reassuring gain has been the demonstration of the power and resilience of the people. The BJP had at its disposal not only unlimited money and media power and massive administrative backing but also what is believed to be a ruthlessly efficient election machine powered by Amit Shah's much-hyped 'Chanakya neeti' and the fabled contingent of 'panna pramukhs'. The belated formation of the INDIA coalition looked no match for the resources and organisational might of the BJP. Yet the people of India turned it into a close fight and beat the BJP in a big way right in the Hindutva heartland of Uttar Pradesh. Beyond the political constituents of INDIA, various movement forces,



CPI (ML) Liberation's 20 Rupees Janata Coupon Campaign against BJP's Corporate backed Electoral Bond and funding

Region	Vote	INDIA	Seat Change from 2019	NDA	Seat Change from 2019	Others	Seat Change from 2019
Hindi heartland	225	72	+59	152	-28	1	-31
Non-Hindi north	20	13	+1	2	-4	5	+ 3
South	132	77	+17	50	+17	5	- 34
West	78	30	+28	46	-27	2	-1
East	64	2	-1	30	+4	32	- 3
Northeast	24	8	+4	14	-3	2	-1

Region-wise number of seats won by the alliances and changes from 2019 (Source: The Hindu)

civil society organisations, campaign platforms and activists of digital communication media pooled their resources and energy to turn the election into a veritable people's movement.

The BJP suffered a dent both in terms of its core agenda of Hindutva and the personality cult built around what is called Brand Modi. Unlike 2019, there was no ultra nationalist wave in these elections and if the BJP expected the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya to create an electoral storm in 2024 it could not have been more mistaken. The Samajwadi Party not only won the very Ayodhya/Faizabad seat, the BJP lost most seats in the entire region.

Many commentators have described 2024 as a 'normal' or 'local' election devoid of any national narrative. But if economic questions and livelihood concerns of the common people have become the election agenda and have been reflected in a vote against the incumbent government, surely it cannot be treated as a 'local factor'? In fact, alongside the bread-and-butter issues of everyday existence, a major component of the election discourse this time was the growing concern over the future of India's democracy and the Constitution.

The Indian electorate has proved that the concern over the backsliding of democracy or degeneration of

India's parliamentary democracy into an electoral autocracy is no 'western propaganda', it is a danger deeply felt by more and more Indians across the country. The assault on various aspects of the Constitution - from federalism and reservation to secularism and citizenship - has also been directly experienced by the people and when BJP leaders themselves started linking the 400-plus target with plans to amend and change the Constitution, it quickly turned into the biggest talking point in this election season. As one of India's leading pollsters confessed in a television interview, even two months ago he would have laughed away any suggestion that democracy and the Constitution could become the common voter's election agenda, but the elections proved him wrong.

Digital War for Democracy

Another major feature of this election was the rise of YouTube as the most effective medium of political news. The degeneration of much of India's so-called 'mainstream media' into a propaganda wing of the government has considerably eroded the viewership of most television channels. Many of India's courageous journalists for whom journalism is still about speaking truth to power have also had to take to YouTube as their preferred

platform of communication. This has shaped the phenomenal rise of digital media in today's India and we have seen the power of this new tool of mass communication in these elections.

The videos of journalists and communicators like Ravish Kumar and Dhruv Rathee and the growing community of youtubers, the digital warriors for democracy, have put up a highly courageous and effective resistance against the relentless propaganda of hate and lies by the combined network of Godi Media and WhatsApp university. The Modi government is now understandably desperate to try and erode the freedom of the digital media and subject it to its vicious stranglehold.

BJP's Mischievous Interpretation

There has been a sinister systematic attempt in the Modi era to disenfranchise Muslims through large-scale deletion of names from electoral rolls and by discouraging and obstructing Muslim voters in various ways to keep them away from the polling booths. Modi even tried to present the 2024 elections as a contest between 'vote jihad' and 'Ram rajya'. Now that this shrill hate campaign and polarisation politics have failed to secure a majority for the BJP, a frustrated BJP camp has

launched a renewed campaign of Islamophobia blaming the Muslim voters (and ungrateful Hindus too) for the shocking outcome.

This mischievous campaign has found an amplifier in the much hyped election strategist Prashant Kishor who had egg all over his face on 4 June after smugly predicting a return of the Modi regime with bigger numbers than 2019. This mischievous distorted narrative first trivialises the improved performance of the Congress by attributing it to a 'free minority vote bank' of twenty percent. In this 'free minority vote bank' he counts eighteen percent Muslims (a huge exaggeration which exceeds the current estimate by four percent) followed by Sikhs and Christians. The Congress vote share of about 23% is thus sought to be brushed aside as nothing significant beyond a consolidated minority vote!

This is patently untrue. The Congress this time contested nearly hundred seats less than it did in 2019, down to 328 from 421. So the vote share figure understates the actual average increase in votes polled by the Congress in seats contested. And the proportion of Muslim or minority vote in this overall vote share must also be seen in the right perspective.

The term 'vote bank' is routinely used by the Sangh brigade as a dog whistle to target the Muslim community. If Muslims in India vote predominantly against the BJP, they are perfectly entitled in a democracy to make this political choice. And this choice, nay compulsion, is dictated by the BJP's aggressive Islamophobic politics and track record. The BJP openly says it does not want Muslim votes, does not field any Muslim candidate and has now formed a jumbo cabinet with 70-plus ministers without a single representative from India's largest

minority community. And the whole world knows what a period of acute insecurity Indian Muslims are having to face under the Modi regime. In addition to the various forms of communal violence perpetrated often with open administrative complicity, the last ten years have witnessed the promotion of new forms of anti-Muslim violence like mob lynching and bulldozing of Muslim homes and shops.

And yet in spite of a general anti-BJP orientation of the average Muslim voter, the Muslim vote is not really as monolithic as the Sangh brigade would like us to believe. Even if the BJP's own share in Muslim votes is understandably insignificant, some of its NDA allies (for instance, the JDU in Bihar, TDP in Andhra Pradesh, RLD in Uttar Pradesh or the JDS in Karnataka) do still poll a certain share of Muslim votes. Then there are non-INDIA parties like the BSP, AIMIM, AIUDF of Assam or the ISF in West Bengal which account for a sizable share in their areas of

influence. And finally, within INDIA, the Congress is a minor recipient of Muslim votes in major states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar where INDIA allies like the SP, TMC and RJD poll bigger shares.

Solidarity of the Oppressed

In other words, there can be no denying the fact that the revival of the Congress in the 2024 elections, howsoever modest, has happened not because of the consolidation of Muslim votes but because of the increased support from non-Muslim communities, Hindus in particular.

The most mischievous part of this narrative is that it blames Muslims for their declining number in Parliament. Are Muslims responsible for the fact that the number of Muslim MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha is only 24 in a house of 543, an all-time low in India's parliamentary history? The number is low precisely because the largest single party in India's Parliament has a declared



policy of shunning Muslims, and its politics and governance have always been virulently Islamophobic. To ask Indian Muslims to accept the BJP for what it is and stop looking for ways to defeat and weaken it is to justify the BJP's Islamophobia. The 24 Muslim MPs have basically come from the non-NDA pool of 250 MPs, the ratio thus works out to be close to ten percent. Had the NDA too maintained this ratio there would have more than fifty MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha.

It is one thing to ask non-BJP parties to be more responsive to the issue of Muslim representation, but asking Muslims to move away from building effective social and political coalitions against the BJP and gravitate to exclusive identity politics can only have totally opposite implications. It can only be a recipe for helping the BJP by disintegrating the anti-BJP vote and thereby ensuring greater invisibilisation and certainly not improved representation of Muslims in Indian politics. Any comparison between Sikhs and Muslims in terms of representation is also totally misplaced. Sikhs are concentrated primarily in the state of Punjab and most Sikh MPs come from this state. The Muslim population on the other hand is spread across the country, albeit not uniformly.

There are many constituencies where Muslim population ranges between fifteen to twenty percent and which used to elect Muslim MPs in the past, but the majority of Muslim MPs today come only from constituencies where Muslims comprise the largest community locally accounting for at least a third of the population. This is the impact of the BJP's divisive and Islamophobic politics. The only way to defeat this design is to forge stronger and wider bonds of solidarity among various minorities and marginalised groups,

both nationally and locally, in the shared battle for democracy and justice, and the majority of Indian Muslims are already following this course. In fact, the 2024 elections have also highlighted the need and possibility of developing similar solidarity among Dalits, Adivasis and other oppressed and marginalised identities.

United Assertion with in Parliament and Beyond

The spirit of solidarity is central not just to building local or regional level social coalitions but also in fostering a coalition at the all-India level comprising a broad spectrum of ideological streams and regional parties. The INDIA coalition answers this need in some essential respects and this is why in spite of its belated formation and lack of local or state-level unity in certain states, it has succeeded in securing a high degree of popular support and electoral success.

With the declining influence of ultra-nationalist fervour and Hindutva frenzy in the electoral arena, the core of the BJP under Modi and Shah has been exposed as a crony capitalist enterprise driven by an aggressive Gujarat lobby. Increasing commercialisation of religion and

domination of the Gujarat lobby and its corporate cronies have started emerging as the manifest features of the economic and political equations around the much-hyped temples and temple corridors. From UP to Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra to Manipur, the people of India have sent out a strong message against over-centralisation, disproportionate domination of the Gujarat lobby and the disaster that passes for 'double engine governments' and 'maximum governance' across much of India.

It is true that the 2024 verdict has fallen short of an outright defeat and ouster of the Modi regime. But it has surely dented the arrogance and power of the regime in a big way. Democracy has got some much needed breathing space. The agenda that has been set in these elections around secure livelihood, justice, constitutional rule of law, secular democracy and inclusive and diverse India must be backed within Parliament and out on the street with the indomitable courage and power of the people. Constitutional democracy has indeed struck deep roots in India over the last seven decades and we, the people of India can never allow fascism to get entrenched and turn India into a republic of fear and hate. ■



CPIML Victory: Consolidation of People's Agenda in Bihar

▲ KUMAR PARVEZ

After nearly 35 years, the CPIML registered a historic win on the Ara Lok Sabha seat. We remember that in 1989 Comrade Rameshwar Ram had won the seat under the banner of IPF. In the adjacent Lok Sabha seat of Karakat, CPIML successfully registered another victory. Even though no Lok Sabha candidate from the left had been able to secure a victory in Bihar in the last 20 years, CPIML victory this time is an indication of the rise of a new left in the Hindi belt.

Despite a strong anti-NDA sentiment in Bihar, the BJP did not face losses in the state in that proportion. It was Bihar which paved the way for a greater alliance amongst the parties in the opposition in defence of democracy and constitution and against Modi's rising tyranny. It also becomes important to remember CPIML Party Congress held in Patna in February 2023 for it is an important chapter in the history of solidifying an opposition against the Modi regime. While the opposition was taking the form of a formidable political alliance which would guarantee the BJP a definitive defeat, the BJP played its cards and managed to remove Nitish Kumar from the opposition in January 2024 thus overturning the final result in its own favour. But the struggling masses of Bihar rallied against this political manoeuvre. The united opposition's hopes found new horizons when lakhs rallied behind it at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan in the 'Jan Sankalp Rally' of 3rd March 2024. Not just Gandhi Maidan but all of Patna bloomed with banners in the red, green and Indian tricolour.



It was here from Patna, when Bihar declared that the switching loyalties of a mere individual or his party would not affect the battle against Modi's dictatorship.

The BJP regularly seemed to be on the backfoot during the Lok Sabha election campaign. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was forced to hold multiple 'sabhas' in Bihar and his narrative was mainly that of hate and negativity. The INDIA alliance on the other hand chose caste census, permanent appointment of teachers, employment, displacement, inflation and others as the main points of its election campaign narrative. Out of the 9 seats won by the INDIA alliance, 6 seats went to polls in the last phase. These were the very seats where the election campaign of the INDIA alliance was majorly consolidated by its leaders.

According to the vote percentage, RJD polled the highest at 22.14% while the BJP and JD(U) saw a decline of more than 3%. All things considered, the defeat of all of INDIA's candidates in Darbhanga, Tirhut and Kosi regions is shocking. Even though RJD's candidates saw an increase in vote share, this could

not be converted into a victory. The CPI(M) and CPI too met with the same fate. This became the main reason why the INDIA alliance could only secure 9 seats despite a widespread and strong anti-NDA sentiment. The nature of victory of the various alliance partners is of a curiously disproportionate nature. The RJD which contested in a total of 23 seats, managed a win in only 4. The Congress won 3 out of the 9 seats in which it contested and the CPIML which contested on only 3 seats, won all but one. Apart from this, Pappu Yadav won the Purnia seat as an independent candidate.

Continuing its strike rate from the Bihar Assembly elections of 2020, the CPIML has once again won a significant victory in the history of Bihar's politics. This goes on to show that had the INDIA alliance made a more practical strategy, it could have bagged a total of 20 seats.

Shahabad, Magadh and Seemanchal to an extent were the primary areas of INDIA's victory. This was also the very site of the opposition alliance; the Mahagathbandhan's victory during the Bihar Assembly elections of 2020. Seemanchal went to polls in

the second phase, Shahabad and Magadh, went to polls in the seventh and final phase of elections. All of the four seats in Shahabad went to the INDIA alliance. ML registered a victory in Ara and Karakat, RJD in Buxar and Congress in Sasaram (SC). Magadh, Pataliputra, Aurangabad and Jehanabad went to the RJD. Seemanchal, Kishanganj and Katihar went to the Congress and Pappu Yadav as previously mentioned won in Purnia.

The victories in Shahabad-Magadh as well as the defeats in the rest of Bihar are matters of thorough investigation for the INDIA alliance. The key to winning the rest of Bihar lies in the wins in Shahabad-Magadh. From the perspective of movements on the ground, Shahabad and Magadh have long been strongholds of the CPIML movement. A significant portion of the Dalit and Extremely Backward Communities in this area repose their trust in the CPIML and this played a crucial role in not only the victory of CPIML but also that of the RJD and Congress. The CPIML was the determining factor in Congress's victory in Katihar. The lead of 64,000 votes gained by its candidate Tariq Anwar in Balrampur Vidhan Sabha was significant in his overall win by nearly 50,000 votes.

An analysis of the election results brings us to two major conclusions. If the INDIA alliance wishes for a decisive victory in Bihar, it must do two things. First; the left movement infused with the revolutionary rigour of the CPIML must be fostered and strengthened across Bihar and second, RJD must actively engage with its political and social base at the grassroots level. The election result exposes a significant infiltration of BJP's ideology in large sections of North Bihar amidst RJD's social base. Making social justice the basis, RJD must move towards greater democratisation of its mass base and cross the bridge towards movements of the working class.

JD(U) and LJP's victory in Bihar was a surprise for the RJD. JD(U) became the major contributor in BJP's victory. The working assumption during the election campaign that JD(U)'s political stature was well on its way towards a significant drop proved to be false. Despite the win, Nitish Kumar's political surrender during the formation of the Modi 3.0, was deeply resented by the people of Bihar. This was an opportune moment for Nitish Kumar to stand firm on the issue of granting special status to Bihar but he betrayed Bihar's aspirations once again.

As the situation currently stands, the INDIA alliance must formulate a plan of action to advance its political role in Bihar. The demand for the status of 'Special State' to Bihar, the diverse set of agendas of Bihar's poor and modernization of Sone river canal system must be transformed into serialised movements by the INDIA alliance. The state assembly elections are not far from the horizon, going ahead on this path will be the perfect strategy to ensure a decisive defeat to NDA in 2025. ■



Women in Election Campaign of CPIML

▲ LEKHA ADAVI

(WITH INPUTS FROM MEENA TIWARI, SHASHI YADAV, ANITA SINHA, SAMTA RAI, & SHWETA RAJ)

Unlike Britain or America, Indian women achieved voting rights with the universal adult franchise being introduced at the time of independence, and this was indeed historic. However, the gender gap in political participation of women in India has been a topic of debate every election.

