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INDIA'S BIGGEST POLITICAL CORRUPTION

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FROM CORPORATES

TO BJP



CPIML Condemns the Arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

Kejriwal, Hemant Soren, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and other Opposition Leaders Must be Immediately Released!

The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) strongly condemns the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise scam. This marks another chapter of the Modi regime's unbridled emergency and the conspiracy to stifle opposition and democratic voices in the country.

Arvind Kejriwal is the second elected Chief Minister after Hemant Soren of Jharkhand who has been arrested under politically motivated allegations which are far from being proved. In Delhi, other leading Aam Aadmi Party leaders – Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Member of Parliament Sanjay Singh – have also been arrested in the recent past under the same allegation as the Chief Minister. As is the norm these days, none of them have got bail and remain in jail despite no charge-sheet or trial in sight.

Since 2014, when Modi came to power, around 95 percent of the 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.

Over the last few years, the Bharatiya Janata Party led union government has brazenly used the federal investigative agencies like the 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. Recently, bank accounts of the Indian National Congress have been frozen.

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

The arrests, intimidation and harassment of the opposition in the weeks preceding the Lok Sabha elections show how little the government cares about democratic processes. Given the scale of unrest in the country due to discriminatory and

undemocratic laws, state-sponsored majoritarian violence, soaring inequality and unemployment, and unprecedented accumulation of wealth and power by big corporations, the government fears that peoples' anger may upset their applecart in the elections. Hence, it is leaving no stone unturned to eliminate any effective opposition.

CPIML demands that Arvind Kejriwal, Hemant Soren, Manish Sisodia, along with other opposition leaders, must be immediately released. CPIML appeals to all opposition parties to strengthen their unity in this difficult hour and with the support of the Indian people give the ruling party a fitting rebuff in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

- Statement issued by CPIML Central Committee on March 21, 2024

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The Challenge of 2024 General Elections: Vote out the Dictatorial Modi Regime



Massive propaganda blitzkrieg around the Modi cult and unprecedented use of money power have been the defining hallmarks of the Modi mode of electioneering since the launch of the 'Modi for PM' campaign in 2013. Over the last ten years both these factors have grown by leaps and bounds. But as Modi bids for a third consecutive term with an aggressive clamour for a 400-plus majority, with the obvious ulterior motive of carrying out deeper subversion of the Constitution of India, Modi is ever more afraid of the people rallying around a united opposition to unseat his government. Weaponisation of central agencies and persecution of opposition leaders has thus become the spearhead of Modi's desperate 2024 drive for a third term.

On 16 March the Election Commission announced the schedule for the 18th General Elections to Parliament with the Chief Election Commissioner repeatedly invoking a level playing field in the elections. But within hours of the notification of the model code of conduct, we now have yet another chief minister of a non-BJP government arrested by the ED. After Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has also been taken into custody. Ironically while the ED has till date failed to produce any evidence in the alleged Liquor Policy scam against any of the arrested AAP leaders from Manish Sisodia to Arvind Kejriwal, the Electoral Bond data now disclosed by the SBI show the BJP as a clear and major beneficiary of bonds purchased by Aurobindo Pharma Ltd, a Hyderabad-based company directed by P Sarath Chandra Reddy, an accused turned approver in the Delhi Liquor Policy case.

While Manish Sisodia has been languishing in jail without bail for more than a year, P Sarath Reddy, who was arrested in this case in November

2022 got bail in May 2023. His company had donated Rs. 5 crore to the BJP just five days after his arrest. That was just one of the serial contributions made by the company. After getting bail in May, Sarath Reddy turned an approver in June and donated another Rs. 25 crore to the BJP within two months. In all, Aurobindo Pharma Ltd, founded by Sarath Reddy's father PV Ramprasada Reddy, and two related firms gave the BJP around Rs 55 crore via electoral bonds. Meanwhile, the BRS got Rs. 15 crore and the TDP Rs. 2.5 crore from Aurobindo Pharma. Companies are being coerced not just into paying hefty bribes but also lending their services as tools to target the opposition.

The Modi regime has clearly been rattled by the way the Electoral Bond scam has unravelled so far and it is trying its best to divert the attention of the people away from this scam. The data finally submitted by the SBI expose the Electoral Bond scheme as a brazen system of money laundering and institutionalised corruption. Journalists tracking the donor companies have identified that alongside well known corporate entities in sectors like construction, pharmaceuticals, mining etc., there are obscure entities, some just newly formed, buying massive amounts of bonds. The value of the bonds is often many times over their record of earned profits, and some companies are actually mired in loss.

“

Twenty years ago India had dethroned the NDA government of the Atal-Advani era in the wake of the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat and growing agrarian crisis and spate of farmer suicides. Let India rise again in 2024 to put an emphatic end to the Modi-Shah reign of escalating economic and social disaster and dictatorial rule.

Clearly the scheme testifies to the worst apprehensions expressed by the RBI about the bonds becoming a money-laundering route, the EC's initial warning about the negation of transparency and level playing field, and the observations made by the Supreme Court about the bonds becoming a system of quid pro quo for donor companies to buy impunity, secure contracts and even favourable policy changes. By all indications the Electoral Bond scheme has been independent India's most brazen system of state-sponsored and legalised financial and political corruption. The fact that the SBI lied repeatedly before the Supreme Court and tried every lame excuse to avoid or defer the disclosure of the bond details only confirms the corrupt core of the electoral bond scam.

The dominant media has all but blacked out information and discussion about this monumental scam. It is only through the alternative media that the people can find real information about the scam exposed by a dedicated team of investigative journalists, truth-seeking researchers and transparency campaigners. The government therefore wants to strangle the alternative media by arrogating to itself the authority of 'fact-checking' and stopping digital platforms from propagating any critical content by branding it fake. Thanks to the Supreme Court stay on this draconian move, the digital platforms and social media are still enjoying some temporary respite, but the threat to freedom of speech, expression and alternative media is growing alarmingly.

A third term for the Modi regime will be a fillip to more brazen corruption, unmitigated corporate plunder, deeper subversion of constitution and erosion of democracy and all its attributes - secular fabric, federal framework and civil liberties. Twenty years ago India had dethroned the NDA government of the Atal-Advani era in the wake of the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat and growing agrarian crisis and spate of farmer suicides. Let India rise again in 2024 to put an emphatic end to the Modi-Shah reign of escalating economic and social disaster and dictatorial rule. ■

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The Electoral Bond Scam and the Corrupt Modi Government

▲ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

The data submitted regarding the Electoral Bonds by the SBI have revealed a very murky pattern around this now defunct unconstitutional scheme. The pattern that has emerged makes the Electoral Bond scheme the most brazen scam of the Modi regime. Taking advantage of the anonymity and secrecy built into the scheme, the government used it as a veritable extortion racket by raiding companies to coerce them into paying huge sums of money and the donors in turn were rewarded with legal protection and lucrative projects and contracts.