Ujjwala, Beti Padhao – Beti Bachao, Swachh Bharat, or Matru Vandana schemes, the BJP rolled out yojanas with women as the target group. The Indian National Congress promised Rs. 1 lakh cash transfer to women every year and 50% reservation for women in government jobs if they came to power in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and termed it 'Naari Nyay'. In Karnataka, they have implemented the free bus ride scheme called 'Shakti' and Rs. 2,000 monthly allowance for women under the Gruhalakshmi Yojana. Nitish Kumar too has a base among women who vote for him due to his policies on alcohol prohibition in Bihar. The 'Sashakt Mahila, Saksham Mahila', free cycles for girl students, 50% quota for women in panchayat and municipal bodies, financial assistance to Class 12 girl students, etc., have been some of his popular schemes. While political parties have left no stone unturned in influencing women voters with welfare schemes, the number of women who turn up for voting has actually been of concern.

For decades, Indian men cast their votes much more than women. However, the situation began to change in the 1990s, from when there has been a steady incline in women voter turnout. In the 2014 Lok Sabha

elections, the difference in voter turnout between men and women came down to 1.4%, and the women

Sabha elections, 31.20 crore women have reportedly cast their votes, with the turnout at 65.78%, with that of



voters outnumbered men by a thin margin of 1.7% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The 2019 general election also had registered a 5.1% increase in women voters, and reports show that in the various State elections of 2022 and 2023, there was a palpable increase in the number of women voters. However, in the 2024 Lok

men being slightly higher at 65.80%. Of the 36 states and union territories, the voter turnout of women in at least 19 states exceeded that of men. A Lokniti-CSDS survey suggested that 36% women voted for BJP as against 37% men, and whereas the Congress enjoyed more support among women than men.

Mahila Samvad

The independent and unique campaign among the women voters of the four constituencies that CPIML contested – namely, Arrah, Karakat, Nalanda and Kodarma – saw women-only teams conducting meetings with women in every village of the constituencies. While the everyday campaigns were undertaken by the party cadre at the grassroots level among farmers, youth, workers, in Dalit bastis and among poor households, the women cadre of All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) took out the jansampark campaign specifically among women voters to kindle political discussions. This was one-of-a-kind campaigns, which received accolades from the people, media, activists and politicians alike, as it mobilized the women voters solely on the basis of political issues and not rhetorics.

In Bihar alone, close to 800 meetings were held in villages of the constituencies. While women were the main focus in these meetings, they were joined by men, especially young men. Despite the scorching summer and heatwave across Bihar, the women leaders of AIPWA undertook these campaigns with much fanfare and enthusiasm with door-to-door campaigns, pamphlet distribution, coupon campaign, political discussions and one-to-one conversations with women. In the villages of Arrah, the women's team would begin with songs ripe with political context, which would attract the women to gather at a common area. The meetings had a presence of 50 women on an average, who would actively voice, electoral bond scam, unemployment, impact of GST, failing education & health systems, inflation, communal propaganda, misuse of ED/CBI, high electricity bills, violence and injustices against women by the BJP and BJP backed leaders, etc.,



and included local issues of access to water, cleanliness as well.

The Lokniti-CSDS post-election survey noted that the people assessed their household's financial condition, rather than their perception of the national economy, which determined who they voted for. This was visible during the mahila samvad, where the most hard-hitting issue was the economic crisis faced by their families. Skyrocketing price rise, insufficient ration doled out, high electricity bills, GST being imposed on cereals, vegetables and milk, etc., were talking points during the discussions. "The women in some of the Dalit tolas had stored their gas cylinders on the attic, as many of them were unable to afford its refilling, despite the Ujjwala scheme and they had to cook on firewood," said Comrade Anita Sinha who was campaigning among women in Daudnagar in Karakat LS constituency. Some women noted how they received electricity bills worth Rs. 90,000! "A woman in a village in Agiaon said she sold three of her mango trees to settle their electricity bills!" said Comrade Shweta Raj. The women were visibly upset with former Union Minister of Power RK Singh of BJP, who contested from Arrah and lost to Comrade Sudama Prasad of CPIML, since he was apathetic to

poor families in Bihar receiving bills worth thousands of rupees.

While Bihar noted the lowest voter turnout in the country, it witnessed 62.95% women turn up for voting as against 51.95% men. It is said that women have played a crucial role in the consecutive victories of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and have been hailed as a "silent force". However, the mahila samvad noted an anti-Nitish and anti-Modi wave in the villages. "While the women belonging to kurmi caste will most definitely vote for Nitish Kumar, in Nalanda, we were able to sway a section of them to vote for CPIML, especially among the scheme workers like ASHA, Anganwadi, mid-day meal workers, etc.," said Comrade Shashi Yadav and added that women were vocal on issues of development, which Nitish Kumar is known to have ushered in for Nalanda. "Women spoke about how road infrastructure did not reach their villages. They also raised concerns about Nal Jal Yojana, as handpumps were removed and now they wait for hours to fetch water for their homes," she said. Samta Rai, who campaigned in Arrah said that there was simmering anger among jeevikas as Nitish claimed that they had become 'lakhpatists', and whereas they actually earned Rs. 850 to Rs. 4,000 in a month and are caught

in a cycle of indebtedness. Many young women, who are said to be beneficiaries of education schemes doled out by Nitish expressed to the contrary that they are prevented from higher studies as they cannot afford education.

In villages of Obra, the women spoke of how they received calls from their daughters and sons studying in different states asking them to vote for INDIA bloc candidates, and not to the BJP, which influenced the women voters to be more receptive to the political discussions. The anti-incumbency against RK Singh was not only visible, but the derogatory language used by him against Sudama Prasad during his campaign, further irked the voters, as for them the issue of dignity and respect was key in this election.

Comrade Meena Tiwari said that the mahila samvad also took place in temples, where women attended shiv charcha. “While women had diverse political opinions and supported both the ruling regime and the opposition parties, it was clear that none of the women agreed with the Hindutva propaganda of the BJP,” she said. On the Hindu-Muslim hate being stoked by the BJP-RSS, a woman in Arrah told Comrade Samta Rai that everyone has a right to live in this country and each has a right to practice their religion, and that no one should bring a rift among the people based on their religion. She said, “Our Babasaheb Ambedkar is being broken. How can we tolerate that? They are taking the name of Ram. Will we protect Ram, or will Ram protect us?” they asked her. Comrade Shweta said that even when women had bought into the communal propaganda, countering it with conversations on labour rights, especially of scheme workers and women peasants, their minimum wages, maternity leave rights, etc., helped them understand the political context. Even in Hilsa, the women

were vocal about exercising their votes to CPIML or INDIA bloc candidate as they said they had decided to save the Constitution.

With CPIML having a strong presence in Arrah and in parts of Karakat and Nalanda constituencies as well, the women remember the fight for equality and dignity that the party has organised in the many past decades, and hence felt a strong connection with the party and the candidates. With a base in musahar tolas, the commitment to the party and the reverence towards the struggles were visible. “It was a hot day and we got hungry while campaigning in Srinagar village of Rajgir at a musahar tola. We requested the women to feed us, but they said that there was nothing available to eat in their homes. After much coaxing, a woman stood up and asked us why we wanted to eat in a musahar locality. So, we responded that the party was born amongst them, and that we would eat anything they offered us. Thereafter, one woman after the other went into their homes and got us something to eat,” narrated Shashi Yadav. She further noted how women in a village in Hilsa remembered the struggles led by the party for women to go to toilet in open spaces, and the oppression they faced at the hands of the feudal landlords due to that. “The women fought to keep the party strong in this village, because they knew they could not let go of the dignity they had won,” she said. In yet another meeting, a man belonging to the bhumihar caste was disrupting the women’s meeting with his counter propaganda, when a woman stood up and loudly said that the man and his community would not understand how the party has fought to ensure that the oppressed people are now able to sit on chairs or khatiya, and to wear chappals; and that if he were allowed to go on, then they will have to go back to the days when they were

oppressed.

During the covid crisis, there was an overall collapse of the health system, and it was then that former MLA of Agiaon and CPIML leader Comrade Manoj Manzil campaigned for strong health system and built two hospitals in the constituency (coming under Arrah LS constituency) and a third one is under construction. “As maternity health of women is a big issue in the constituency, and migration is also occurring due to lack of health infrastructure, building of these hospitals granted access to the people here, which helped garner a lot of goodwill for us,” said Comrade Shweta. The ‘sadaq par school’ movement led by Comrade Manoj Manzil for children of poor families to access good quality and dignified education had a great impact as well, especially since school mergers and high fees was restricting people from getting an education, she added. In Badgaon, where 22 comrades along with Comrade Manoj have been incarcerated in a politically motivated murder case, the women relatives of those men who are incarcerated campaigned for CPIML, while putting forth their political outlook to the other women and sought votes. Comrade Anita Sinha said that people remembered Comrade Rajaram Singh from the time he was an MLA 20 years ago and remembered the work he did in the Obra constituency at the time, and the struggles he led to achieve dignity for the people.

With the catchy slogan going with beats of “aap ka button kahan dabega... teen tara jahan rahega”, women from Dalit bastis and poor households, whether literate or illiterate, were able to cast their votes for CPIML, to save Constitution and to save democracy. ■

Mahila Samvad in Arrah Gave Boost for Victory

Meena Tiwari

The All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) campaigned for INDIA bloc candidates across the country. A jansampark campaign mostly among women voters helped elevate CPIML to victory in Arrah Lok Sabha constituency, while similar campaigns were also held in the other three constituencies where CPIML contested election in Bihar and Jharkhand.

The decision to have an independent campaign among women voters was initiated at the cadre convention of the INDIA bloc on April 7th. After subsequent meetings with the CPIML Election Steering Committee, Bhojpur district committee and meetings with the women's wings of the INDIA bloc parties like RJD, AAP, VIP, etc., 'mahila samvad' began on May 2nd which went on till the end of the election campaign. However, the jansampark campaign among women voters in localities was already initiated by AIPWA.

The mahilasamvad would commence with songs as an attempt to gather the women, which we also realized was helping them to grasp the political context of our campaign. Initially when meetings were being convened, it was preferred that only women partake in the discussions. However, women hesitated to come out of their homes due to the severe heat. Yet, the meetings saw the participation of 15 to 150 women, with an average of 50 to 70 women participating on an average. The mahila samvad team held at least 4 to 7 meetings on a daily basis. During the meetings, efforts were made to use simple and colloquial language to communicate, so that

the women also engage in the discussions. After the meetings, one-on-one conversations with the women helped in addressing the issues faced by them. In each of the villages where the campaign took place, we made sure to speak about the role played by CPIML and its MLAs, which was received well by the women. On many occasions, and despite the scorching heat, women took out rallies in their villages to campaign for the CPIML candidate. A total of 276 meetings were held by the team comprising of Meena Tiwari, Samta Rai and Priti Kumari, who formed the central team, and were joined by Shweta Raj, Sohila Gupta, Madhuri Gupta, Sangita Singh, Shobha Mandal and others on occasions. The women cadre of AIPWA held independent campaigns in different parts of the constituency, and were also accompanied by the social media team from Delhi at times.

In some places, the women sang songs that they had composed, or composed by few local comrades which gave a boost to our campaigns. In a few places, we held discussions with women who were attending shiv charcha in the temple premises. Since there were women supporting both the ruling and opposition parties, some differences were visible among them. But it was clear that most of them did not agree with the Hindutva ideology being propagated by the BJP. In Tarari, about 100 women working as jeevikas [workers of Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Scheme] participated in the meeting. In Sahar and Koilwar, there were about 7 to 8 meetings held amongst the Anganwadi workers.

It was decided in the District

Committee that the women from the families of those incarcerated in Badgaon, where 22 comrades have been sent to jail in a politically motivated case, must be involved in the election campaign. These women held jansamvad campaigns during the day in two blocks of the Agiaon assembly constituency against the persecution of activists and democratic voices by right-wing BJP-feudal forces. With their clear political understanding, they gave a boost to our election campaign.

During these meetings, it was observed that while the party has a strong base in the musahar tolas. However, there has to be change brought about in the living and economic condition of the people here, where the party can demand specific policies for their betterment. It was also felt that with little effort, a large difference can be made for the people in the Manjhi tolas. It was seen that there were no handpumps to fetch water and that garbage mounds were surrounding these localities. Few young women asked whether they were destined to live in such dump, if the garbage would ever be cleared, or whether they would see a handpump in their locality. In such areas, the Panchayat Raj Institutions should be asked to clean the garbage, and if this will not work, the party cadre and leaders should clean the area along with the people.

Women faced the brunt of price rise, unemployment and other difficulties, which made them to speak out against the government. As the party has stood with them in their fight for equality and dignity, while also being part of their everyday lives, it was easier for the mahila samvad team to build a connection and seek votes. The grassroot level work of the party cadre as part of collective leadership, led us to secure victory in Arrah. ■

Uttar Pradesh: A Vote for Livelihood and Liberties

▲ MANOJ SINGH

The massive defeat of BJP in Uttar Pradesh in the Lok Sabha elections has triggered an analysis of the reasons behind its defeat but the actual reasons are consciously being glossed over. The electorate was pained by unemployment, price rise, Agnipath scheme, paper leaks, rural distress and threat to constitution and democracy. The SP-Congress alliance, the PDA experiment, isolation of BSP and other factors transformed people's resentment into an anti-government wave.

Even the most well-known political and exit poll analysts were caught unaware by the mood of the voters while the winds of change blowing from Ganga, Saryu, Ghagra and Gomti rivers were foretelling the impending change in fortunes. Sashi Shekhar Rai, a political analyst from Phephana Assembly segment had predicted on 28 May that Ballia braces itself for a change. The cold winds from the wetlands of Ganga would reach Delhi.

This prophecy came to be true. During the chilly month of January, when the nation was witnessing the grand inauguration of the Ram temple, the cacophony produced indicated that the election results in UP were already decided in favour of the party in power.

The celebration was also observed in Sohgi Barwa, situated near Narayani river at the Bihar- Nepal border, where there is no road accessibility till date. People have to walk four kilometres on sand to reach their homes. There was a mood of celebration there during the Ram temple inauguration but two months later, the same people put out banners in favour of election



boycott till their demand for a bridge was not fulfilled.

I visited this village to prepare a write up and asked the people that on the day of voting, whom would they prefer - the Ram temple or demand for a bridge? After an initial silence, three to four people spoke in chorus- we will vote for our issues.

This reply was unexpected. After some days, banners sprung up in 26 villages announcing boycott of BJP. Land of these villages had been acquired for construction of a bypass road at a circle rate which was seven years old. Nobody paid any attention to their demand but during election time the administration intervened to have the banners removed. The police started reaching the houses of people who had put up the banners. They were even called to the police station and told that putting such posters was against the moral code of conduct. There were tears in the eyes of a young man who said that he had voted for BJP during the previous

elections but this time we would use the power of vote to teach them a lesson.

Such voices could be heard even before the declaration of elections. During the first week of May, such dissenting voices could not be heard while commuting on train, bus, auto rickshaw or on foot. Be in Arrah and Chapra in Bihar or Deoria, Salempur, Basgoan, Ghosi, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Lalganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Maharajgunj or Kushinagar of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Unemployment, paper leak, Agnipath, inflation, threat to constitution and democracy were the issues being discussed in tea stalls and kiosks. On the other hand, voices about Mandir, Modi, free rations remained muted. Even these people agreed that the Modi-Yogi government had failed on the issues of livelihood and price rise.

A labourer travelling from Arrah to Chapra was heard saying that the main issue was unemployment. Even a daily wage of Rs. 500 was falling

short. Another vendor was heard saying that even Rs. 150 fell short to buy vegetables for two square meals. One trolley puller said that when so many big things are happening, why are we not getting employment? A woman vendor selling bananas on Gorakhpur - Nausar road lamented that we have no employment and even the road on which we sell our goods is being made out of bounds for us. Where shall we go?