India's top three corporate houses do not figure directly in the list of bond purchasers. Investigative journalists tracking the bonds have however located the Ambani footprint in bonds. The Tatas probably prefer their own trust (Progressive Electoral Trust) routes to make political donations and the Adani connection probably lies hidden under layers of shell companies and obscure donors. Several other leading corporate houses however figure quite prominently in the list. The top donors are of course a revelation unto themselves and lay bare the corrupt underbelly of India's increasingly rotten and brazen crony capitalism. The money spent by companies in buying electoral bonds is tax-exempted, but the real benefit lies in the quid pro quo, the correlation between the bonds purchased and the contracts secured, the laws evaded and the penalisation avoided for all sorts of economic offences.

According to this overall picture, the BJP bagged bonds worth a whopping Rs 8,252 crore, more than 50% of the total value of bonds redeemed worth

Rs 16,492 crore. The Congress with Rs 1,952 crore is a distant second followed closely by the TMC in third position with Rs 1,705 crore. The fourth and fifth places are held by BRS with Rs 1,408 crore and the BJD with Rs 1,020 crore respectively.

Rather than answering the SC indictment for inflicting an unconstitutional scheme to legalise economic and political corruption, the BJP is now busy trivialising the Electoral Bond scam by claiming that it actually got much less than the opposition parties! It is also being argued that the donations received by the BJP are actually proportionately less than the party's electoral strength. The BJP IT cell is also dishing out outright false statistics to mislead the people. The point to understand is that the Electoral Bond scheme took the standard practice of corporate funding to major parties to a totally new level both in terms of the scale and nature of funding (including all kinds of shady sources from foreign funding to money laundering via shell companies) and the total decimation of the very notion of a level playing field.

The unconstitutionality of the Electoral Bond scheme lay in its utter opacity and asymmetry, which institutionalised clientelism and opened the floodgates of corruption. The serial purchase of Electoral Bonds by Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services company following serial raids on the company and even attachment of the company's assets by the ED testifies to the absolutely murky nature of the scheme. The SBI data show obscure companies with little paid-up capital and profit having bought Electoral

Bonds several times their known financial strength. And while the government had total knowledge of which company was paying how much to which party, the people at large and the opposition parties were in total darkness about the flow of funds. The control over information and abuse of agencies - from ED, CBI and various Tax authorities to even the banking system - tilted the scheme totally in favour of the BJP even though some of the regional parties holding power in major states (TMC, BRS, BJD, DMK, YSRCP for example) also had significant shares. The only parties steering clear of corporate funding and Electoral Bonds are the communist and other Left parties.

The Electoral Bonds are only one source of corporate political funding. Prior to the launch of this dubious scheme, Electoral Trusts were the principal vehicle for legal contributions (the quantum of illegal flow and use of cash in elections is anybody's guess). Over the years the Trusts have also gravitated increasingly to the BJP. The richest electoral trust, the Prudent Electoral Trust gave 95% donation to the BJP in FY 2017 and since then it has directed 85% of its funds to the BJP. In FY 2023 five Trusts gave Rs. 366 crore



to political parties with the BJP alone getting Rs. 259.08 crore. Ahead of the 2019 elections in FY 2018 the Tatas paid Rs. 356 crore to the BJP through their Progressive Electoral Trust with the Congress getting only Rs. 55 crore. These political contributions apart, the BJP has at its disposal the government's growing advertisement budget and sundry government schemes all of whom revolve around selling the Modi brand. Government advertisements are indistinguishable from the BJP's own party publicity and these are no longer limited to newspapers and radio and television channels, they now swamp every public space and every digital platform. And then there is the mammoth opaque fund launched in the wake of the Covid pandemic under the acronym PM CARES, which collects enormous donations from public sector companies and private corporations and refuses to submit itself to any public scrutiny by calling itself a private entity.

The coffers of the BJP have swelled unprecedentedly in the Modi era by using every possible corrupt, unconstitutional and unethical means. The nexus between the Modi regime and India's top corporate groups has resulted in unprecedented concentration of political and economic power in a few hands. While monopolisation of political power by the Modi government has completely upset India's federal balance and competitive electoral democracy, the growing control of a few oligarchs like the Adani and Ambani groups over the entire economy is landing the overwhelming majority of India's workers, farmers, small traders and the job seeking youth in a permanent state of misery. Defeating the Modi regime in the coming elections is therefore the first step towards freeing the Indian people and India's constitutional democracy from this fascist corporate stranglehold. ■

BJP : Party For the Corporates, By the Corporates and of the Corporates

▲ SANJAY SHARMA

In 1969 Indira Gandhi had abolished the provision of corporate funding by amending the Companies Act. Bearing populist overtones, this decision was viewed more as an attempt to damage the financial prospects of opponent parties. But the corporates' influence over Indian politics continued as ever with the black money and under the table donations. This amendment was reverted in 1985 during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi. The maximum corporate contribution was still limited to 5% of annual net profits which remained so till 2013 when this limit was raised to 7.5%.

The BJP government not only removed the 7.5% cap on corporate donations to political parties, it also amended FCRA to allow foreign companies registered in India to make donations. The latter provision made before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls facilitated companies like Vedanta Limited to make donations in India and we know this company made donations more than Rs. 400 crores through electoral bonds.

BJP did not show even a pretence of maintaining transparency in funding which is an essential aspect of democracy. The introduction of Electoral Bonds came via a finance bill in 2017 undermining Reserve Bank of India's serious objections which had opposed the move to bring EBs saying this will not only override the RBI's sole authority for issuing bearer bonds, will also not achieve the intended purpose of transparency and be in violation of the principles and the spirit of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002.

It is ironic that the government makes KYC verification in banks and for all government schemes mandatory to common citizens, when corporate donations with hidden identity were allowed by the BJP in the name of

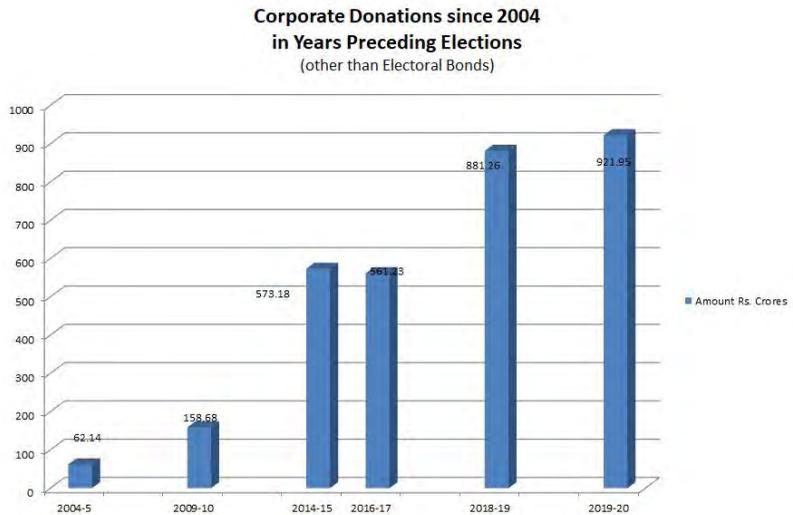


Fig 1: Surge in corporate donations since 2004 during election years. Source: ADR data

cleansing “the system of political funding in India”.

The corpus of corporations in political funding has risen steeply in previous two decades indicating increased hold of the private sector in policy making. With the introduction of EBs, the proportion of corporate money rose to the levels India had never imagined. The funding pattern suggests that the BJP has also made this a tool for extortion and blackmailing. In sync with the use of agencies like ED and CBI the ruling party has amassed a lot of money. The annual accounts of this party with a closing balance of Rs. 1,071 crores in financial year 2013-14 have inflated five times with a closing balance of 5,680 crores after spending lavishly in the last ten years.

In 2022-23, BJP received Rs. 1294 crores through EBs and another Rs. 568 crores from ‘Companies & Organisations’ where just one organisation Prudent Electoral Trust alone contributed Rs. 256 crores. BJP’s total contribution received this year was Rs. 2,120 crores. The ratio of Electoral Bonds (55%) and other corporate funding (24%) in this amount was almost 80%, just like the preceding year 2021-22 when total accumulated funding was Rs. 1,775 crores.

Besides, companies directly and through electoral trusts also contributed huge amounts during this period. The Prudent Electoral Trust ‘donated’ more than 1,000 crores in this period to the BJP. This trust received funds from companies like Serum Institute (Rs. 95 crores), Megha Engineering & Infra (Rs. 97 crores), ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel Ltd. (Rs. 200 crores) and Future Gaming & Hotel Services (Rs. 100 Crores).

Airtel, DCM Shriram, DLF, Essel Mining, GMR, Hero MotoCorp, real estate company Navayuga, Torrent Power and Western UP Power

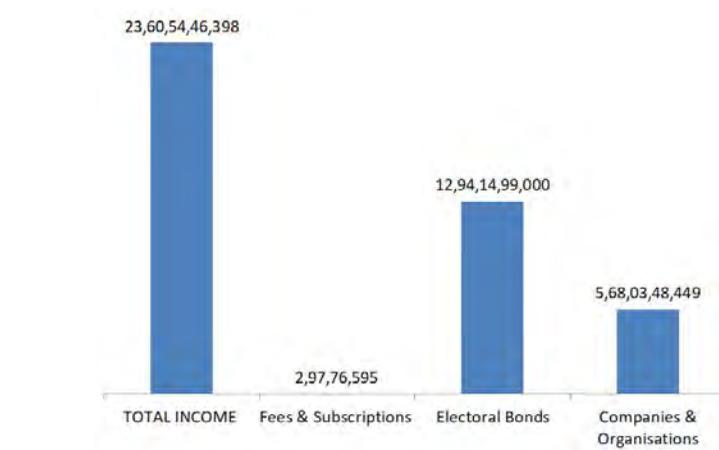


Fig 2: Breakup of total income of BJP in 2022-23 (Source: ECI data)

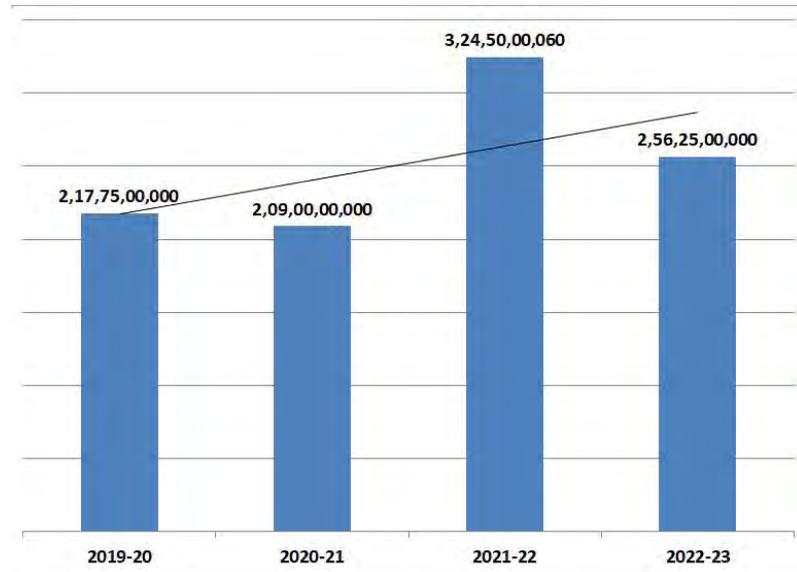


Fig 3: BJP Funding via Prudent Trust during 2019-20 to 2022-23 (Source: ECI data)

Transmission Co have also made big donations to parties, BJP being major beneficiary, during last years through electoral trusts. Out of five major such Trusts nearly 90% donations were made to BJP.

In its annual contributions report for financial year 2022-23 submitted to the Election Commission with names of donors above rupees 20,000, mostly are companies who have given bigger amounts to this party. Individual donors’ share is negligible as compared to corporate donors. Out of 719.85 crores contributed by

7946 donors, 70 percent came from only 2% donors (139 corporate and institutional each donating one crore or more).

Since introduction of Electoral Bonds out of total Rs. 16,492 crores worth of redeemed bonds, the BJP had a lion’s share with Rs. 8252 crores. This is more than the total contributions received by all other parties through bonds. In the previous 6 years the ruling party has collected Rs. 12,930 crores through Bonds, Electoral Trusts and other means.

Reliance Linked EB Donors to BJP

Quick Supply Chain Pvt. Ltd.	375
NexG	35
Infotel Technologies Pvt Ltd	30
Infotel Business Solutions	
Infotel Access Enterprises	5
MN Media Ventures	
Honeywell Properties Pvt Ltd	30
Chander Commercials Pvt Ltd	20
Mankind Pharma Ltd	24
Laxmidas Vallabhadas Merchant	25
KR Raja	25
Total (In Rs. crores)	569

Reliance Industries' Bond Connections

Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited, a firm having links with Reliance Industries, is the fourth largest purchaser of EBs with Rs. 410 crores. One of its directors is also a board member in at least five other Reliance companies and head of accounts in Reliance Industries Limited. This firm donated Rs. 375 crores to BJP, remaining 35 crores went to Shiv Sena and NCP.

Many firms with no direct official connections with the RIL but having common directors also on the board of RIL or in some other capacity connected to it have given EBs worth hundreds of crores to the BJP. An old business associate of Mukesh Ambani, Surendra Lunia is a board member of NexG Devices Private Limited and Infotel Business Solutions. Kamal Kumar Sharma is an associate of Lunia and is a director in Infotel Technologies Private Limited and Infotel Access Enterprises. The director of Honeywell and Chander Commercials Satyanarayanamurthy Veera Venkata Korlep is also a director on few Reliance firms. MN Media Ventures directors Sandeep Jairath and Kulwinder Pal Singh are connected to Lunia's group. Laxmidas Vallabhadas Merchant is director at several Reliance group firms. KR Raja is also a director in

Reliance firms, both of them donated Rs. 25 crores each are among top 100 donors.

MK Jalan's Keventer group, Aditya Birla group and BhartiAirtel are other big donors for the BJP with contributions worth Rs. 352 crores, Rs. 285 crores and Rs. 236 crores respectively.