Students suffering from paper leak were saying that we will teach them a lesson by our vote. A youth from Chauri Chaura area of Gorakhpur was heard saying that candidates appearing for competitive exams would teach BJP a lesson. Another said that only a fool would vote for BJP.

Devi Prasad Nishad who stays in Sanichara village of Sant Kabir Nagar was preparing for a religious ritual to worship his boat. Simultaneously, he was preparing a memorandum regarding the non construction of roads for the sitting BJP MP and candidate Praveen Nishad who was invited to attend his puja. He felt that there was no hope of getting a job in this regime. Even the elder Jhinku Nishad agreed with this view.

Ram Nakshatra Paswan of Chauri Chaura was a bit philosophical in his criticism. He said "All youth have become jobless in this government. No new vacancies have been created in the last ten years. Trees are planted to get shade. If the tree does not produce shade, it is better to chop it. You all are smart enough to understand what I mean".

To enlist the support of first time voters, BJP-RSS leaders were invited to address students in universities and colleges. This however did not cut ice with those voters. A youth named Ranjit of Muhammadabad narrated his journey. He completed a degree from Mumbai in 2018 and was expecting a job in some polytechnic

college. After remaining unemployed for six years, he started a soap agency. He lamented that the youth have lost hope in this government and want a change.

Such voices could be heard all the way up to Ayodhya. On the Ram path that leads to the Ram temple, Mauryaji has a shop that sells photos of the temple and other religious artwork. He was reluctant to talk when he came to know that I was a journalist. He said that nobody tells our real story. He said that a road had been constructed on his land and some land had been acquired for temple construction. He now pays 50 percent of his sales to the shop owner. He adds that destruction and not development has taken place. Kishore, who was selling goods nearby, had a similar story to tell. His vegetable shop was broken to widen the road and one lakh rupees was given as compensation. He has to pay Rs. 200 daily to use the footpath for vending. Another young shopkeeper told us that during the inauguration of the temple, we were locked in our houses while the VIPs had a tour of the city.

A new Ayodhya is being developed in Ayodhya. More than 3000 acres of land had been acquired for this purpose. Hundreds have lost their land and livelihood. When the woes of these displaced people were not heard by those who were 'bringing in Ram Lala', they tasted the bitter results in elections.

Even before the election results were announced, it was the talk of the town in Ayodhya that BJP would lose the elections. Along with Modi-Yogi, the residents were very angry with the sitting MP Lallu Singh for not standing with them.

The decision of BSP to distance itself from the national narrative and go solo in the elections proved self destructive. A large chunk of its social base voted for the India alliance as politics was polarised between the

BJP and the alliance.

The dilemma of the Dalit voters was explained by Shiv Shankar Ram of village Bariya in Ballia. He said "We are confused. Dalits are thinking of ways and means to defeat the BJP. One option is whether voting for BSP will defeat the BJP or whether voting for someone else will cause this to happen. One thing though is sure, our vote will determine the outcome of this election". The weakness of BSP in the elections had confused the Dalit voters. Some wanted to stay with BSP while others wanted to be part of the change.

The election results of Uttar Pradesh and the position of BSP clearly demonstrate that a large chunk of the core voters of BSP voted for the India alliance because they could feel the threat to the constitution made by Dr. Ambedkar. The Dalits and backward castes gradually got convinced that BJP wanted 400 seats so that it could change the constitution. Many BJP leaders including Lallu Singh, the candidate from Faizabad had made such statements. The India alliance had placed the issues of constitution and democracy in the forefront of their campaign. The Dalits, backwards and poor were convinced that even the basic rights of speech, franchise, equality and respect were given to them by the constitution. Hence they voted for the constitution against the BJP.

The autocratic and high handed behaviour of BJP was also building resentment among the people which finally exploded during the elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the bulldozer had been made synonymous with justice and law and order. The state officials at the behest of the government had become reckless. The right of people to protest had been severely curtailed. Dissenting voices on social media had been gagged. Many had to go to jail. Hence, at the opportune moment, they expressed their resentment

through their vote.

During these elections, large fault lines appeared in the social engineering that BJP had developed since 2014. During the last ten years, the BJP has been successful in winning over a large section of the other backward castes over and above its upper caste social base. The former sections were not getting adequate political representation in SP, BSP or Congress. Within the BJP, these sections were getting frustrated to see that in spite of their votes, the BJP was not giving them requisite political representation. Also this time, the SP used the PDA formulation of backwards, Dalits and minorities very effectively by giving more tickets to them. As a result, the other backward classes moved from BJP towards SP.

Even the upper castes have voted for SP against BJP at different seats. The Sainthwar Mall Mahasabha wanted one ticket from among the eight seats of their influence. When BJP refused, they supported the SP candidates in Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar and Kushinagar. SP won the first two and put up a good fight in the last seat. Similarly, in Deoria, Salempur, Basgoan, Ballia and Ghosi seats, sections of upper caste voters voted in varying degrees for the India alliance.

Efforts to portray this decisive defeat as internal subversion and expression of anger against the sitting MPs is too superficial. A policeman returning from election duty commented that the crowds in the rallies of Akhilesh and Rahul are spontaneous while that in the rallies of Modi and Shah were orchestrated.

Experts sitting in state capitals who have little connect with the pulse of the masses were calling these elections as very silent and comfortable for BJP. Time took a heavy toll of such prophecies. ■

The UP Story: *Farmers' Movement, Youth Unrest and Defence of the Constitution*

▲ NAKUL SINGH SAWHNEY

Since Narendra Modi ascended to power in 2014, and perhaps even before that, the General elections have always been a loud and boisterous affair in Uttar Pradesh. This time, however, election campaigns lacked the usual fanfare and were relatively lowkey.

Another striking difference between the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, was the lack of a wave, be it a Modi wave, NDA wave, INDIA wave or even a Mandir wave. With the heightened hyper-nationalist fervour in 2019 after the Pulwama blasts and Balakot air strikes, most voters overlooked their candidate and their vote for BJP was a direct vote to Modi. This time, a reverse undercurrent on a variety of socio-economic issues, if not a wave, was visible.

The ChalChitra Abhiyaan team travelled to 21 Lok Sabha constituencies across the state. The seats we covered include Ghaziabad, Meerut, Bijnor, Nagina, Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Etawah, Kheri, Dhaurahra, Kannauj, Badaun, Mainpuri, Hathras, Allahabad, Phulpur, Azamgarh, Ambedkar Nagar, Ghosi, Ballia and Ghazipur. As a rule, we identified numerically influential castes and communities in each constituency. We picked out villages and townships where these communities have a strong presence to understand how voters are thinking, the issues determining their votes and if and why their voting preferences have changed since 2019. On average, we covered at least two Vidhan Sabhas in each of the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies.

One thing to be noted across constituencies was an underlying fear among voters in several constituencies. Several voters often chose to remain silent and were discreet about the party or candidate of their choice. The term *tanashahi* or the notion of a dictatorial attitude of the BJP government was a big concern among several voters in UP, particularly among Dalit and OBC voters. The arrests of Arvind Kejriwal, the Chief Minister of Delhi and Hemant Soren, the Chief Minister of Jharkhand further cemented this idea. One farmer in Kannauj said, "Leaders like Kejriwal who worked for people have been put behind bars."

This was visible in Lakhimpur Kheri too where fear among the voters was prominently visible. On October 3, 2022, a convoy of Ashish Teni, son of Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teni, allegedly ran over protesting farmers mowing down four farmers and one journalist. Ajay Mishra Teni had once again been fielded as the BJP candidate from the area. In the Sikh majority Mirchiyan village in Kheri, an important part of the farmers' protest, people consistently said, that they will vote to change the government, but maintained an eerie silence on Teni's candidature owing to the lack of justice in the case. SP had fielded an OBC Kurmi candidate Utkarsh Verma 'Madhur' for this seat. Even in several Kurmi majority villages, people refused to open up about their voting preferences. A small dhaba owner told us off camera that people are generally scared of BJP's candidate and added, "If Teni has been fielded even after the entire country watched the video of



what his son did to farmers, then why won't people be scared? People want to vote him out but worry about the consequences. On the day of polling, if voters can overcome their fear, Teni will certainly lose." Teni lost to SP's Utkarsh Verma by over 34,000 votes.

Another prominent issue that dotted the varied landscape of UP was the agrarian crisis. Ironically, even Brahmin farmers who seemed to be strongly mobilized in favour of the BJP spoke of the agrarian crisis with anger. One of the specific and grave issues all farmers in these constituencies faced was the menace of the stray cattle that destroyed crops in the fields. With the Yogi government's increased restrictions on slaughterhouses and the fear of cow vigilantes, many farmers are left in the lurch. They are clueless about how to deal with their male cattle, essentially an economic burden on farmers who are anyway dealing with growing financial distress. These policies have robbed farmers of an additional source of income, and they are now forced to abandon their male cattle and also older cows and buffaloes who can no longer produce milk. The Yogi government has

unsuccessfully attempted to build cow sheds to keep the cattle in one place. The stray cattle are running havoc across UP and are keeping farmers awake all night to guard their crops.

Prashant from Rasoolpur village in Muzaffarnagar says, "Instead of getting a chance to study, I have been pulled into farming. Each time I go to the coaching class, I get calls to take care of the stray cattle that have barged into the fields and destroyed the crops." The stray cattle run over crops, graze on them and destroy them completely. The losses incurred by stray cattle are substantially higher than the quarterly cash transfer of Rs. 2000 (Rs. 500 a month) from the central government as part of the much-hyped 'Kisan Samman Nidhi'. Add to this the decrease in the weight of urea sacks (from 50 kg to 45 kg) with the price remaining at a constant Rs 242 and with a very nominal increase of roughly Rs 45 per quintal in State Advised Price for sugarcane in the last seven years when compared to previous UP state governments, the disillusionment of farmers is evident. This has resulted in the drifting away of several non-Yadav and non-Jat

agrarian OBC castes from the BJP in West UP. This includes castes like Lodhi Rajputs, Kurmis, Kushwahas, Sainis who are essentially marginal and small farmers.

In Etawah, many poor voters expressed concern over the free ration claim by the Central government. Instead of wheat and rice, Bajra and corn are being distributed. These cannot be consumed in the scorching summer heat. During the 2022 UP Assembly elections, Jayant Chaudhary, chief of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), when asked about his possible alliance with BJP said, "We are not a 'chavanni' (25 paise coin) who will change." Two years later, on March 2, 2024, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), a party with a significant Jat following in Western UP, joined the BJP-led NDA alliance. It was in the hope of consolidating Jat voters for NDA. But in many seats like Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Aligarh, Agra etc, Jat voters haven't shifted to NDA to the extent that they had hoped for after this RLD leader Jayant Chaudhary's turncoat moment.

The ripple effects of the historic thirteen-month-long farmers' movement of 2020-21 continue to impact the Jat voters of the region and they remain suspicious of the newly formed alliance. Jagmehar Singh, a Jat farmer from Phugana village of Muzaffarnagar constituency said, "The file on farm laws has been strategically kept away for now. Soon after the elections, it will bring the three laws back if they are elected. Farmers will go back to Delhi to protest."

In many constituencies like Kairana, Meerut, and Muzaffarnagar, it was also observed that the low voting turnouts are a result of core BJP communities voting in fewer numbers. For example, in the first three phases, one factor that hurt the BJP was the massive Rajput panchayats held in Meerut,

Kairana and Muzaffarnagar constituencies against the party. This was in response to a couple of speeches made allegedly against the community by BJP leaders. On March 22, 2024, Parshottan Rupala, a BJP candidate from Rajkot in Gujarat said, “Even kings and royals bowed down to the British...but not Rukhi samaj (a Dalit community).” He was seen to praise Dalits at the expense of Rajputs and Kshatriyas whom he accused of entering “roti-beti” (breaking bread and entering into marital relations) with the British.

Many also accused the BJP of ‘keeping silent’ when the caste name Gurjar was inscribed on the statue of Mihir Bhoj who they claim is a Rajput. Some also expressed apprehension that the Thakur leader Yogi may not get prominence in the upcoming elections. In Ghaziabad, a relatively safe seat for the BJP, there was growing resentment against the party. The fact that Atul Garg, a Baniya candidate was fielded by the party instead of a Rajput split the roughly five lakh Rajput votes in the area.

In the absence of a larger national narrative, the anger among the Rajput community couldn’t be quelled and many in the community boycotted the elections. As a result, in several constituencies in West UP voter turnout in Rajput-dominant villages was far lower than the average in their constituencies and significantly lower than the community’s polling in 2019. This too, hurt the BJP’s chances on several seats in West UP.

While there was disillusionment with the ruling party, even the opposition INDIA bloc was not able to win over their confidence. As a result, voter enthusiasm was minimal and many chose not to vote. What was also evident was a simmering anger against the ruling dispensation among large sections



of the rural and semi-urban poor and even middle classes. Issues of inflation and unemployment were oft-repeated by voters.

In Meerut, many voters talked about how BJP’s key campaign points like the scrapping of Article 370 in Kashmir had no impact on their lives. One of them said, “We are not buying land there!” With growing unemployment, anger among the youth was further fueled when the Uttar Pradesh Constable Recruitment and Promotion 2024 examination was cancelled. The exam was held on February 17 and 18 this year and over 48 lakh aspirants took the exam for 60,244 posts. It was later revealed that the examination papers had leaked. The examination was declared null and void, and the state government announced that the exam would be held again after the Lok Sabha elections. Repeated incidents of paper leaks in the Yogi government have only increased the despondency among young voters who eye government jobs.

Subhash who passed Class 12th in 2021 in Kunwarpur village in Hathras appeared for the UP police exams recently. He says, “Despite Yogi saying that he is very strict, the paper was leaked yet again. Apart from the cancellation of the exam, we also ended up wasting money on the form, and conveyance to the exam centre once again. No one in my village has

got any government job in the last three years.” Moreover, youth from across large parts of rural UP have always eyed a job in the army. The recent Agniveer scheme has proven to be yet another wet blanket. Ajay in Palia Kalan, who completed Class 12 a few years back, from Lakhimpur Kheri Lok Sabha added, “Many of us did not manage to get married, we are way past the age because we are unemployed.” Ajay belongs to the Dalit community in the area.

Apart from the anger on similar issues of unemployment and inflation evident in the Dalit communities across UP, there is another concern. On March 25, 2024, BJP Anant Kumar Hegde from Karnataka called for the ‘rewriting’ of the Indian Constitution which is not possible without winning 400 of the 543 seats. At least, three other BJP candidates openly stated the same intentions. The videos of their statements have gone viral. The BJP’s campaign slogan ‘abki baar, 400 paar,’ thus caused a growing insecurity among various SC voters. Rajpal Singh Jatav, from Bisoli in Badaun, says, “Anant Hegde says if we get 400 seats, we will change the Indian Constitution. The Constitution is the soul of all the oppressed, exploited, marginalized people in the country. If the BJP comes into power, our soul perishes, our basic fundamental rights will also perish.”



The party's alleged intention to change the Constitution and scrap reservations made many wary in the various SC communities in the state. This includes non-Jatav SC communities, large sections of which have in the past few years been voting for the BJP. This departure from the previous trends was visible across the state. Bhaga, a daily wage, Dalit labourer from Palia Kalan said, "As far as vote is concerned, I am illiterate, but Babasaheb has written in the Constitution that every five years, our political representative must change, so will vote to change."

Another factor that should have worked in BJP's favour, but is proving to be their biggest dampener is that BSP and SP couldn't finally ally. In several constituencies like Meerut, Saharanpur, Nagina, Kairana, Etawah, Lakhimpur Kheri, Mainpuri etc, there was a visible shift of Dalit voters from BSP to INDIA alliance candidates essentially looking to vote for the strongest candidate against BJP. But, a large majority of those who didn't feel comfortable shifting to the INDIA alliance have been retained by BSP and the shift to BJP has been minimal. In 2019, because of the SP-BSP alliance, on many seats that didn't have a BSP candidate, one also witnessed a shift of a substantial number of Dalit votes to BJP. With BSP retaining such voters in 2024, the BJP's vote share was adversely affected.

On the other hand in East UP seats like Azamgarh, Ambedkar Nagar, Ghazipur and Ballia many Dalit voters continued to strongly stand with BSP, but small fractures were visible here too. On Ghazipur seat Reena Devi, a Dalit woman voter said, "Our children are unemployed. Inflation is going through the roof. We got gas cylinders but can't afford to refill them. The men are doing private jobs where they earn only Rs. 5,000-Rs.7,000 a month. How can we survive on that money? Last time we voted for Modi, but this time we will vote for the INDIA alliance."

While the Muslim community largely rallied behind INDIA alliance candidates, exceptions were visible here too. For example, in the Nagina constituency, there was a strong consolidation of both Muslims and Dalits in favour of Chandrashekhar Azad from the Azad Samaj Party. This is because Muslims were looking for an alternative candidate owing to SP's silence on many issues related to the Muslim community. Mohammad Zeeshan a young voter from Nagina said, "Chandrashekhar is young leader. He raises issues ranging from sports stadiums, and the condition of hospitals to his opposition of NRC, standing with farmers and our women wrestlers (who alleged sexual assault by BJP leader Brij Bhushan Singh). He has even been attacked and jailed." On the other hand, many voters felt dismayed by SP's glaring silence on these issues.

As one moved further away from West UP, it seems Akhilesh Yadav's PDA (P' for Pichade (backward classes), 'D' for Dalits and 'A' for Alpsankhyak or minorities) slogan has penetrated successfully among the people. Across the state, the women rural voters we spoke to were particularly upset with the lack of allocation of houses under the PM Awaas Yojana. Village after village, they were keen to show their abysmal living conditions to our cameras.

What is also noteworthy, is that the two seats that were most adversely affected by the 2013 communal violence, Muzaffarnagar and Kairana, have both been lost by the BJP. Even more heartening is the fact that Kairana elected a Muslim woman as their MP. Overall, a narrative of social justice coupled with the demand for economic justice was able to permeate among voters of UP, which immensely damaged the BJP.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that the three youngest MP's from UP include a Dalit man, Pushpendra Saroj, MP from Kaushambi, a Dalit woman, Priya Saroj from Macchlishahr constituency and Iqra Hasan, an OBC Muslim woman from Kairana constituency. At the same time, a young assertive Dalit leader like Chandrashekhar also secured a very convincing victory from Nagina.

It will be important to see how these leaders raise people's issues over the next five years. However, given how marginalised communities have seen myriad assaults in the last ten years, their victory does indicate a positive shift in the state.

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Uttar Pradesh: Dalit Politics at the Crossroads

▲ MRINMAY

The Lok Sabha election results of 2024 have spurred the debate about the role and future of Bahujan Samaj Party. The party contested elections on all the seats of Uttar Pradesh but could not win any. Nevertheless, it was successful in damaging the BJP and India alliance on some seats. The supporters of the Samajwadi party and India alliance estimate a loss of about 16 seats due to the BSP. They further allege that BSP decided to go alone in the elections to benefit the BJP and fielded candidates with the intention of damaging the India alliance. The truth behind these accusations will be ascertained in due course but there can be no denying the fact that the tactics and decisions of BSP and its supremo Mayawati during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections have created a sense of suspicion in the minds of its social base. This has resulted in a section of its social base voting for the India alliance and producing a favourable result for the alliance in Uttar Pradesh.

The electoral fortunes of BSP had started declining from the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The results of that election indicate that in pockets of sharp communal polarisation, the core voters of BSP, Jatavs voted for BJP and it fetched them 73 seats. The BSP got 19.7 % votes and could not win a single seat. Buoyed by the results, the BJP repeated this tactic again to its advantage in the 2017 Vidhan Sabha elections and obtained results similar to 2014. In a nutshell, a sharp communal polarisation by BJP facilitated the transfer of dalit votes from the BSP's fold to its kitty. Statistics point out that even in this situation, the Muslim voters

continued to repose faith in BSP. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, there was an alliance of BSP and SP which clearly benefited BSP and with a 19% vote share, it won 10 seats while SP won 5. Just after these elections, BSP however snapped ties with SP, accusing the latter of not transferring its votes. The statistics however do not corroborate this charge.

In the 2024 elections, the vote share of BSP has shrunk to 9% indicating that even its core Jatav voters, who constitute 11% of the state's population have not all voted for the party. However, in constituencies where Muslim candidates contested on BSP tickets, they also got votes of Muslims. Overall, the tactics of BSP was to split opposition votes to benefit BJP. The same tactic was used in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections which led to the re-election of Yogi government with a thumping majority and BSP winning a single MLA.

The surrender and a tacit understanding of BSP and its supremo Mayawati with BJP and the duo of Modi-Shah is a hotly debated issue in the corridors of power as well as the social base of BSP. This decade old relationship of these two parties had led to BSP being dubbed as the B team of BJP. The silence of Mayawati, who once was considered a strong and gutsy leader, on issues like threat to democracy and constitution is indeed puzzling, though to many political commentators, it is an open secret that she keeps quiet to keep the ED and CBI away. Mayawati's capitulation was also visible during the 2024 elections.

After the declaration of elections

and till the first round of voting, it was being speculated that Mayawati might join the India alliance. Signals given by the Congress and statements of Akhilesh lent credence to this speculation. It was also anticipated that Mayawati might favour the alliance while selecting her candidates. And in fact this appeared to happen till the first and second phase of the elections, especially in Kairana and Muzaffarnagar seats. But after these phases were over, the BSP candidates started getting replaced to favour BJP. The Azamgarh and Jaunpur Lok Sabha seats are two such examples. The abrupt public censure of her cousin Akash Anand by Mayawati and withdrawing him from campaigning was attributed to his anti BJP speeches which were getting a positive response from the voters. With his sidelining, the little that remained of BSP's credibility was also lost. After the declaration of election results, Mayawati has put the blame of her defeat on Muslim voters.

It is quite apparent that the BSP supremo is on her back foot and her social base is in a state of confusion. Those Dalits who are propertied, and who have had the taste of power which includes some old BSP leaders and their family members and others who have had the benefit of reservation in bureaucracy are moving closer towards BJP. This is an important development. One can understand it by going through some of the names of the people who have joined BJP. A close confidant of Kashiram and important BSP leader Gandhi Azad's daughter Sangeeta Azad contested and won on a BSP ticket from Lalganj Lok Sabha seat

in 2019, joined BJP during this election. Brijlal, the Uttar Pradesh DG Police during Mayawati's regime had joined BJP in 2014.

Many dalit bureaucrats after resigning from service or post their retirement have joined BJP. Aseem Arun and Prem Prakash are two such examples. However, this option is not available to the poor, workers and dalit youth. In the last ten years, the Modi-Shah government has persecuted Dalits and by granting EWS reservation to the forward castes, diluted and distorted the very foundational edifice of reservation. Dalits have realised that in the so-called Hindu Rashtra in the making, Dalits will be subjected to renewed caste discrimination and no wonder Dalits and other backward sections have voted in large numbers against the BJP and RSS. The election mandate has shown that the churning within the BSP's social base has risen to a new level.

The fallout of these events has accelerated the quest for an alternative leadership in Dalit politics. The rise of Chandra Shekhar Azad Ravan should be viewed in this backdrop. He led a powerful protest against violence on Dalits in Saharanpur in 2017. The Yogi government unleashed a brutal crackdown against him. His organisation, the Bhim Army seemed to emerge as a new rallying centre for Dalit youth in many parts of North India and now his spectacular victory in the Nagina Lok Sabha seat has further strengthened his position as a rising leader of Dalits, especially youth. The very name of his party Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) makes it clear that he wants to contend with Mayawati over the political legacy of Kanshi Ram. It remains to be seen if the new party can carve out any different political identity for itself than the BSP. ■

How Peoples' Movements Propelled the Opposition

▲ AKASH BHATTACHARYA



The Lok Sabha Elections of 2024 were remarkable for multiple reasons. First of course because against all odds, the united opposition (the INDIA Alliance) managed to give a considerable blow to BJP's fascist game plan and opened up the possibility of not only salvaging our democracy but also stretching it to new horizons.

The unity of the opposition was the second remarkable aspect. The last instance of a united opposition fighting an autocratic ruler comes from 1977 elections, when multiple parties came together as the Janata Party to overthrow Indira Gandhi's regime. But Janata Party was an attempt at creating unity by overlooking differences and it did not last long. Democratic forces learnt its lessons from it. INDIA, in contrast, was an alliance which accommodated differences rather than set them aside prematurely. Some constituents may change but INDIA, encouraged by this against-the-odds performance, looks set to retain its core: the Congress, significant section of the social justice parties, and the three major Left parties.

The third, and perhaps the most significant aspect, has been the role played by common citizens in stopping a 400-aspiring Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at 240. Two major mass movements – the movement against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and the movement against the farm laws – played a pivotal role in crystallizing opposition unity. Other major actions and policies of the BJP government – National Education Policy (NEP), labour codes, indiscriminate privatization, encouragement of crony capitalism, institutionalization of hatred, and systematic suppression of dissent, and attacks on the political opposition, and so on – led to united mass action of various kinds.

Come the election, common citizens, civil society organizations (Eddelu Karnataka, Watan Ki Raah Par), issue-based social movements (e.g. Right to Food, Right to Information) mobilized on their own to teach a lesson to the BJP. Where the INDIA alliance lacked cohesion, these so-called

non-political actors stepped in to build coordination and fill in the lacunae in the campaigns led by the major political parties. INDIA was indeed a people-driven rather than leader driven initiative. The whole process energized a whole generation who are now poised to play a key role in shaping the future of the country.

Common citizens not only campaigned but also actively kept a watch on the elections. Several representatives of civil society organizations held meetings in Bengaluru and Delhi to discuss the manner in which the Lok Sabha elections were conducted and vowed to prevent any kind of malpractices or manipulations during the counting of votes. A Vigilant Voter Task Force was formed to make sure that the elections were conducted in a free and fair manner, and a Transition Watch Commission was formed to keep a check on horse-trading other malpractices after the results were out.

In a resolution called the Delhi Resolution, passed on 21 May, political parties and civil society organizations agreed on the need to challenge the pro-BJP Exit Poll narrative and prepare for mass mobilization all over the country in case of manipulation of the results. Initiatives such as these have played an important role in pressurizing institutions like the Election Commission of India and the judiciary to uphold the constitution in letter and spirit.

Peoples' initiative and successful attempts at self-organization are major gains of this election. Right now, there is a need to build on and consolidate these gains and strengthen the anti-fascist struggle, in tandem with the parties who are willing to do so. ■

The New Media Heroes

▲ JAIDEEP VARMA

Within the pun in the headline lies the story of the 2024 elections in India. The largest election so far in human history wasn't actually an election as much as an attempt of the citizenry and the opposition to wrest the country back from criminal capture.

The authoritarian exercise was being carried in the guise of an election while making a mockery of a level playing field. A large part of the business sector and almost the entire mainstream media participated in this from the government's side. All the governmental sources of information, all the main newspapers, all the major news channels, were most blatantly bought-out - all of them intensely spewing propaganda and fake news for months (along with WhatsApp forwards). This had a big effect on the elections, of course, especially in the less economically advantaged sections of society (60-80% of India, depending on the definition) where people have little energy or time to comprehend anything beyond survival. Meanwhile, the entire law enforcement machinery was being used to throttle the opposition (fake cases, imprisonment, frozen bank accounts - the lot). Even the Supreme Court had been transparently infested as it kept throwing out cases pertaining to a free-and-fair election (like not allowing a tallying of the VVPAT slips with the EVMs). And the Election Commission did not even make an attempt to hide its affiliation to the ruling party.

The mainstream media obviously did not report on any of this but neither did the international media. The most prominent international media houses disgraced themselves (as has been their wont for a few years now) by merely quoting or re-publishing the fake opinion polls (from the transparently sold-out Indian media) that showed Modi comfortably coming back for a third term.

Initially, it had seemed as if the uniting of the opposition would scuttle Modi's chances of coming back (given that he had 37% of the vote last time around). But with the rearrangement of allies and the largescale unethical buying out of MPs by BJP from opposition parties (who had their own electorally beneficial caste bases), this equation had altered somewhat. The scale of propaganda increased to such an extent that it was not unfeasible that BJP (in the sole name of Modi) would have increased its following, despite its performance thoroughly not justifying it.

This is where the role of the YouTube channels changed this election. A very small section of the media had already resisted for a while - The Wire, Scroll, Newsland, The Caravan and a few others, for example. But now, it became akin to a mass movement, going by the pace at which subscriber bases and viewership grew on YouTube and how such material began to be shared on social media. Ravish Kumar and Dhruv Rathee began the noticeable escalation - the two stars of this space, and Dhruv in particular succeeded not just in reaching out to a really wide and young audience but also galvanising them into action especially by taking it to the WhatsApp turf with his #Mission100Crore campaign.

On the other side, the transparently governmental-sponsored YouTube channels, like Beer Biceps (Ranveer Allahbadia) and ANI (Smita Prakash) appeared to find viewers but not enough impact - at least not in organically



measurable ways. The post-election analysis by Smita Prakash (called “Samosa Caucus”) perfectly demonstrates the smugness of that enterprise – a bunch of middle-aged men trying to be self-consciously cool (in English), while their thoroughly half-baked pronouncements, often laced with poorly disguised bigotry, renders the assault on our time even more pointless. When the impotence of these channels becomes obvious (when the Modi government goes), their true worth will manifest.

But when the election began, it is the Hindi YouTube entities, those news bloggers and quasi-channels, who distinguished themselves. They fearlessly separated themselves from everyone else, and began to get specific. They didn’t just report on reports from the ground, they combined them, connected dots, extrapolated information, and even predicted things. When Prashant Tandon said on DB News the night before the first phase of voting that Modi’s first rally speech after that would be like an exit poll, and Modi came out with a rabidly bigoted speech (his worst as PM) – that was the moment when suddenly all of this became more real than anything else.

The YouTube channels did war-time coverage, with urgency and courage. Because this WAS war. A vicious fight to save democracy from emphatic criminal capture. When Prof Ravikant, before the third phase of voting, against all expectations, predicted a rout in UP for the BJP (he actually said they would struggle to

get 30-35 seats), it was completely new territory. Some others, like Anand Vardhan Singh, said the same thing – and all of them began to gradually, in varying degrees, converge to this point. This specificity was absolutely crucial – it provided a sharper focus on a reality that so many otherwise were too scared to even comprehend – that BJP was losing in UP, probably very badly. You could actually feel the energy lifting and a spirit of discovery spreading – amongst the viewers as well, while most of these journalists predicted results that ranged between 190 and 250 seats for the BJP (accounting for manipulation as well). Their subscribers and viewer numbers began to rise quickly as well.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that people began to speak more freely about BJP’s descent as the election went on. More people appeared to have come out and voted also precisely because of this. Hope is an absolutely essential part of such an exercise – action cannot follow without it (which is why the narcissistic doomsayers on social media do more harm than they realise). Yogendra Yadav (who predicted these same numbers, but also in the mainstream media) is now being feted for getting it right, but many of these journalists did too. Yadav has actually said that if more people had known that BJP was in trouble (since mainstream media’s reach is far, far more), BJP would have lost an additional 50-80 seats, probably even more. That is how significant information, and specifically this brand of hope, was.

The CSDS Lokniti post-election study suggests that 1% more of the poor voted for the BJP this time (which means their welfare schemes worked electorally). While 1% less from the lower middle-class, 3% less from the middle-class and 3% less from the upper-class voted for the BJP (these are only economic category breakdowns, the caste breakdown

suggests the higher castes voting overwhelmingly for the BJP). Given that they would fall in the category of the target audience of these channels, this seems to strengthen the case that their coverage actually made a difference to these elections.