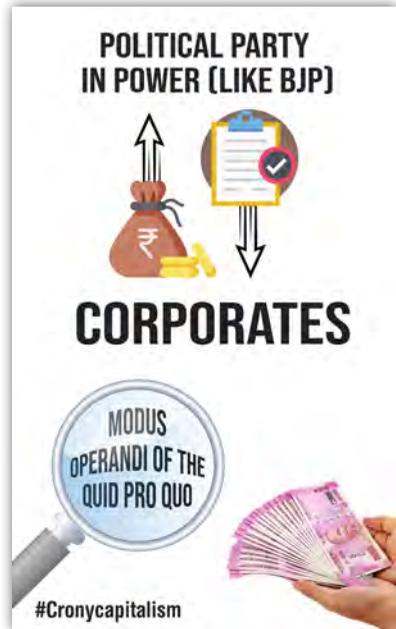
The government not only made electoral funding completely non-transparent, it also manipulated electoral bonds Rules at convenience. It reinterpreted Rules before the 2018 Karnataka Assembly elections to redeem expired bonds ought to be deposited in the National Relief Fund, and in 2022 a special window was opened in the month of December for purchase of Bonds before the Gujarat Assembly elections.

Introduction of EBs violated the constitution by depriving citizens of their fundamental right to know the source of political funding, by hiding identities of donors BJP obstructed voters from making informed decisions. The Supreme Court was also concerned that these Bonds would open doors for corruption and distort the democratic process of institutional decision making. Moreover, anonymised bearer bonds could be used by any foreign entity endangering our sovereignty. Similar apprehensions were raised by the RBI before the introduction of electoral bonds.

BJP brazenly disregarded the notion of transparency and accountability in governance at a time when corporate influence over political decision making is highest in the neo-liberal framework. History tells us that corporate houses have always donated funds to political parties as a measure of lobbying or for bribing to manipulate policies that serve their vested interests to make more profits. There is no philanthropy in corporate funding.

The BJP has gone many steps farther

with the use of central agencies like ED, CBI, IT and GST Departments whose raids on many business houses were followed by hundreds of crores of rupees worth of EBs deposited in BJP accounts. This is the highest political corruption in the country's history and biggest extortion scam too.



The Modus Operandi:

1. Corporates donate to parties, mainly the party in power, and policies are amended in their favour
2. Party in power institutes raids through governmental agencies and concerned corporate entity makes huge donations
3. The Corporate entities make donations and the ruling party withdraws/halts ongoing inquiries/investigations/cases of violations of law.

Did EBs Bought Favours to Companies?

The lists of donors and purchasers are now in public domain thanks to Supreme Court judgement. Three news organisations Newslandry, Scroll and The News Minute along with a group of independent journalists collectively investigated

under Project Electoral Bonds into the pattern of donations made through EBs by 21 companies. They found a distinct pattern of raids by CBI, ED, IT department etc preceding the dates of purchase of Bonds. This raises doubts whether the contributions are voluntary. Top two donors, Future Gaming and Hotel Services and Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd purchased bonds worth Rs. 1368 crores and Rs. 966 crores. Former was under investigation for money laundering charges and the latter for gross irregularities in mega construction projects.

Megha group's Megha Engineering and Western UP Power Transmission gave 664 crores to the BJP. This group is not only the second biggest purchaser of Bonds but also biggest donor for BJP and second biggest for the Congress party. BJP received 56% of its total donations.

Future Gaming's owner Martin Santiago has been under scanner for nearly two decades. His lottery business runs in many states, also in Bhutan and Nepal. He was accused of running an illegal lottery racket in Karnataka in 2007, then again in 2011 CBI registered 30 cases against him. It is believed he has powerful connections across political parties in various states and his business continued to flourish in spite of alleged irregularities. He is under investigation for money laundering since 2019 and in April 2022 his company's assets were attached by the ED. In April, July and September in 2022 Future Gaming premises were raided by ED and in April, July and October this company bought EBs amounting to Rs. 280 crores. The properties of Martin and his son in law were raided again in April and May 2023 followed by purchase of EBs in April and July worth 213 crores in three instalments. The attached assets were freed in May 2023.

On 2 April 2023 Martin's son Jose Charles Martin, who is Managing Director of Martin Group of Companies along with a delegation of All India Federation of Lottery Trade & Allied Industries and Rowing Federation of India met with the Union Finance Minister N Sitharaman to discuss 'on unlocking lottery industry potential to generate five crore jobs and a potential for INR 1.3 lakh crore annual GST revenues'

Future Gaming made donations six times its profits in Electoral Bonds, this company is also one of the major donors for the DMK in Tamil Nadu.

Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL), second highest purchaser of EBs, accused of gross irregularities and corruption amounting to thousands of crores of rupees in construction of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation project (KLIS) in Telangana. The Comptroller and Auditor General's performance audit report shows payments made in excess by at least Rs. 7500 crores to this company. The controversial project is ridden with corruption to the extent that original outlay of 80000 crores is now expected to rise up to Rs. 1.5 lakh crores. Income Tax officials raided its premises in October 2019, the company bought Bonds worth 5 crores in the same month. This company continued buying EBs till November 2023 totalling to Rs. 980 crores.

Vedanta Limited is the fifth largest buyer of EBs worth Rs. 400 crores has acquired concessions in environmental laws oil drilling project in Rajasthan. Company was under the scanner of CBI in 2020 and ED in 2022.

Hetero Pharma group faced a raid in October 2021 by the IT department which seized Rs. 142 crores in cash. This Group and its subsidiaries bought EBs. The chairman of this one of the biggest health sector

conglomerates in the country, Dr B Pardhasaradhi was elected to Rajya Sabha on BRS ticket in May 2022. He is the richest MP in Rajya Sabha. As reported by the Scroll most of the bonds were bought around the date of his RS nomination.

DLF Group's case is interesting as it stopped buying EBs after an ED raid in November 2023. The bonds worth 170 crores were bought by this company between October 2019 and November 2022. Aditya Birla Groups had donated Rs. 534 crores through its group companies and was successful in sanctioning strict quality control measures in import of viscose fibre. This decision restored Grasim Industries, a Birla subsidiary, monopoly in the market over small and medium producers who rely on



PROJECT ELECTORAL BOND

SL NO	NAME OF THE COMPANY	DATE OF RAID	BOND PURCHASE DATE	AMOUNT (IN RS)
1	Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited	April 2022	April 7, 2022	100 crore
		July 2022	July 6, 2022	75 crore
		September 2022	October 6, 2022	105 crore
		April 2023	April 5, 2023	90 crore
			April 11, 2023	60 crore
	May 2023	July 6, 2023	63 crore	
2	Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd	October 2019	October 3, 2019	5 crore
3	Vedanta Limited	March 2020	April 8, 2021	25 crore
		August 2022	July 7, 2022	25 crore
			November 14, 2022	110 crore
		November 15, 2022	1.75 crore	
4	Hetero Pharma Group	October 9, 2021	April 7, 2022	40 cr
5	Hero MotoCorp	March 2022	October 7, 2022	20cr
		August 2023	-	
6	Rashmi Group	July 2022	July 7, 2022	5 crore
7	DLF Group	April 2014	October 9, 2019	25 crore
		December 2022	November 15, 2022	25 crore
		November 2023	-	
8	Reddy's Labs	November 2023	November 17, 2023	21 crore
9	Navayuga Engineering	October 2018	April 18, 2019	30 crore
10	Aditya Birla Group: Utkal Alumina and Grasim Industries	February 2019	April 15, 2019	1 crore
			April 15, 2019	1 crore
			April 18, 2019	1 crore
11	United Phosphorus	January 2020	November 15, 2022	50 crore
12	Aurobindo Pharma	November 2022	November 15, 2022	5 crore
14	IFB Agro Limited	June 2020	October 8, 2021	12 crore
15	Chennai Green Wood Private Limited	July 2021	January 5, 2022	40 crore
16	Rungta Sons Pvt Ltd	December 7, 2023	January 11, 2024	50 crore
17	Shirdi Sai Electricals	December 20, 2023	January 11, 2024	40 crore
18	HES Infra	February 2021	April 8, 2021	20 crore
19	Shri Jagannath Steels & Power Ltd	December 2020	April 9, 2021	7 crore
20	Kalpataru Projects International Limited	August 2023	July 5, 2023	10 crore
21	Sun Pharma	May 2019	May 8, 2019	10 crore

The NEWS Minute

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import of cheaper fibre from China and Indonesia.