So, this is to acknowledge the contribution of all these journalists – who, in many ways took on the mantle from Satyapal Malik and Parkala Prabhakar in provocation (whose fiery interviews did have an impact months before the election), but adding much more specificity and authenticity in terms of ground reports – making it all altogether more real. The perseverance of people like Rajeev Srivastava of DB Live and Sanjay Sharma of 4 PM, the sharpness of Deepak Sharma, Prof Ravikant and Prashant Tandon, the anecdotal chirpiness and insights of Ashok Wankhede, the gravity of Abhisar Sharma, Anand Vardhan Singh, Punya Prasun Bajpai and Ajit Anjum, the clarity of Prem Kumar, KP Malik and Vivek Deshpande, the contributions of Neelu Vyas, Girijesh Vashistha, Abhishek Kumar, Bushra Khanum, Shravan Garg, Dinesh K Vohra, Umakant Lakhera, Sheetal P Singh, Meenu Jain, Priya Sahgal, Sandeep Manudhane, Shakeel Akhtar, Vineeta Yadav, Anil Sinha, Girish Joshi, Akhil Swami, Abhay Dubey, Mayur Jani and so many more (including Satya Hindi and Ashutosh, though their propensity to present the “opposing voice” to the “rebel voice” diluted their coverage, as the latter was just establishment propaganda) must be remembered at this moment, as much as our united opposition.

They are heroes of this freedom movement, which is still a work-in-progress, but the progress is undeniable.

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Maharashtra Elections: Dalit Realignment in Defence of the Constitution

▲ AJIT PATIL

The Mahavikas Aghadi (MVA) of Congress, NCP-Sharad Pawar and Shivsena (UBT) won 30 out of 48 Lok Sabha seats it contested. This tally could have improved by at least five seats if the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) had joined the MVA alliance. One more seat could have been added to the opposition tally if Raju Shetti's Swabhimani Paksha would join hands with MVA. There has been a strong undercurrent against the BJP rule at the centre and a sympathy wave for both Sharad Pawar's NCP and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena.

This election saw some significant realignments of the voters. The Muslims voted majorly for the MVA alliance, as the state witnessed increasing violence and hatred against minorities orchestrated by the ruling BJP-Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena alliance. The vote consolidation for MVA happened despite lack of representation to Muslims in the choice of the candidates.

Prakash Ambedkar, grandson of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, was a key player in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections with his party, the VBA, garnering a considerable vote of around 41 lakhs. (This was of course a cumulative effect of the Dhangar community's votes as well as votes of AIMIM.) VBA considerably impacted MVA's prospects by fracturing the anti-BJP votes. Considering Prakash Ambedkar's legacy and the 1.3 crore Buddhist votes in the state, the MVA tried to bring VBA on board. Prithviraj Chavan of the Congress is on record that the VBA was offered 5 seats.

The Dalits had made up their mind against the BJP because of the issue of subversion of the constitution.



The historic Dalit Panther Movement of 1972 paved way for organised struggles.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's warning against the republic being converted into Hindu rashtra had a deep resonance among the dalits besides the issues like price rise and unemployment.

In fact, the MVA winning 4 out of 6 seats, in Mumbai was due to the consolidation of dalit and Muslim votes from the slums and working class areas in favour of the opposition alliance. In other urban areas, like Thane and Kalyan where slum dwellers are in minority, the BJP led alliance has won. While this was the ground reality, the dalit parties and their leadership in the state proved out of tune with masses.

Dr. Babasaheb's clarion call - Educate, Organise and Agitate - to the dalit masses has been given a complete miss by the present dalit leadership and organisations. In Maharashtra, alone the total number of Dalit organisations runs into hundreds. After the demise of Dadasaheb Gaikwad, founder of Republican Party of India no organised struggles have been launched on the basic issues of employment, land, social, economic justice and housing (all the major slums in urban areas have majority of intra/inter-state

dalit and Muslim migrants) by any of the dalit groups. The quest has always been to enter the corridors of power. Sporadic actions have been limited as a symbolic reaction to emotional issues, without any sustained intervention to ensure justice.

Prakash Ambedkar along with Jogendra Kawade, Ramdas Athavale, Gavai had joined hands with Congress in 2004 and won the parliamentary elections. He founded Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh, aligned with AIMIM and after the Bhima Koregaon incident formed the VBA. He had announced a joint front with Shiv Sena (UBT) in early 2024, but he finally decided to contest independently and put up candidates in 37 constituencies. Many candidates opted out and had to be replaced at the last hour. This time around the vote share came down to a mere 15 lakhs.

There is a widespread criticism of Dalit leadership in general and that of Prakash Ambedkar in particular amongst the Dalit masses quite openly. It remains to be seen how this criticism converts itself into a united Dalit assertion in terms of organisation for wider socio economic justice and the rightful political space. ■

Lok Sabha 2024:

Fighting Institutional Takeover

Odds Stacked Against the Opposition

▲ **AKASH BHATTACHARYA**

The opposition's performance despite institutional inaction, subversion of the Election Commission, strategic silences of the part of the judiciary, blatant violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by none other than the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), voter suppression, attacks on Muslim voters, and so on, is a testament to the peoples' resilience. The opposition prevented a disastrous (and possibly decisive) defeat and salvaged enough space to stage a comeback.

Misuse of Law Enforcement Agencies

Over the last few years, the BJP-led union government has brazenly used the federal investigative agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to harass and intimidate opposition leaders across the country. Leaders of non-BJP state governments have been key targets. In the months leading up to the elections, bank accounts of the Congress have been frozen.

Since 2014, when Modi came to power, around 95 percent of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) related cases have been against opposition leaders. Clearly, this pattern reflects the politics of vengeance by unleashing ED against those who speak against the Modi regime's anti-people policies.

The law enforcement agencies were used to imprison two elected Chief Ministers – Hemant Soren of Jharkhand and Arvind Kejriwal of Delhi – in dubious cases. Both were

powerful opponents of the BJP. Soren had repeatedly demanded the constitutional recognition of a separate Sarna religious code for the Adivasis: a clear rebuff to the Hindutva politics of appropriation. Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has been steadily building a welfare-ist politics focusing on civic amenities, health and education: a sharp contrast to the Hindu majoritarian politics of the BJP.

Arvind Kejriwal's arrest came at a time when the BJP government was under the scanner for its use of electoral bonds to acquire vast amounts of wealth from big corporations. The Supreme Court had declared these bonds unconstitutional and their details had been made public. Kejriwal's arrest seemed like a desperate and draconian method to try and flip the narrative.

Subversion of the ECI

Serious doubts arose over the neutrality of the ECI, after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) changed the composition of the three-member selection committee for the picking the members of the ECI. In 2023, the BJP government had brought in a Union Cabinet minister in place of the Chief Justice of India into the committee.

The manner in which the two members of the ECI were selected and appointed on March 14 this year, compelling the third member, the leader of the opposition Congress, to boycott, reflected the use of partisanship in the appointment. It was later alleged that the stretched

election schedule worked out by the ECI was at the instruction of the government to facilitate campaigning for the BJP. This allegation looks quite correct, as the stretched schedule gave the BJP ample time to pick up its election campaign after faring poorly in the earlier rounds.

Violations of MCC

The already compromised ECI closed its eyes to the regular violations of the MCC by the PM Narendra Modi. His (and his party's) repeated negative invocations of the Muslim community, and manipulative interpretation of the Congress manifesto, were in direct contravention to the MCC. The MCC disallows activities that "aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguistic." The MCC also states that "criticism of other parties or their workers based on unverified allegations or distortion shall be avoided."

Speaking at a pre-poll rally in southern Rajasthan town on 21 April, Modi said, "When they (the Congress) were in power, they said that Muslims had the first right to the properties of the state. This means that they would collect these properties and give them to the ones who have more kids (insinuating Muslims). They will give it to the ghusapethyon (infiltrators). Do you want to give away your hard-earned money to the intruders?" This was his response to the opposition agenda of wealth redistribution.

The PM's behavior set the tone, allowing many BJP leaders –

especially Himanta Biswa Sarma – to invoke hatred and Islamophobia on a regular basis. Sarma, for example, said on May 15 in Jharkhand, that India is a Hindu nation and hence the government should not fund “mullah-producing” madrasas. Some BJP members openly called for the changing the constitution. Yet neither the Supreme Court (SC) nor the ECI dared to act against the ruling party. The judicial inaction against blatant violations of the constitution was galling, but not unexpected in the context of a right-wing takeover of institutions.

Judiciary Compromised

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the age of Modi has been how politically beneficial the Supreme Court’s rulings have been for the Union executive. Not only have controversial laws either been upheld but, in some cases, they have never been heard, this allowing the policies to continue. On the other hand, dissenting voices have been systematically imprisoned under stringent anti-terror laws in concocted cases.

Going back to 2019, the Modi government amended the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to make it retrospectively applicable. This further helped it weaponize the Enforcement Directorate to go after India’s Opposition.

Later that year, the court also upheld the Modi government’s move to provide quotas to upper castes based on an income threshold. The order radically changed how India’s reservations work, changing their logic from social backwardness, defined using caste, to one based on wealth.

Back in 2016, the judiciary had given a clean chit to the Modi government on accusations of corruption in buying Rafale fighter aircraft. In 2019, the SC sat quietly as the discriminatory and unequal Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed into law and Jammu and Kashmir was decimated as political entities.

Even though the controversial Electoral Bonds was struck down by SC during Justice DY Chandrachud’s tenure, the fact that it was allowed to come into force and run for a few years was a cause of concern. In the run up to the election, the erosion of judicial autonomy raised critical questions about the separation of powers, transparency, and the rule of law.

Polling Day Incidents and Number Fudging

With a weakened Supreme Court and inactive ECI, polling days were marked with irregularities. slow voting, deletion of names from voter lists, and violence at polling booths were reported from all over the country, especially from areas where there was a tight contest and areas which



had a large number of Muslim voters. For example, in Sambhal, Muslims alleged that the Uttar Pradesh (UP) police stormed booths, snatched voter identity cards, and beat up voters on polling day. In Uttar Pradesh, the attacks were reported from Muslim-majority villages that voted overwhelmingly for Samajwadi Party in the 2022 Assembly polls.

The Wire found a network of data brokers and several booth management mobile apps that supply voter data to political parties under the garb of providing these unofficial voter slips. According to data released by The Wire, at least 4000 candidates had used these apps. The pervasive use of such slips across parties is a result of increase in private firms supplying voter data and orienting services to political candidates. These apps help parties identify favorable voters, breaches principles of data privacy, and compromises the integrity of the electoral process. The ECI failed to check this practice.

Most worryingly, the polling data released (or not) by the ECI seemed rather bizarre at time. The aggregate voting figures were not made public by the Election Commission of India (ECI) till 11 days after the first phase and 4 days after the second. About 1 crore 7 lakh votes increased and the percentage of votes polled jumped by about 5.7 percent during this period. The Quint has also reported that the ECI discarded 5, 54, 598 votes across 362 Lok Sabha seats is a discrepancy between votes polled and votes counted in several parliamentary constituencies.

In the light of these developments, it can be safely said that restoring institutional integrity should be one of the top priorities of the rejuvenated opposition. It must do so by constantly monitoring the government’s activities as well as by raising peoples’ consciousness about these

The message of TN Elections: **Need For the Left and Democratic Forces to Occupy the Oppositional Space!**

Balasundaram

Tamil Nadu (TN) has, once again, categorically rejected the fascist Modi and the BJP. The BJP was unable to win even a single seat in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. INDIA has won all 40 seats of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

The people of Tamil Nadu have been resisting the communal, fascist politics of the BJP since 2014 and they have delivered a more powerful verdict this time, rejecting not only BJP alliance in TN but also AIADMK alliance and the Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) (The Party of We, Tamils) led by Seeman who is articulating Tamil pride with chauvinistic overtones. Modi's frequent visits to the state, more than eight times, in the name of Ram and spirituality and also his repeated election visits has not given the expected results for Modi and the BJP. Tamil Nadu BJP president, Annamalai's much trumpeted Yatra across Tamil Nadu, named as "en Mann, en Makkal (My Land, My People)" also did not yield desired results. Tamil Nadu BJP's expectation of achieving 25 percent votes in the state and also expected victory in double digits were also belied by the people. The people of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry thus joined the people of UP, Maharashtra and WB to deal a body blow to the BJP.

ADMK has faced a major defeat despite contesting independently and moving away from the BJP alliance. ADMK is relegated to third position in 10 constituencies by BJP alliance candidates. It has also lost deposits in seven constituencies. Even though ADMK votes have been polled by all other three camps including DMK, BJP and NTK, the major beneficiary appears to be the BJP alliance which

is amply evident in Coimbatore constituency where Annamalai was the candidate. The BJP was expecting a sure win in the constituency. The election results also point out that the people of Tamil Nadu are not willing to pardon ADMK for its past defense in favour of BJP and its policies.

The victory of all parties of INDIA bloc, led by the DMK, including CPI, CPIM, VCK, IUML, etc., also indicate a victory for pluralism and secularism and for the parties that were consistently fighting against the fascist BJP. It is a welcome development that the VCK, the party that consistently fought against Sanatan, has become a state party now. It can also be considered as a symbol of assertion of Dalits of Tamil Nadu which was also part of an assertion all over the country, against the BJP. At the same time, the defeat of Dalit leaders owing allegiance to the BJP and the AIADMK alliances is also worth mentioning. The Dalit assertion in the state against the BJP is an appreciable progress.

Political commentators point out the decline of the percentage of vote share of the DMK compared to past elections. Anti-incumbency and dissatisfaction against the three years of rule of the DMK is being pointed out as the possible reason for the decline. The DMK and its alliance partners should consider this as a sign of warning.

On the other hand, the BJP has increased its vote share more than 10 percent which is also a matter of concern despite the fact that the increase is being attributed only to the alliance, more than its own growth. Another matter of concern is the increase in the vote share of NTK which has propelled it to attain the status of a state party.

This is also an unpleasant indication

that the BJP alliance and the NTK are moving in the direction of capturing the oppositional space for third forces in the state which should also be taken with seriousness by DMK alliance partners who are not part of the state government. Annamalai, as expected, has congratulated NTK for attaining the state party status in his interview while harshly criticizing the DMK and the AIADMK alliances.

The people's mandate has once again underlined the objective need for the emergence of the INDIA bloc in the backdrop of 10 years of fascist threat in the country. Despite the downsizing of the BJP in the elections in 2024, the damage already caused by the BJP rule is yet to be undone. We have to continue our struggles much more powerfully against the BJP now.

When reactionary forces are emerging in the state against the politics of the DMK, we should not forget that they mainly target the Left, democratic and progressive forces and not just the DMK. In this context, it is all the more important that the Left, democratic and progressive forces in the state rise to the occasion and occupy the centre stage to fight against the reactionary forces. In no case, the BJP should be allowed to occupy the oppositional space. Only in such a case, the reactionary forces can be effectively fought out in a political scenario of the possible post - Dravidian phase of the politics in the state in future. In that process only, the next generation of youngsters may be mobilised against the reactionary forces.

Tamil Nadu unit of CPI ML Liberation joined the election campaign with the slogan, "Defeat Fascism and Victory to INDIA" and engaged in a very active campaign in support of the INDIA candidates in almost 25 - 30 constituencies in the state. The party in Tamil Nadu has strengthened its resolve to fight fascism and its various avatars in the state through expansion and reinforcement of its mass base in the state. ■

Kerala Lok Sabha Elections 2024: Worrying Signs

Chandramohan

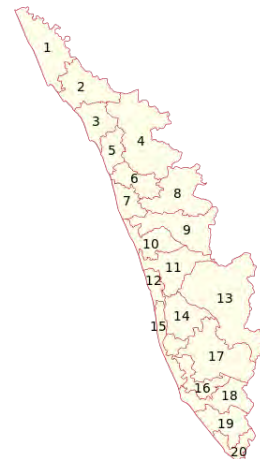
The BJP has emerged as a political force to reckon with in Kerala not only in terms of rising vote share but also has become one of the poles in the state. It has almost attained the critical threshold level of vote share of 20 percent that has made it a force not to be erased in the political scenario which is a matter of concern for the Left and democratic forces. It is amply evident from the fact that BJP candidate Suresh Gopi won the Lok Sabha elections at Thrissur constituency with a margin of 74,686 votes. He had been cultivating the constituency since he lost the seat five years back. He has been continuously engaged in welfare measures through a trust led by him and has made a lot of contributions to the people in distress which is appreciated by many, more importantly by the orthodox Christians which has yielded more dividends. The BJP's vociferous propaganda of "Love Jihad" against Muslims is also said to have attracted a sizeable section of orthodox Christians. This traditional congress voting section shifted

towards BJP, with the congress vote share dropping in Trissur by around 9 percent.