CPIML had demanded from Dhama government in Uttarakhand to lodge a criminal case against the Navayuga Engineering Company and an investigation into the irregularities and corruption by this company in 2023 after the Sylkyara-Barkot tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand when lives

of 41 miners were at stake for 17 days. This company had purchased EBs worth Rs. 55 crores which were given to BJP between 2019 and 2022. Navayuga's Hyderabad based offices were raided by the Registrar of Companies and IT department in 2018 for tax violations and money laundering allegations. This is a travesty that Navayuga company continues to enjoy the fruits of

cronyism, while the leader of rescue miners who saved lives of 41 workers in Sylkyara, Wakeel Hasan, has to bear the brunt of Modi's Bulldozer-raj. He is rendered homeless, his home at Khajuri in East Delhi was demolished by the government.

The Dhama government took no action against Navayuga for violating standards or for endangering the lives of workers. An investigation panel later found that proper safety arrangements were not made during the construction of the tunnel. This tunnel is part of Modi's much hyped Char Dham All Weather Project which is causing immense devastation to the environment and social life in Uttarakhand hills. Navayuga was also awarded the Rishikesh-Karnprayag rail link project in Uttarakhand. Another big project by this company in Assam, a bridge on Brahmaputra river was inaugurated by Narendra Modi in 2017. This same company was also responsible for the death of twenty labourers in August last year in an accident in Nagpur-Mumbai Samridhi expressway and a case of culpable homicide has been registered against the company.

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal was arrested in the liquor scam case filed by the Enforcement Directorate on 21 March. One of the accused in this case is a director in Aurobindo Pharma P Sarath Chandra Reddy who was taken into custody on 10 November 2022. He contributed Rs. 5 crores to BJP just five days after his arrest. In June 2023 he turned approver in this case and in November same year Aurobindo Pharma (and related firms) gave another 50 crores in EBs to BJP. (See Page 12 for the article on Pharma companies and the EBs)

Rest of the companies in this list of twenty one companies seem to earn favour with respect to irregularities in their conduct or to seek concessions in environmental clearing or some other type.

Another interesting case that correlates corruption allegations and Electoral Bonds is one on Robert Vadra of alleged fraud in a land deal that was filed in Gurugram in 2018. DLF group was alleged to be involved in this. In April 2023 Haryana government told the high court that it has not found any violation in this case. Between October 2029 and November 2022 DLF group had contributed Bonds worth Rs. 170 crores to the BJP.

Santiago Martin's Future group was the highest contributor with Rs. 542 crores for the All India Trinamool Congress which received a total of Rs. 1609 crores in EBs. Sanjiv Goenka group has donated Rs. 403 crores and Keventers group gave Rs. 47 crores to AITC. Both these groups have major business interests in West Bengal.

The Kaventer group, faced investigation by ED for undervaluing shares in divestment in Metro Dairy, donated to BJP Rs. 320 crores.

Bharat Rashtra Samithi in Telangana received Rs. 1214 crores total through Bonds. Megha Engineering again was the biggest donor for this party with Rs. 195 crore.

For Odisha's ruling party Biju Janata Dal, Essel Mining (174 crores), Jindal Steel & Power (100 crore) and Aditya Birla's Utkal Alumina (70 crore) were major contributors. These groups have big industrial projects in Odisha. BJD's total contribution was Rs. 775 crores. ■

Influencing Policy

Energy Sector

Electoral Bonds worth Rs. 3600 crores were purchased by companies in the Energy sector, biggest among them being the second highest donor MEIL and its subsidiaries with Rs. 1200 crores. Almost all major players in this sector donated to political parties. Many ongoing projects in the energy sector affect a large number of populations facing displacements. We are aware that effective political push plays a role in acquiring environmental, forest and land clearances in such projects.

Environment

The National Green Tribunal questioned Sun Pharma in 2022 for environmental clearance by the ministry for its TN expansion plant in Kanchipuram, this company had donated 31.5 crores in 2019-20.

Vedanta groups, a multinational mining conglomerate, gave Rs. 230 crores to BJP. This group's Cairn Oil is responsible for polluting water sources making them unsuitable for use in Barmer district of Rajasthan. The company has not provided any alternate arrangement for water to the locals as was directed by the administration. Vedanta companies are responsible for polluting the environment in other places including Jharsuguda and Kalahandi in Odisha. This has not failed in acquiring clearances from the ministry of Environment or clean chits from the NGT despite local peoples' protests and objections. Vedanta donated Rs. 125 crores to Congress.

Much before Electoral Bonds, Vedanta a foreign company, had illegally contributed to BJP and

Congress violating FCRA for which both these parties were indicted by Delhi High Court in 2014. The Modi government amended the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act in 2016 with retrospective effect to change the definition of 'foreign' company, and made illegal donations legal in one go.

Dubious Deals ?

The BJP government in 2017 had done away with the earlier corporate donation cap of 7.5% of net profit. 200 top donor companies contributed a total of Rs. 8,700 crores to political parties, which in case of earlier 7.5% cap would have been only Rs. 21 lakhs for that year.

The Reporters' Collective analysed, out of 200, 16 loss making firms who donated to parties in EBs worth Rs. 710 crores, major share went to BJP with Rs. 460 crores. Bharti Airtel incurred an average loss of Rs. 9,716 crore during 2020-21 to 2022-23, but the company made donations worth Rs 197.6 crore (Rs 197 crore to BJP, Rs 50 lakh to National Conference, Rs 10 lakh to RJD). DLF too incurred losses in the financial year 2019-20 even then it made donations.

Apart from this, 31 firms made political donations exceeding their profits. A liquor distribution company made an average profits of Rs. 6 lakhs in three years, but donated to BJP Rs. 6.8 crore and to RJD Rs. 70 lakhs. Santiago Martin's Future Gaming contributed 16 times more than its average three year profits. Reliance linked Qwik Supply Chain Pvt Ltd donated 15 times more than its profit. A Keventer group's company, Madanlal Ltd, gave 56 times more money to parties than its average three year profits. ■

Drugs, Bonds, and BJP

▲ V. ARUN KUMAR

The Electoral Bonds has unearthed a complex web of nexus between the BJP, enforcement agencies and private pharma companies. To understand the scale of political corruption by the BJP, one has to juxtapose the donations from ED, Electoral Trusts and corporates with the 'Ease of Doing Business' policies that have been given on a platter to the rich and the corporates by the Modi regime.