In Kerala, the BJP also modified its strategy to attract upper caste Christian voters and the extreme backward castes like Ezhavas to their side and the results display that they were successful with the strategy. They have secured the votes of orthodox Christians in several constituencies of the state.

Another major concern is the shifting of Ezhava votes, towards the BJP and NDA, who had, hitherto, been the fundamental mass political base of the CPIM and the LDF which propelled them to power in Kerala decades back. In fact, the CPIM was known as an Ezhava party in the beginning who were the most downtrodden and belonged to the extreme backward category.

In the previous Lok Sabha elections, for the first time, the BJP was successful in leading in only one assembly segment of LS seats in the entire state. BJP also won an assembly constituency, Nemom assembly, under Trivandrum Lok



Sabha seat in Kerala. In that sense, the BJP has made its foray already in the state in 2016 itself through its first victory of assembly seat in Kerala but lost subsequently in assembly elections 2021 to the CPIM. The victory of Suresh Gopi is the first debut in the Lok Sabha from Kerala.

The BJP and NDA has been steadily rising in terms of its vote share in the several recent elections. It has increased its votes share from 14.8 percent in 2019 to 19.2 percent in 2024. Most striking is that it has maintained its lead in 11 assembly segments of the state LS constituencies in 2024 in contrast to that of 19 by the CPIM. It has also come to second position in seven assembly segments in 2024. On the other hand, CPIM's vote share has marginally declined from 25.97 percent in 2019 to 25.82 percent in 2024 while the LDF has lost a vote share of around 2.6 percent in 2024 compared to 2019 which is more or less gained by the NDA. The NDA's vote share has risen by 4.4 percent.

The BJP's victory of one Lok Sabha seat and leads in 11 assembly segments in 2024 has raised serious concerns about the threats of the right-wing force successfully making further inroads in Kerala and eroding its democratic landscape. ■

Party	Vote	Vote %	Change in Vote %	Seats Won	Seat Change from 2019
INC	6,927,111	35.06%	- 2.40%	14	- 1
IUML	1,199,839	6.07%	+ 0.59%	2	-
RSP	443,628	2.24%	- 0.22%	1	-
KC	364,631	1.84%	New	1	+1
CPI(M)	5,100,964	25.82 %	- 0.15 %	1	-
CPI	1,212,197	6.14 %	+ 0.06%	0	-
KC(M)	277,365	1.38 %	- 0.70%	0	- 1
BJP	3,296,354	16.68%	+ 3.68 %	1	+ 1
BDJS	505,753	2.56%	+ 0.68%	0	-

Farmer's Movement and its Consequent Fall-Out for the BJP in Punjab Elections

Indresh Maikhuri

In the past couple of years, India and the world have borne witness to a historic farmer's movement, as well as the varied means of suppression that the BJP has used to crush the movement from its inception. The Modi government has left no stone in its arsenal unturned, be it from the deployment of tear gas and water cannons to placing nails, barbed wires and heavy concrete barricades, to stop the farmers demanding justice and rights. However, even in the face of such brutal state repression, with over 700 farmers losing their lives, the farmers have persisted unwaveringly, and have held their ground till the fascist Modi government was forced to withdraw the three anti-farmer agricultural laws.

Punjab was the epi-center of this historic farmers' movement and one of the noteworthy effects that this movement had on the political situation in the state was the dissolution of the long-standing alliance between the Shiromani Akali Dal and the BJP. This groundwork laid by the farmers' movement continued to challenge the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Punjab was among the states where the idea of the INDIA alliance had not fully materialised. In tandem with this, and keeping local political equations in mind, the Aam Aadmi Party which had come to power in Punjab by defeating Congress in the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections, once again contested against Congress in the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. Yet, the BJP remained unsuccessful in gaining ground Punjab once again.

Punjab has 13 Lok Sabha seats. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, out of the 13, Congress has won 7 seats, while

Aam Aadmi Party secured 3 seats. The Shiromani Akali Dal won one seat, and two seats were won by independents of whom, one is Amritpal Singh, who is imprisoned in Guwahati for supporting Khalistan.

BJP managed to secure the second position in only three seats in Punjab, namely, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana. In the remaining ten seats, the BJP fared even worse. It is noteworthy that in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won two Lok Sabha seats in Punjab, back when it was in alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won 8 seats. However, in 2019, Congress was in power in Punjab. Two years before the

2024 Lok Sabha elections, in 2022, Congress not only lost considerable power in the state but also saw many of its key leaders defect to the BJP. One of these leaders, Ravneet Singh Bittu, switched from Congress to BJP, contested from Ludhiana, and lost to Punjab Congress President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring. Despite this, Modi appointed Bittu as a minister in the central government.

Similar to how Modi has tried to establish his connection in every state, he tried to use a similar tactic and establish a connection with Punjab by saying in an election rally that one of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's five beloved ones (Panj Pyare) was from "his" Dwarka! The election results in Punjab portray that people have seen through this farce and have given a strong response to the atrocities committed during the farmers' movement and the attempts by BJP to label Punjab as a terrorist and anti-national state. ■



Note on the Andhra Pradesh Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections

N Murthy

Elections to the 18th Lok Sabha and 16th Assembly were held in Andhra Pradesh during the fourth phase, i.e. on 13 May 2024. Ten years of BJP's anti-people fascist rule and the widespread discontent against the regime, paved the way to strengthen the opposition unity at the national level with the formation of the INDIA alliance. But in Andhra Pradesh, there was a lack of a strong democratic alternative against both the YSR Congress rule in the state and Modi regime at the centre.

The ruling YSRCP and the opposition TDP both tried to align themselves with the BJP. The Indian National Congress was a weak force in the state, with vote share of the party falling to 1.31 percent in the 2019 General Elections. In this backdrop, there lacked a viable anti-fascist and anti-autocratic alternative. Although the BJP was never a strong force in Andhra Pradesh, it succeeded in bringing film actor Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena party into its fold along with his considerable fan base of youths and a large section of Kapu community, which is around 18% of the state population.

Sensing a strong anti-incumbency in the state, the BJP, which had

maintained a close relation with YSR Congress Party for all these years, suddenly changed the track to form an alliance with the TDP. Taking the opportunity of the recent arrest of Chandrababu Naidu by Jagan Reddy government, the saffron party successfully moved pawns through Pawan Kalyan to bring TDP to the NDA fold.

Despite Jagan starting his election campaign much early and mobilising people in the name of "memu siddam" (we are ready), the party failed miserably in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. In the Assembly elections, the party was reduced to a mere 11 seats from the previous 151. According to observers, Jagan's overconfidence with his Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) welfare schemes that will automatically yield votes in his favour also proved a fatal mistake. Except for 3 ministers, all other cabinet ministers of the YSRCP were defeated.

Jagan's autocratic rule in the state along with the vicious targeting of opposition parties, including the arrest of Chandrababu Naidu, have played a crucial role in adding to the discontent against his government. Furthermore, the state was unable to secure any special status for Andhra

Pradesh despite his closeness to the BJP and existing funds were spent on non-productive activities. The state had been facing a severe financial crunch. His decision to have three capitals for Andhra Pradesh also generated widespread public anger. The YSRCP regime's undemocratic and lax attitude towards people's issues, including the issue of price rise, ESMA on protesting workers like Anganwadis and non-implementation of job calendar along with rising unemployment had created severe dissatisfaction against the regime. Jagan's frequent hobnobbing with the BJP, despite increasingly dissatisfaction against BJP at the national level, led to the failure in the consolidation of anti-BJP votes in the state.

The INC, which was almost decimated in the AP politics, tried to revive itself by bringing in YS Sharmila, the sister of Jagan Mohan Reddy, and appointing her the Pradesh Congress President. The INC formed an alliance with CPI and CPI(M) and contested all seats. But despite this, INC and the alliance were unable to make any dent in the political landscape and failed to win any seats in the elections. CPIML independently contested in one parliament seat (Kakinada) and five assembly seats.

The polling witnessed an impressive 81.86 percent voter turnout in the state. A large number of women and youth participated in the voting, and a considerable number of migrant workers from AP came back from other states to cast their votes. IT employees and NRI's also enthusiastically came and exercised their voting rights.

The TDP-JS-BJP alliance achieved a massive victory by winning 164 seats out of 175, with TDP securing 135 seats and 21 by Jana Sena. In the Lok Sabha, the TDP-JS-BJP alliance secured 21 out of 25 seats. ■

Party	Vote	Vote %	Change in Vote %	Seats Won	Seat Change from 2019
TDP	12,569,179	37.79%	- 2.4%	16	+ 13
BJP	3,750,687	11.28%	+ 10.3%	3	+ 3
JSP	1,454,138	4.30%	- 1.57%	2	+ 2
YSRCP	13,174,874	39.61%	- 10.28%	4	- 18
INC	886,165	2.66 %	+ 1.35%	0	-

Lok Sabha Elections in Delhi: BJP Clean Sweep Hides the Full Story

Akash Bhattacharya

Delhi witnessed an unprecedented situation in the lead-up to the election. Its elected Chief Minister was arrested under dubious charges. The seat-sharing arrangement had been announced by then but Arvind Kejriwal's arrest generated a strong groundswell of opinion against the BJP government.

There were other reasons too for the brewing discontent among the masses of Delhi against the BJP: unemployment, price rise, demolitions and evictions, systematic communal polarization, memories of demonetization and the covid deaths and so on.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress joined hands to campaign, and it seemed that the seat-sharing arrangement, along with the mass dissatisfaction against the BJP, would defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In the end, BJP won all 7 seats but in each seat the victory margin was significantly lower compared to 2019. BJP's vote share fell from 57% in 2019 to 54.4% in 2024.

In three seats BJP's victory margin was less than 1 lakh: Chandni Chowk (89,325 in 2024; 2,28,145 in 2019), East Delhi (93,663 in 2024; 3,91,222 in 2019) and New Delhi (78,370 in 2024; 2,56,504 in 2019). In North-East Delhi (1,38,778 in 2024; 3,66,102 in 2019) and South Delhi (1,24,333 in 2024; 3,67,043 in 2019) the victory margin was between 1 and 1.5 lakhs. The margin was more substantial in West Delhi (1,99,013 in 2024; 5,78,586 in 2019) and North-West Delhi (2,90,849 in 2024; 5,53,897 in 2019), but still it was far lower than

the 2019 margin.

The results suggest that with better efforts the results could have been reversed. Perhaps a more coordinated campaign was necessary. It seems that not enough was done to tell the average voter about the alliance, let alone convincing them to vote for it. While the top leaders of the Congress and AAP did work in coordination, such coordination was lacking at the middle and lower levels.

Unfortunately, the INDIA leaders did little to bring on board non-AAP, non-Congress parties within INDIA, which have a presence in various areas. The combined presence of trade unions, the Left parties, Ambedkarite groups, civil society organizations, does amount to something but the alliance leaders failed to tap into that strength. This also resulted in weak booth management and polling-day presence in critical areas. All these culminated in the failure to convert peoples' anger against the BJP into a favorable result for INDIA.

The non-Congress, non-AAP forces within INDIA ran parallel campaigns, integrating common citizens and civil society organizations with them. CPIML lead one such campaign: the Vote for INDIA campaign in South Delhi, which touched upon most Assembly Constituencies in South Delhi. The All-India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) campaigned extensively in three major industrial areas: Narela, Wazirpur and Okhla. Students of the All-India Students Association (AISA) joined both campaigns from time to time and campaigned in the vicinity of their universities on most other days.

During the campaign, veteran trade union leader and CPIML South Delhi District Secretary Comrade Ajay Pal Singh urged people to remember each and every damage caused by the Modi government and vote them out. Trying to break the Modi-spell, CPIML State Committee member Akash Bhattacharya repeatedly pointed out that it was the people who had voted BJP to power and the people had the power to vote him out as well.

At a campaign meeting in Kusumpur Pahadi, Jawaharlal Nehru Students' Union (JNUSU) President Comrade Dhananjay emphasized that INDIA is primarily an alliance of the people rather than of political parties and people must vote for it. In the same meeting Central Committee member Comrade Sucheta De asked the workers to vote for their rights and for their future.

The AICCTU campaign, spearheaded by Comrades Abhishek (Delhi General Secretary), Surya Prakash (Delhi Secretary), Apurva Sharma (President, App Karmachari Ekta Union) and others, gave the slogan Modi Hatao Mazdoor Bachao. The campaign emphasized on the anti-worker and pro-corporate nature of the Modi government and urged the workers to vote in large numbers against it. AICCTU also submitted a workers' charter of demands to the INDIA candidates it campaigned for.

In a state beleaguered by a pogrom, a pandemic, demolitions, segregation and polarization, the election campaign generated fresh energy and created new solidarities on the ground. While the AAP-Congress alliance may be tested in the times to come, the people who invested hope in INDIA will remain active in their efforts to rid Delhi of the communal-corporate influence of the BJP. ■

Modi's Hate Campaign Bites The Dust in Rajasthan

Indresh Maikhuri

Shank Lal Chaudhary

The recent Lok Sabha elections in the country have stripped away the lustre from the Modi brand. For the past decade, Modi was omnipresent - Modi government, Modi's guarantee, etc. Even BJP's name was overshadowed by Modi's. But after the shock from the Lok Sabha results, it seems Modi himself has realized that, at least temporarily, it is wise to keep his name in the background. Therefore, now he is emphasizing on "NDA government" instead of "Modi government."

Several states played a key role in deflating Modi's vision of 400 paar, including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. There are also several smaller states and Union Territories where BJP couldn't even win a single seat.

Moreover, there are states where BJP had almost swept the 2019 Lok Sabha elections but this time, the public did not let it move beyond a certain limit. One such state is Rajasthan.

Rajasthan has a total of 25 Lok Sabha seats. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP achieved a landslide victory in Rajasthan, winning 24 out of 25 seats. The Nagaur Lok Sabha seat was won by Hanuman Beniwal, the chief of Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP), who was in alliance with BJP at that time. Therefore, it can be said that BJP, along with its allies, made a clean sweep in Rajasthan in 2019. At the time when BJP achieved this one-sided victory in the Lok Sabha elections, Congress was in power in Rajasthan.

On November 25, 2023, Rajasthan's Assembly elections were held. In the 200-member Assembly, BJP won 115 seats and formed the government.

Congress, which was ousted from power, won 70 seats. The victory in the 2023 Assembly elections seemed to have given wings to BJP's hopes. Modi and Shah had so much confidence in their charisma that they sidelined many senior leaders and made Bhajan Lal Sharma, a first time MLA, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan.

BJP entered the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan riding on the wave of the landslide victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and the success in the 2023 Assembly elections and given this background, the elections in Rajasthan was being considered a cakewalk for BJP.

However, as the Lok Sabha elections drew nearer, it became apparent that the situation was not that easy. From the first phase of the elections held on April 19, 2024, BJP and Modi started realizing that Rajasthan would not easily fall into their lap as it did in

2019. This frustration was evident in Narendra Modi's rhetoric. On April 21 in Banswara, Rajasthan, Modi gave a speech filled with intense hatred, claiming that if the opposition came to power, they would snatch women's mangalsutras and gold and give it to those who had more children. This speech was a descent into the depths of hate for a Prime Minister. Several political parties, including the CPI(ML) Liberation and Congress, complained to the Election Commission about Modi's speech but unfortunately, instead of taking action, the EC forwarded the complaint letters to BJP's national president J.P. Nadda.