A quick look at the recently released data on income inequality by the World Inequality Lab makes the picture clearer. The report notes that today India is now among the most unequal countries in the world. The rich (1% of the population) are getting richer, and the poor poorer. The report notes, "While the top 10% and top 1% hold respectively 57% and 22% of total national income, the bottom 50% share has gone down to 13%. India stands out as a poor and very unequal country, with an affluent elite. At the very top of the pyramid, the wealthiest 10,000 individuals own an average of Rs. 2260 crore in wealth, 16,763 times the average Indian."

Though the trend of consolidation of wealth in the hands of the rich is clearly visible from 1990s onwards, the period India implemented the neoliberal economic model, but post 2014-15 this consolidation skyrocketed. Clearly, the slogans of *Acche Din* and Amrit Kaal are benefiting the rich and the elites, the top one percent.

This enormous consolidation of wealth in a few hands is a part of the largest economic-political corruption — the crony capitalism — India has seen in its history. While the rich amassed their wealth, the oligarchs close to the *Sengol* wielding

king received ports, airports and several humongous projects.

The data on electoral bonds exposes corporate houses involved in infrastructure, mining and other sectors, and their relationship to the ruling BJP. In this article, we will focus on the healthcare and pharmaceuticals sector which deeply impacts the lives and livelihood of millions, especially people at the bottom of the wealth pyramid. In previous issues of Liberation — *COVID-19 Vaccine Debauch: Why are people left at the mercy of the market?* (June 2021) and *The Unhealthy Medicine Scenario in India* (June 2023) — we explored how the market oriented and privatised pharma and healthcare push by the BJP government is hitting people hard.

Vaccines & Donations

The COVID-19 pandemic in India had left the country's millions of people suffering due to lack of access to healthcare and medicines. When the ICMR-National Institute of Virology developed the vaccine, the BJP government decided to go for a market-oriented vaccine strategy rather than utilising the country's public sector resources. Why did India with a rich history of strong immunisation programs, went for private players? The electoral bond and electoral trusts' donations sheds some light on this.

Serum Institute of India (SII) donated around Rs. 50.02 crores to the Bharatiya Janata Party via Prudent Electoral Trust during 2022-23. Meanwhile, in January 2024, Bharat Biotech International Limited and related firms like Chiron Behring Vaccines Private Limited, Biovet Private Limited and RCC Nutra Fill Private Limited donated Rs 25 crore to the Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu

Desam Party. The BJP has recently forged an alliance with the TDP for the ongoing elections.

Article 14, in an article published in November 2021 noted how Bharat Biotech, then a small Hyderabad-based company, has been offered a virtual monopoly by the Modi government. Bharat Biotech was reaping gigantic profit for a vaccine which was largely developed and invested by the government. Furthermore, in response to a Rajya Sabha question, it was revealed that the government had transferred the viral strain isolated by the ICMR-NIV to Bharat Biotech for a one-time fee of mere Rs 5 lakh.

We will now take a look at the entire pharmaceutical / drug manufacturing sector vis-a-vis EB donations.

Drugs & Bonds

Around 35 pharmaceutical companies have contributed a whopping Rs 1,000 crore to political parties through electoral bonds. Many of them were facing ED or IT or enforcement agencies like drug control authority at the time of purchasing the bonds.

1. Torrent Pharma tops the electoral bond list in the pharma sector donations to BJP, with the company giving away Rs. 61 crore to the ruling party between 2019 to Jan 2024.

In September 2019, Losar H drug (for lowering blood pressure) manufactured by the company failed a quality test by the Gujarat Food and Drug Administration. Again, in October 2019, the US Food and Drug Administration issued a warning of quality related failure at Torrent's manufacturing unit in Gujarat. However, no action was taken against the pharmaceutical company. Furthermore, in December 2021 and February 2023, Nicoran LV (to treat heart diseases) and Lopamide (for



Pharma biggest donor in top 5

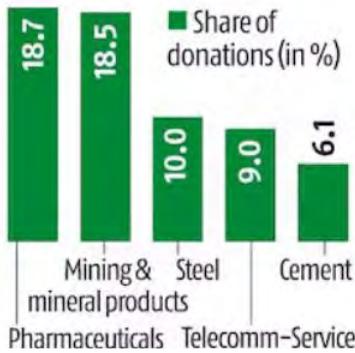


Fig 4: The largest sectoral donor was pharmaceuticals (18.7 per cent) among nearly 100 listed companies (as per company data from Capitaline) across 32 sectors have contributed to political parties through electoral bonds. (Source: Business Standard)

controlling diarrhoea) failed to meet quality standards.

2. Dr Reddy's Laboratories, which bought bonds worth Rs 84 crores, donated Rs. 32 crore to BRS and Rs. 25 Crore to BJP. IT officials conducted raids in November 2023 on Dr K Nagender Reddy of Dr Reddy's Laboratories over allegations of tax evasion.

3. Natco Pharma Ltd purchased a total electoral bond worth Rs. 69.25 crore, and Rs. 15 Crore went to the BJP. Hetero Pharma and associated entities gave Rs. 50 crore to BRS and Rs. 10 Crore to BJP. Divi's Lab donated Rs. 30 crore to the BJP out of the total Rs 55 crore worth of bonds purchased. The company had faced several non-sanitary and contamination complaints regarding its production facility during US FDA inspections in Natco facility in Mekaguda in August 2019 and October 2023.

4. The accused turned approver in the alleged Delhi Liquor Scam case, **Sarath Reddy** was the director of **Aurobindo Pharma**, a company which along with two of its subsidiaries (**Eugia Pharma Specialities Ltd and APL Healthcare Ltd**) donated Rs. 55 crore to the BJP. Interestingly, Aurobindo Pharma purchased electoral bonds worth Rs 5 crore on November 15, 2022, five days after its director was arrested in the liquor case. On November 21, the BJP encashed this sum, and soon, in June 2023, Reddy was made approver in the case. On November 8, 2023, Aurobindo Pharma and the two subsidiaries donated in total an amount of Rs. 50 crore to BJP via EBs.

5. Another big name in the Pharmaceutical industry, **Cipla** donated almost all of its bond amount to the BJP. Cipla gave Rs. 37 crore in Bonds to the BJP. The company received four notices regarding substandard drugs between 2018 and 2022. According to Scoll.in, in 2018 Cipla's RC cough syrup failed quality standards and in 2019 the company purchased bonds worth Rs. 15 crore. Again, in July 2021, it received notices of quality failure and in November 2022, the company purchased bonds worth Rs. 25.2 crore.

6. Sun Pharma and Labs gave its entire bond amount of Rs. 31.5 crore to the BJP. According to Reporters Collective, in 2022, this company was taken to NGT for environmental violations for its proposed expansion of a bulk drug manufacturing unit in the Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. Though it got the Central government's environment clearance just three months after applying, but the strong opposition from the locals and with case in NGT, the clearance was put on-hold.

7. In 2022-2023, **Zydus Healthcare**, a Gujarat-based company gave Rs. 18 crore to the BJP. According to reports, in 2021, the drug regulatory

authorities in Bihar had flagged a batch of Remdesivir produced by the company as substandard after traces of bacterial endotoxin were found in them.

8. The Hyderabad-based **Hetero Labs and Hetero Drugs Ltd** purchased electoral bonds worth Rs 39 crore in April 2022. This was at a time when the company's drug manufacturing arm was facing complaints about substandard quality. The company was issued six notices for failing drug quality tests by the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration, including for Remdesivir, an antiviral drug widely used in Covid-19. Remdesivir was in massive demand during the pandemic. Furthermore, its antifungal medicine, Itbor and antibacterial drug, Monocef, were found to be substandard in 2021. Apart from this, the Hetero entities faced IT raids and protests regarding industrial pollution. Overall, the Hetero companies together donated Rs. 50 crore to the BRS and Rs. 10 crore to the BJP.

Journalists Soumyarendra Barik and Aanchal Magazine (The Hindu, March 15) mapping the pattern of electoral bonds and actions by enforcement agencies notes:

On one particular day, November 10, 2022, major pharma companies including Cipla, Dr Reddy's, and Ipca Laboratories purchased bonds totalling close to Rs 50 crore. A day later, Glenmark and Mankind also purchased bonds worth over Rs 30 crore. Three days later, on November 14, Alembic Pharmaceuticals, Alkem Laboratories and Piramal bought bonds worth over Rs 20 crore.

Incidentally, in March 2022, the Directorate General of Goods and Services Tax Investigation (DGGI) had started a probe against several pharmaceutical companies for alleged tax evasion, including Glenmark

Pharma, Cipla, Mylan and Aurobindo Pharma.

In total, Prime Minister Modi's party received a whopping Rs. 420 crore from the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector alone.

Pharma and Government - Quid pro quo?

Public health experts have raised serious concerns regarding the pattern of electoral bond purchases by pharma companies, especially as the pharma lobby in India has been pushing for concessions from the government, both for increasing drug prices and also for regulatory relaxations. The BJP's 'ease of doing business' policy and the red carpet for the rich and the private sector has been the result of this corporate nexus. In return for donations to BJP the pharma industry has gained considerably.

For example, the government's gross and wilful neglect of public sector companies and manufacturing units (as seen in the case of COVID-19 Vaccine) has given pharma companies more leverage to push for corporatisation of healthcare and thus increased drug prices. In April 2023, the Modi government approved an increase in the prices of essential medicines by 12.12 per cent. This was the highest ever annual increase in the prices of drugs in recent times. Previously in 2022, the drug prices were increased by 10.70 per cent.

Furthermore, the government has announced a scheme for 'Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks' where support will be provided to companies involved in crucial bulk drug production. Bulk drugs or Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) are the main ingredients of a drug or medicine. While, the API domestic production will considerably reduce the burden of imports and can help drug production costs, but experts argue, it is only helping private players at public

expense. As long as major public sector involvement is lacking, the access to medicine will remain a major challenge.

The money for this scheme was allocated in the Union Budget for the Department of Pharmaceutical, primarily for its Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for pharma companies. The BJP government had allocated Rs. 4,089.95 crore for this scheme for the fiscal year 2024-25, which is higher than the Rs. 3,160.06 crore outlay estimated for the fiscal year 2023-24.

In 2023, the application of **Aurobindo Pharma (via subsidiary Lyfius Pharma Pvt. Ltd)**, which together with its related firms gave Rs. 55 crore to the BJP in EBs, was approved under PLI scheme for manufacturing of Penicillin G, a key fermentation-based API.

Interestingly, India's public sector (like Hindustan Antibiotic Limited and Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited) was once a world leader in production of fermentation technology-based APIs like Penicillin G (Liberation, June 2023). But due to the anti-public sector policies of the government and the increasing focus on market based approach, many of these PSUs have shut down, with India now forced to depend on fermentation based APIs.

In 2019, most of these drug companies including Sun Pharma's US arm Taro, Zydus, Lupin, Aurobindo Pharma, Dr Reddy's and Glenmark were accused in the US of market manipulation and unfair practices in collusion with an Israeli Pharma to inflate the prices of generic medicines. As per reports, due to the manipulation 112 drugs saw a price rise of around 1000 percent. Aurobindo Pharma is the largest provider of generic drugs by prescription to the US market.

Another major concern regarding the staggering amount of money being given to political parties in power by

Pharma companies is hampering the ability of the government machinery to take action in cases of spurious drugs and substandard medicines. As illustrated above, several of the products of these drug companies failed drug quality tests. These incidents of the drug quality failures faced by pharma companies should have attracted immediate suspension of manufacturing licences, but instead business was as usual for them. According to reports, around 3 to 4 percent of drugs are found to be substandard or fake, or spurious in India.

Once known for high quality generic drugs, today we witness several cases of death and injury due to spurious drugs in India. WHO in 2022 had flagged a warning over four Indian-made cough syrups thought to be linked to the deaths of 66 children in the African nation of Gambia.

Clearly, both the BJP government and pharma companies feared the bond exposé. Many of these pharma companies are members of either Indian Drugs Manufacturers Association (IDMA) and/or the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA). Both these pharma associations influence policy making on aspects concerning drug regulation and drug pricing. The regime tries its best to keep the lid on this nefarious nexus of crony capitalism.

Data from electoral bonds, trusts and other corporate donations gives a snapshot of the correlation between the pro-corporate policy of the government and the rising income inequality in the country. The increasing privatisation of the pharma and healthcare sector has played a vital role in exacerbating this. Today, India is among the countries with the largest out-of-pocket expenditure in healthcare, with people having to pay around 48.2 percent of the total cost from their pocket. ■

21st Century Indian Fascism, Corporate Capital and the Rhetoric of ‘Women’s Empowerment’

▲ KALPANA WILSON

The rise of fascism in India has long been characterised as a ‘war on women’. This is not surprising. Globally and historically, patriarchal oppression and violence has been central to fascist ideologies and regimes. But how exactly does India’s Hindu supremacist fascism wage its ‘war on women’? And how is this shaped by the specificities of Hindutva ideology, by neoliberal capitalism, and by imperialism?

Fascism and far-right nationalism everywhere has constructed the bodies of women of the dominant community as both vehicles for reproducing the nation and as marking the boundaries of the nation, therefore requiring constant policing and control. One of the openly stated goals at the heart of the Hindu supremacist project of establishing a Hindu Brahmanical state is the replacing of India’s Constitution and the rights embedded in it with the Manusmriti, which explicitly states that women must be under the control of a man, whether father, husband or son, throughout their lives, and dehumanises oppressed castes and queer people. We can observe too the day-to-day moral policing by the stormtroopers of Hindutva who function as extensions of the state, the legitimacy granted to the gender and caste violence of patriarchal village councils, khaap panchayats, now being invoked by the government as an authentically Indian form of democracy; the institutionalised violence against those who choose their own partners, especially if these relationships are intercaste or interfaith – and in the latter case, the laws which actually criminalise such relationships in the name of

‘love jihad’ and those which facilitate their policing and harassment such as Uttarakhand’s Uniform Civil Code and its provisions regarding live-in relationships.