However, Modi's speech in Banswara made it clear that he felt his ground slipping away, leading him to revert to his old agenda of hatred. Reports indicate that wherever Modi and other BJP star campaigners gave hate-filled speeches, they lost in this Lok Sabha election. The same happened in Banswara, where BJP candidate was defeated by Rajkumar Roat of the Bharat Adivasi Party by





Except Badhmer and Banswada, INDIA alliance proved to be victorious in constituencies wherever the Farmers' movement of 2020-2021 enjoyed popularity and influence. Coupled with the factor of the historic farmers' struggle, the issue of Agniveer had also led to resentment amongst the youth. The BJP has itself conceded the fact that they lost in the constituencies where the opposition "spread malicious propaganda" in farmers against the saffron party. The Joint Trade Union platform in the state (excluding the HMS) also released pamphlets in favor of the INDIA alliance. Comrades from AICCTU worked tirelessly on the ground to spread the message amongst the people to support the candidates from the INDIA alliance and vote out BJP.

Thus, the INDIA alliance posed a strong challenge to BJP in the Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan, preventing it from making a clean sweep with its hate agenda. It should be noted that immediately after winning the Rajasthan Assembly elections, BJP leaders started orchestrating hate and violence against minorities and dalits. The INDIA alliance and all the pro-democracy and pro-justice forces must stand firmly against the BJP's communal campaign and oppression of the marginalized sections of society.

The INDIA alliance could have won 3-4 more seats if the seat sharing equation could have been concluded earlier. The Congress leadership was considerably slow in terms of being responsive in the initial stage when left wing parties had made repeated calls for coordination in political activity in the State. The experience of comrades working on ground in Rajasthan reflects that the state's Congress leadership was slow in its decision making process resulting in considerable confusion. ■

Party	Vote	Vote %	Change in Vote %	Seats Won	Seat Change from 2019
BJP	1,61,65,859	49.24%	- 9.83%	14	- 10
INC	1,24,45,396	37.91%	+ 3.67%	8	+ 8
BAP	8,20,831	3.41%	New	1	+1
CPI(M)	6,45,559	1.97%	+ 1.77%	1	+ 1
RLP	5,91,460	1.80%	- 0.26%	1	-

about 250,000 votes.

In Rajasthan, although the BJP did not completely collapse, the public halted its one-sided victory chariot. Out of the 25 seats in Rajasthan, BJP won 14, while Congress won 8 seats. It is noteworthy that in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Congress did not win a single seat in Rajasthan. This time, Congress benefited from contesting under the INDIA alliance. The CPI(M), which contested with the INDIA alliance, also won one seat, with farmer leader Comrade Amra Ram winning from Sikar. The

Bharat Adivasi Party won one seat, as mentioned earlier. Hanuman Beniwal of RLP, as part of the INDIA alliance, won the Nagaur seat.

The electoral contest in Kota which is the bastion of former Lok Sabha Speaker and BJP leader Om Prakash Birla saw a close contest as the BJP was barely able to win this seat. Another electoral contest worth mentioning is Bharatpur where Congress was victorious given that Bharatpur is known to be the home ground for the current BJP Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma.

Resolutions passed by the Central Committee of CPI(M) Liberation

(15-16 June 2024, Patna)

1. **T**he CC welcomes the Lok Sabha election results as a mandate against Modi's dictatorship and BJP's quest for political hegemony, and resolves to continue our fight for democracy and the Constitution. The CC also congratulates the Party candidates Comrade Rajaram Singh and Comrade Sudama Prasad for their victory in Karakat and Arrah. We thank the people of Agiaon for their mandate for Comrade Shivprakash Ranjan in the by-election for MLA from Agiaon after the conviction in a false case and unfair cancellation of legislative post of Comrade Manoj Manzil.

2. CC commends the efforts of the INDIA alliance for the fight put up against the NDA and resolves to continue the efforts to unite all political parties against the BJP, while giving full expression to the aspirations of the people.

3. Despite the people's mandate against it in the Lok Sabha elections 2024, BJP has come to power in Odisha riding on the strong anti-incumbency coupled with the political vacuum and the popular yearning for change. The 24-year tenure of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has ended, and the pro-corporate BJP has formed the government under Chief Minister Mohan Majhi, who is infamous for his protests demanding release of Dara Singh and others convicted in the gruesome murder of Graham Staines and his two minor children. CC recognises this as the intent of BJP to take Odisha in the same direction of

Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and calls on the forces of democracy to resist this with greater unity and determination.

4. CC calls on people to reject the cynical right-wing backlash against the people of Ayodhya for the loss of the BJP in the Faizabad constituency to Awadesh Prasad, Dalit SP candidate. BJP supporters and the right-wing ecosystem have launched a veritable hate campaign against the Hindus of Ayodhya, declaring them as ungrateful and opportunistic, and calling for their boycott. This vilification of the voters of Ayodhya exposes the patronising and cynical attitude of the BJP towards voters.

5. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections have thrown up more questions, doubts and suspicions regarding EVMs. ECI is yet to clarify why it failed to make public the aggregate voting figure until 11 days after the first phase and 4 days after the second. There is still no credible explanation for the increase of 1 crore 7 lakh votes and poll percentage by 5.7% during this period. Reports are now emerging that the ECI discarded 5,54,598 votes across 362 Lok Sabha seats and that there is a discrepancy between votes polled and votes counted in more than 140 parliamentary constituencies. There is a need for even more energised assertion of the people on the streets demanding answers from the ECI.

6. CC recognises the public demand for an enquiry into the

Exit Poll Stock Market Scam and the statements of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah which resulted in the manipulation of the stock market. The broadcast of the exit polls on June 1 and 2 predicting a landslide victory for the BJP and the NDA, caused record highs in the stock market with Nifty and Sensex surging up. However, as the results poured in on June 4, proving the exit polls wrong, the stock markets crashed heavily causing losses in lakhs of crores.

7. The massive corruption in the conduct of NEET is systematic and inevitable in privatisation of competitive exams. NEET since its inception has brought out the fallacy of the One Nation One Exam model in a diverse country like India where different state boards incorporate diverse curriculum according to regional needs. The CC will continue to fight to end exams through the NTA and for Universities to conduct their own entrance exams.

8. The LG Delhi granting sanction for the prosecution of Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkat Hussain under UAPA, is just another instance of the vindictive quelling of any voice of democracy and dissent, that has become an essential feature of the Indian brand of fascism. The very same LG of Delhi is behind the false defamation case against activist Medha Patkar, in which she has convicted and now awaits sentencing on punishment. The CC will continue to fight for the repeal of all draconian laws and for the release of all political prisoners and prisoners who are not released after completion of their sentences.

9. Within weeks of coming to power, we have witnessed the impending prosecution of Arundhati Roy

and Sheikh Showkat Hussain, the FIR against journalists of “The Caravan”, the lynching of two Muslim men in Chhattisgarh, the arrest of Adivasi activist Suneeta Pottam - all reflecting the conscious endeavour to portray a continuum in fascist polity. The CC calls on the people of the country to continue their resistance to the Modi regime.

10. The new criminal laws are scheduled to come into force from 1st July. These laws, having debilitating implications for civil liberties and human rights, will facilitate the clampdown on legitimate political dissent and protest. The CC calls for the withdrawal of these three new criminal laws and urges to people to expose this farce of alleged ‘decolonisation of laws’ for what it really is – entrenchment of colonial police powers for the curtailment of civil liberties and the dawn of a formal police state.
11. The ganging up of bigoted residents against a lone Muslim woman allottee in a complex of 462 units in Vadodara is Hindu bigotry parading out into the open from the everyday casteist exclusion of Muslims and Dalits from housing. The silence of the larger society emboldens the hate-mongers. Unite against hate, unite for justice, unite to reject the perpetual dehumanisation of religious minorities.
12. CC endorses the objections by the farmers organisations to the appointment of former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who was responsible for the death of six protesting farmers in police firing in M.P.’s Mandasaur in June 2017, as Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. This insult is

compounded by the failure of the 1st cabinet meeting of the Modi government to take necessary decisions to address the acute agrarian crisis and meet the long pending demands farmers - law to guarantee MSP, full loan waiver, repeal of privatisation of electricity, reduction in the cost of production and assured insurance and pension.

13. Even as the heatwave makes life and work impossible across several states leading to loss of lives and livelihoods, Prime Minister Modi, the Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) tasked with the duty to respond to disasters immediately, has failed to convene a single meeting of the NDMA since coming to power, let alone take cognizance of the incessant heatwaves and pass necessary orders to protect the lives of particularly the poor and the working class, who are suffering most due to the heatwaves. We demand a comprehensive Heat Action Plan to be developed and adequate compensation to be given to families of people who died in heat wave.
14. The CC reiterates its deepest solidarity to the people of Palestine, who are currently facing a genocide at the hands of the settler colonial apartheid state of Israel. While condemning the horrifying war crimes being committed by Israel, the CC also condemns the US administration and its imperialist allies who are using lies to justify once again escalating military support for Israel, emboldening it to commit further war crimes. CC resolves to ensure that the Indian government upholds its anti-imperialist solidarity with Palestine and does not endorse

in any way Israel’s genocidal project.

15. CC expresses deep grief and anguish over the fire tragedy in Kuwait in which workers from different countries were killed including 41 Indians. CC urges the Government of India to provide proper treatment to the injured and compensation to the families of the deceased workers. It is time that the Union government sheds its apathy towards the rights and safety of migrant workers from India flocking to other countries due to diminishing employment opportunities and low wages.
16. CC condemns the BJP government’s relentless assault on Adivasis in Chhattisgarh resulting in repeated heinous massacre of Adivasis which are disguised as encounters. Emboldened by its Assembly victory last year and now the sweep of MP seats in Chhattisgarh, the Modi regime and the Sangh-BJP brigade are bound to intensify their fascist offensive on the people of Chhattisgarh. We urge the people to stand with the Adivasis in the battle against the corporate plunder of natural resources in Chhattisgarh.
17. CC resolves that the MNREGA allocation must be at least to the tune of Rs 2.5 lakh crore to help alleviate rural unemployment distress. It is also imperative that the State comes up with comprehensive housing plan for the urban and rural poor and the announcement of 3 crore houses is grossly inadequate, and moreover, the allocated amounts per house are also inadequate and must be increased to a minimum of Rs. 7 lakhs per house. ■

NEET 2024 Scam:

Stop Playing with the Future of Millions of Indian Youth

On 4th June, 2024, as the outcome of the 18th Lok Sabha election was being broadcast, the future of 24 lakhs NEET aspirants was declared to be marred in yet another corruption. The results of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) that is held for admission to MBBS, Dental and Ayush courses in the medical colleges throughout the country were declared on the same day as Lok Sabha election results, so that the former does not attract any media attention. It was only after a few days that the angry outbursts of students exposing the scam in NEET 2024 started doing the rounds in social media. Subsequently, the nature of the massive scam came out into the open and students started coming down on the streets against the scam.

The NEET was introduced by the Modi government in 2016 as a singular national level entrance test replacing earlier state level entrance examinations for admission in medical courses. Since its inception, NEET has been questioned by several state governments including Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal due to centralisation of the entrance examination.

Just after the NEET was conducted in May this year, news of paper leaks started pouring in from Bihar to Gujarat. Patna Police arrested 13 persons who demanded Rs 30 to 50 lakhs from aspirants for leaked question papers. Gujarat police busted an entire racket run by an education consultancy owner involving a school teacher and a BJP leader who were charging Rs 10 lakhs for writing the papers. The National Testing Agency (NTA) that conducts the NEET was aware of the scam and released the results on June 4, ten days ahead of the scheduled date and coinciding



with the counting of votes of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The purpose was obvious - to divert attention away from the NEET scam.

The entire process of NEET 2024 has been mired in controversy since the beginning. Firstly, the online registration for NEET 2024 started on 9th February and was extended till 16th March. Suddenly, on April 9, the NTA declared that the registration would be re-opened for two days on 'stakeholders' request' violating all norms of free and fair conducting of the examination. There are also questions being raised about 67 students securing the top position with a perfect mark of 720, six of whom had given the exam from the same centre in Jhajjar, Haryana. Two students have also been given the statistically impossible mark of 719 and 718. Students have also exposed how the mark obtained in their OMR sheets do not match with the final result. The NTA's clarification that around 1500 students were given grace marks due to delay in the start of the exam has further added to the controversy.

Another major concern being raised by students is that of massive rank inflation. In 2022, the score of 715 had fetched the top rank, even in 2023 it was ranked 4, this year the same score

is ranked 225! A score of 700 meant the rank of 49 in 2022, 294 in 2023 and 1,770 this year. Surely the examination is not getting easier with time, or the quality of students appearing for the test recording a quantum jump. The entire system has been thoroughly compromised from within and students and their families are paying the price for this systemic corruption.

NEET had been declared illegal and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2013. However in 2016 a five-judge Constitution bench restored the system and in November 2017 the Modi government launched the National Testing Agency under the Ministry of Education as the nodal authority to conduct the NEET examination. This over-centralised 'one nation, one examination' model has an innate bias in favour of the rich and the privileged and with the rise and consolidation of the coaching industry and paper leak mafia, the system has now become highly unfair and opaque. The implications of such an over-centralised, opaque and corrupt system on the quality of the country's medical infrastructure are utterly disturbing. The anti-reservation lobby masquerading as a champion of 'merit' keeps silent about this rampant foul play of money power in an increasingly commercialised education system.

The Tamil Nadu Government had set up a committee under the Chairpersonship of Justice A K Rajan in 2021 (5 years after the introduction of NEET) to study the impact of the NEET on students from different social and educational backgrounds. The committee found out that the share of English medium students in admission in medical colleges had increased significantly after the introduction of NEET. In the pre-NEET period from 2010-11 to 2016-17, students from rural areas secured 61.5% seats on average in government medical colleges, and by 2020-21, this figure had fallen to 49.91%. The study also pointed to the growing share of students from higher income backgrounds and from CBSE background at the cost of students from lower income and Tamil medium backgrounds. The Rajan Committee's findings thus validate the concern raised by several state governments regarding the centralised exam pattern. The Central University Entrance Test (CUET) introduced since 2020-21 meant for admission in all Central Universities is another example of the centralised examination pattern forced upon the students of India hailing from diverse linguistic, regional and social backgrounds by the Modi government. The CUET has, in the same way, systematically pushed out students from different state boards from the Central Universities of the country.

As we await the hearing of all NEET-related petitions by the Supreme Court, we must support the student demand for cancellation of the NEET 2024 results and a fresh conduct of the examination to end all discrepancies. More fundamentally there is a growing demand for the scrapping of the incompetent NTA and the unfair NEET system itself. The perils of over-centralisation, commercialisation and corruption in our system of higher education are too high for the country to ignore any longer. ■

Countrywide Protests against NEET Paper Leak and NTA Scam



Much to the dismay of lakhs of students, the NTA canceled the NEET PG exam on 22nd June, less than 12 hours from when it was scheduled to be held. This was the third national level exam after UGC NET and CSIR UGC NET, to be canceled within a span of four days. These cancellations came hot on the heels of the massive NEET UG 2024 Scam. The connecting factor in three out of four of these exams in question: NTA was the sole conducting body for the exams! According to NTA's own data, a record 24 lakh students had registered for NEET UG this year! This along with more than 9 lakh applicants for UGC NET and a little less than half a lakh CSIR UGC NET applicants, take the total toll of NTA's victims to about 34 lakh! These 34 lakh applicants were to be the country's future doctors, scientists, professors and writers but instead they have been forced to roam the streets and brave this heatwave demanding justice for the theft of their hard work and dreams!

Following the announcement of the NEET UG 2024 result on 4th June and the simultaneous disclosure of massive irregularities in the same, the applicants began demanding that the exam be reconducted for all applicants. The fire of student movement against NTA was just igniting when AISA joined the fray! In the course of the past two and a half weeks, relentless protests by the student and youth has turned it into a roaring fire that has threatened the MoE to an extent that the Education Minister who was calling this disaster a controversy "motivated" by third parties has been forced to remove the Director General of NTA!

The first nation wide major call against this massive corruption was given by AISA with student demonstrations in front of the Ministry of Education in Delhi, universities and student centers in Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, several parts of Bihar and Jharkhand on the 10th of June. The NTA Headquarter was gheraoed by NEET applicants and AISA the next day in Delhi and this culminated in a meeting with Vijay Kumar, Director of Examination, NTA. After the meeting it became even more clear that while the inefficient NTA was criminally guilty, the Ministry of Education's monumental complacency in the entire matter can not be underestimated.

Daily student protests throughout the country ensured that no matter the MoE's excuses of a 'pending enquiry' and the 'sub judice matter', the movement would not settle for anything less than Re-NEET for all students and a complete

scrapping of the NTA. AISA's Press Conference with NEET applicants at the Press Club of India, New Delhi on 15th June, 2024 ended with the call for a two 'All India Students' Strike' on the 19th and 20th of June.

Students from across the country took to the streets on the two days! As the demonstration in front of MoE on 19th June was coming to an end for the day, the news of another paper leak reached the students! The UGC NET exam conducted by the NTA on the 18th of June had on 19th June been 'found' compromised because of a paper leak. Angry students demanding justice faced police batons and brutal detention at Lucknow University and Ministry of Education, Delhi on the very next day! Students in several parts of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh also occupied the streets with Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as their main demand!

After the paper leak in UGC NET, the CSIR UGC NET as well as the NEET PG exams were postponed on the 21st and 22nd of June respectively. Following these cancellations, the demands of Re-NEET for all, a complete scrapping of NTA, an immediate resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan and an end to all centralized exams including CUET have become the agenda of the student movement today.

Even though the entire nation is watching the NTA, it can't help but flounder from the corruption that lies at the



core of a system arising from the commercialisation and over-centralisation of higher education. The back to back cancellation of exams betrays the NTA's desperation to hide this corruption. While the NTA continues to fumble, it is exposing the failing system and providing the student movement that was struggling post the lockdown with much needed firewood. Let the fire rage! ■

Protests Across the World Demanding an End to the Genocidal War in Gaza

On June 8, Israeli occupation forces unleashed another brutal massacre in northern Gaza's Nuseirat Refugee Camp. Marketed as a 'hostage rescue operation,' the Israeli forces killed at least 274 Palestinians, including 64 children and 57 women, and injured nearly 700. The Nuseirat massacre occurred just a few weeks after the massacre in Rafah, in which at least 45 civilians were killed, mostly children and women, when Israel bombed tents of displaced people.

Condemning the ongoing genocidal war in Gaza, protests across the world called for immediate ceasefire and delivering of humanitarian aid in Gaza. According to reports, famine, severe malnutrition and epidemics have become widespread across Gaza as death and destruction due to

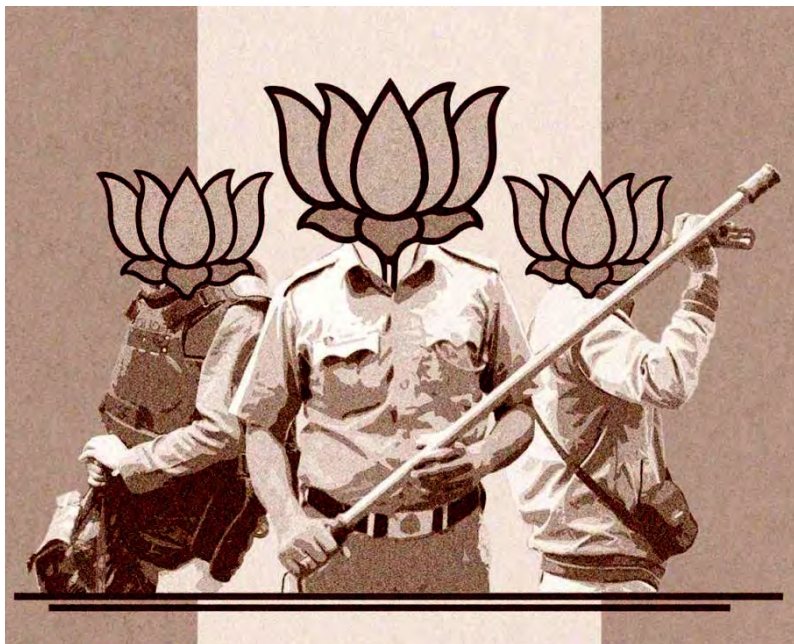
Israel's attack have led to the collapse of all crucial infrastructures including hospitals, bakeries, and sewage plants. Humanitarian aid continues to face restrictions due to Israeli blockades and attack on aid convoys.

On June 1, several students-civil society organisations, along with CPIML and AISA activists, came together at Delhi's Jantar Mantar demanding an end to Israel's genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza. The protesters saluted the steadfastness of the people of Gaza and the whole of Palestine in the face of war crimes, massacres, and brutality by Israeli forces. Dhananjay, JNUSU President and AISA activist said at the protest gathering "all voices, world over advocating peace, must speak up against the imperialist war of Israel over Palestine and demand an immediate ceasefire! We have seen

in Rafah, that despite the order from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to halt the offensive, Israeli forces deliberately carried out brutal massacres by bombing civilian tents." The protest also called upon the Indian government to revoke all military-economic ties with apartheid Israel and ensure an international arms embargo against the country for its genocidal war against Palestinians.

"The support provided to this genocide through funding and supply of arms by the US and right-wing governments across the west, as well as India, is alarming and the citizens of this country must demand from our respective governments an immediate end to all ties with the apartheid Israel!," repeated AISA Delhi President Abhigyan. CPIML has called on the Indian government to suspend all diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with Israel and ensure an international arms embargo on apartheid Israel. ■

CPIML calls for Deferring the Implementation of the New Criminal Codes



Several compelling concerns are raised from various sections of society and the legal fraternity regarding the three new criminal codes - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam that are to come into on July 1, 2024 and replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860; Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 respectively.

Firstly, it is pointed out that several draconian provisions have been criminalise the basic civil liberties that citizens enjoy, in particular, the freedom of speech, right to assembly, right to associate, the right to demonstrate and other civil rights. This is particularly evident in the introduction a broadened definition of a “terrorist act” from the draconian UAPA, the retention of the notorious sedition law (section 124A of IPC) under a new nomenclature

and the criminalising of hunger strikes – all of which are likely tools in the criminalization of legitimate dissent and lawful violent democratic protests.

Secondly, are the enhanced arbitrary powers to the police that will have an impact on civil liberties and human rights in the country. Statutory sanction has been given to the police to detain persons, without complying with the safeguards around arrest. It is made mandatory to prominent display, both physically and digitally, the name, address and the nature of the offense of an arrested accused, in every police station and district headquarters. This provision in addition to violating the right to privacy and human dignity of a person, facilitates the profiling and targeting of individuals by the police prior to any formal conviction. Handcuffing has been made statutory, while the police has been given discretion in the

registration of FIRs. Most shockingly, the duration of police custody has been enhanced from the present limit of 15 days, to 60 or 90 days (depending on the offence), exposing accused persons to intimidation, torture and danger.

Thirdly, it appears that half measures have been taken at tackling mob lynching since the relevant provisions in the BNS, while criminalises such actions without specifically calling it as such, has omitted religion as one of the explicit grounds.

Fourthly are the concerns of the provisions sanctioning arbitrary and inhuman punishments. Alongside handcuffing, statutory recognition is given to the inhuman punishment of solitary confinement.

Finally, given the massive backlog of criminal cases (3.4 crore cases), bringing these three laws in force at this time, will create two parallel legal regimes, leading to further backlog and placing further strain on the already overburdened judicial system

There is no denying that India’s criminal justice infrastructure is in dire need of reform. However, the three criminal laws are not the answer. These were passed with undue haste, without any discussion or parliamentary scrutiny given that 146 Opposition MPs were under suspension at the time these laws were passed. As such, it is necessary that the Union government take the decision to suspend the implementation of these three criminal laws and re-introduce them in Parliament for proper scrutiny and deliberations. ■



Yogi's Bulldozer Must be Stopped in Akbarnagar, Lucknow

The CPIML condemned the UP government's drive to build a river front on the Kukrail river in Lucknow's Akbar Nagar in which 1,100 houses have been demolished with bulldozers in the name of beautification. State party secretary Sudhakar Yadav said that bulldozer raj continues in the state even after the Lok Sabha election which has given a mandate against the Yogi government's bulldozer raj. It was the defeat in Uttar Pradesh due to which the BJP fell short of a full majority at the Centre. The people of

Uttar Pradesh have restricted the BJP more than any other state. Not only the Modi government, but the policies of the Yogi government in the state have also been a factor in this defeat.

It seems that the BJP and its government have not learnt from the Lok Sabha election results. Videos of people crying and protesting against the bulldozing of houses in Akbarnagar are going viral on social media. The administration says that on the night of Tuesday, June 11, a final warning was given to vacate the houses by the morning, after which

water and electricity connections were disconnected. This demolition drive was carried out amidst the extreme heat wave which is highly inhuman.

The government claims that affected people are being shifted to new houses, while the residents are asking that if the houses were illegal then why were they being charged house tax, water tax and electricity bills till now? Residents living in Akbarnagar for the past several decades said that the compensatory houses being given to them are so small their belongings will not be able to come in them. Moreover, the possession of the houses in the alternative site at Govindnagar have not been completed yet. ■

Kanchanjunga Express Accident is a Result of Continued Criminal Neglect of Railway Safety!

In the early morning of June 17, a collision between the Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train, near Rangapani railway station in North Bengal claimed 15 lives and left 60 people injured. Among those dead are three railway employees, including the loco pilot and co-pilot of the goods train. The Kanchanjunga Express incident has once again exposed the tragic state of affairs of railway safety in India.

The Modi government owes an answer to the families who lost their near and dear ones in the mishap. The Union government must immediately ensure proper compensation to each deceased family and injured ones and all injured must be provided with free and proper medical treatment and rehabilitation.

The horrific accident comes almost a year after the train accident in Odisha's Balasore which had claimed 296 lives and left 1,100 people injured. In Kanpur (2016), a train derailed in the town of Pukhrayan,

killing 150 people and injuring 150 others.

These incidents expose the Modi regime's lax attitude towards India's railway system that caters millions of people. While crores are being spent on flagging off expensive trains by PM Modi, the rail safety has been left in shambles. The anti-collision technology 'kavach,' which could have prevented several of these rail tragedies, only covers a miniscule part of India's vast railway network!

Even when such a nightmare keeps repeating itself, the Modi Government's neglect of railway safety, proper maintenance and modernisation has assumed fatal proportions. The Commission of Railway Safety (CRS) had flagged multiple loopholes in railway safety in India, but its reports and recommendations were ignored by the government. The Modi regime, in the name of 'ease of doing business,' has put the lives of millions of passengers at risk, by slashing the powers of CRS, privatising the railway

networks, and contractualisation or stopping recruitment in various railway departments vital to ensure safety.

Considering the increasing number of rail accidents and safety issues, CPIML demands a high-level review of railway safety be carried out, and immediate corrective measures be taken. The anti-collision system must be mandatorily implemented in all trains on an urgent basis. The government must carry out modernisation of the railway network and increase the recruitment in railways in all posts to ensure safety. ■



Comrade Ashok Singh

Comrade Ashok Singh, 61, succumbed to the heat stroke related ailments on 13 June 2024 while he was on the way back in a train to Delhi after participating in the party's election campaign in Arrah parliamentary constituency in Bihar. His passing is a great shock to his family and the party in Delhi. He had been active as Okhla district committee member among the working class areas in Okhla and Mithapur for more than three decades as a committed member.

Comrade Ashok Singh, fondly known as Master ji among comrades, served as a teacher in a MCD School in Jaitpur and retired just a few months ago. Along with his job he was actively engaged with trade unions as well as local area work. He hailed from Ballia in Uttar Pradesh and came in contact with the party during his education in Allahabad University through AISA. He carried with him the spirit and legacy of the students' movement of the 1980s and 90s while migrating to Delhi for his job. His sudden passing away is an immense loss for the party in Delhi. We send our condolences to his bereaved family and friends.

Red Salute Comrade Ashok Singh Master ji!



Comrade Dinesh Singh

A veteran party member and trade union leader in Delhi comrade Dinesh Singh succumbed to severe heat stroke on 2 June 2024. He was hospitalised in the Safdarjang Hospital after he developed symptoms of heat stroke on 30 May, which was the hottest day of the season. Despite all efforts he could not be saved.

Comrade Dinesh Singh had joined the party in the 1980s and was active among industrial workers of Okhla-Faridabad region since then. A well known trade union activist he was widely recognised by workers for whom he always stood firmly. Hailing from Azamgarh in UP, he always lived in the party office in the Okhla Industrial Area which became synonymous with his name. A victimised and retrenched worker in the 80s, he decided to dedicate his life to work for the workers rights and an egalitarian society. For nearly four decades of association with revolutionary politics he never wavered from his commitment and always stood with the party during many ups and downs. We will also remember him for his bold and straightforward interventions in front of factory gates whenever some worker's rights were violated.

Red Salute Comrade Dinesh Singh!



Comrade Vishnudev Prasad Yadav

Comrade Vishnudev Prasad Yadav, member of Bihar State Committee of CPIML from East Champaran district succumbed to heat stroke even as campaigning was about to end for the final phase of polling on June 1. A dedicated communist organiser and trade union leader, Comrade Vishnudev was playing a key role in the Ara election campaign since the end April. Goodbye Comrade Vishnu ji, you went too soon. You will remain a role model for young communists in India's battle against fascist aggression and in the struggle for securing justice and rights for the working people.

Red Salute to Comrade Vishnudev Prasad Yadav!



Comrade Atul Kumar Anjan

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Comrade Atul Kumar Anjan, Member, CPI National Secretariat and leader of All India Kisan Sabha (Ajoy Bhawan). He was the member of national coordination committee of Samyukta Kisan Morcha. Comrade Atul Anjan started his political journey during his students days. He was the president of the Lucknow University Students Union in the decade of seventies. Our heartfelt condolences to his family, comrades and admirers. Defeating the fascist Modi regime in the ongoing elections will be the best tribute to the departed leader.



Comrade Gopal Prasad

Comrade Gopal Prasad, legendary leader of the urban poor in Ara and former member of the Ara Municipal Corporation, passed away on May 1. He was a pillar of strength for CPIML in Bhojpur. Red Salute to Comrade Gopal Prasad. More power to his revolutionary legacy.



Comrade Bela Rani

Senior CPIML member of Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh) Comrade Bela Rani (Mataji) passed away on 9 June 2024. Comrade Bela Rani played a vital role in leading the farmers movements in Pilibhit in the 1970s, despite facing all the repression. Later she and her husband, Comrade Jhanjan Lal (Chhote Mahashay Ji) left CPI and joined CPI(ML).

The Puranpur party office is built on the land given by her. The demise of Comrade Bela Rani is an irreparable loss for the party. Comrade Bela Rani left us at the age of 90, but her struggle, support and affection will always remain alive as an inspiration among us.

Red Salute to Comrade Bela Rani!



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10 DAYS OF MODI 3.0 GOVT

WIDESPREAD COMMUNAL VIOLENCE & LYNCHINGS

7 JUNE, RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH

8 JUNE, UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

15 JUNE, MEDAK, TELANGANA

17 JUNE, BALASORE, ODISHA

19 JUNE, NAHAN, HIMACHAL PRADESH

19 JUNE, ALIGARH, UTTAR PRADESH

PUNISH PERPETRATORS OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

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