Conversely, women of the demonised minority communities are seen as embodying a demographic threat to the majority making them the targets of horrific violence. India has witnessed what feminist historian Tanika Sarkar has called the ‘almost inexhaustible violence’ which the Hindu supremacists have directed at Muslim women – violence which incorporates the genocidal horror of pogroms like that in Gujarat in 2002, and the day-to-day war of attrition exemplified in the open calls by hate-preachers for mass rape of Muslim women, the police atrocities against Muslim women, as witnessed again recently in Haldwani, and the vicious online targeting of Muslim women journalists, activists and others critical of the current regime. We witness the protection, leniency and even felicitation offered to rapists of Muslim and Dalit women. The regime’s political prisoners, including women like Gulfisha Fatima and Shoma Sen, languish in jail on false charges, endlessly denied bail. Meanwhile we find that even after Bilkis Bano’s immensely courageous struggle had succeeded in sending her rapists back to jail, these ‘sanskari’ rapists and murderers are granted parole and furloughs on the flimsiest of pretexts.

Meanwhile, although ‘feminists’ are not always explicitly listed as enemies of the state, we can see the demonisation of the so-called Urban

Naxal woman who is described as free-love practising, cosmopolitan, Marxist, Pakistan-loving, and terrorist-supporting.

All of this has much in common with the gender ideologies of European fascism which of course provided inspiration for Hindu supremacism from the 1920s onwards. The RSS was formed in 1925 modelled on Mussolini’s fascist youth organisation. And Hindutva ideologue MS Golwalkar notoriously hailed Nazi Germany as a ‘model of race pride’ which India should emulate.

But a marked difference with these earlier fascisms lies in the fact that central to Hindu supremacist gender discourses is the figure of the ‘excessively patriarchal’ Muslim man who represents and epitomises gendered oppression and violence. This allows core Hindutva policies such as the Uniform Civil Code or even the revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir to be championed as promoting women’s and LGBTQ+



rights, even when such false claims are thoroughly debunked.

This approach is in fact shared with Modi's close ally and model Israel's Zionist ideology, which weaponises the rhetoric of 'women's rights' to legitimise the genocide against the Palestinian people – even pointing to Israeli women soldiers being on the front line when Israel commits its genocidal atrocities as an example of liberation. It also evokes the US imperialist wars on Afghanistan which claimed to be 'saving' Muslim women. More generally Hindutva shares with contemporary US-led imperialism the identification of Muslims with a series of interlinked tropes including terrorism; fanaticism; allegiance to forces external, and hostile, to the nation; illegal immigration; population growth; and women's subordination.

Along with this, the Hindu supremacist state promotes a particular notion of women's empowerment/naari shakti as something authentically Hindu, especially of course, when it involves the mobilisation of women within the Hindutva project and their incorporation as perpetrators of violence.

On one level, it is easy to see that the government's 'women's empowerment' rhetoric is simply a veneer designed to try to win women's votes, as with the passing of the flawed Women's Reservation Bill with no date for implementation, and the seemingly endless announcements of flimsy new government schemes aimed at women.

But today's Hindutva is also inextricably entwined with neoliberal corporate capital. And its brand of naari shakti/women's empowerment is also inseparable from a neoliberal discourse of gender equality mobilised for expanding corporate profits in various ways. It is used to legitimise policies of incorporating women as underpaid or unpaid workers into labour markets, without challenging

the gender division of labour in which women continue to do the lion's share of domestic work. As the State of Working India 2023 report explains, female employment rates have risen in India since 2019, a time when growth was slowing down. Underlying this is the fact that women have been forced into precarious work, including unpaid work as 'family helpers' often categorised as self-employment, by falling household incomes. And crucially, the report reminds us that 'a shift in current weekly status from domestic duties to employment need not mean a reduction in hours spent in care work and other domestic activities...we find that increased workforce participation may be accompanied by constant or even increased time spent in housework for women'.

The Indian state's women's empowerment discourse is used to promote the financialisation of women's debt through self-help group and microfinance schemes which are increasingly integrated into global financial flows and profit-making. Women taking these loans find themselves harassed and persecuted for repayments, only escaping the clutches of microfinance companies when they have organised vibrant collective movements against debt.

This neoliberal form of naari shakti/women's empowerment is also invoked to promote population policies which are shaped at global as well as national level. These have long been partially driven by commitments made by the Indian government under global population control programmes like FP2030, which was set up by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations alongside US and UK governments and the UNFPA. Women from poor households – mainly Dalit, OBC and Adivasi women, instead of being given access to safe contraception which they can control, continue to be targeted for coercive sterilisations and unsafe injectable

and implantable contraceptives, practices which have long been a focus of feminist resistance. As with the Chhattisgarh sterilisation massacre of 2014 this targeting often coincides with campaigns of dispossession and displacement to make way for mining and environmental destruction by transnational corporates like Adani and Vedanta.

At the same time calls for coercive population control explicitly directed at Muslim women's bodies have become a key part of the Hindu supremacist arsenal. In UP under Yogi Adityanath, alongside the bulldozing of Muslim homes and the mass killing of Muslim youths by the police in fake encounters, the government introduced the Uttar Pradesh Population (Control, Stabilisation and Welfare) Bill, ahead of the 2022 elections in the state. This proposes restricted access to food distribution schemes, disqualification from applying for government jobs, a bar on promotions for existing government employees, and ineligibility for receiving any government subsidy for people who have more than two children. Further, sterilization of one partner, which in practice means almost exclusively tubectomies for women, is specifically mandated to access certain benefits after two children. These laws invoke and legitimise the ongoing stream of false claims and hate speech about Muslims in India being set to 'outnumber' Hindus'. In BJP-ruled Assam, in the context of the violent campaigns against its Muslim minority who are demonised as 'Bangladeshi immigrants' a similar bill was introduced in 2021, with the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announcing the formation of what he called a 1,000 strong 'Population Army' to distribute contraceptives and create awareness about population control in Muslim-dominated areas of the state. This January he further announced that a new welfare scheme aimed at 'developing entrepreneurship among

women' would only be provided to women with three children or less.

Understanding these intimate connections between Hindu supremacist fascism, neoliberal corporate capital and the women's empowerment discourse perhaps makes it easier to understand why Melinda Gates, a leading advocate of the neoliberal approach to gender equality, could be all praise for Yogi Adityanath, who notoriously wrote in 2014, echoing the Manusmriti, that 'Women must not be left free and independent'. In the midst of an epidemic of rapes and murders in which Dalit women and girls were especially targeted and state forces repeatedly shielded upper caste and powerful perpetrators, Gates actually enthused that "Uttar Pradesh is a model not only for India but for the whole world" praising it in many fields including women's empowerment.

Confronting this 21st century fascism in India, resistance to the 'war on women' takes many different forms. We have seen it in the students rising up against sexual harassment and violence and administrative collusion and repression, in the iconic Shaheen Bagh occupations of public space by Muslim women in the anti-CAA movement, in the resistance by Adivasi women to the acute gendered violence of the state and corporate land-grabbers, in the demands of women scheme workers and sanitation workers for decent wages and conditions, recognition and dignity. We see it in the insistence of Kashmiri women who refuse the erasure of mass rapes by the Indian Army, in the voices of Kuki-Zo women demanding an end to the atrocities in Manipur, and in the trans activists resisting exclusion from citizenship. This resistance continually exposes the lies of patriarchal, Islamophobic, neoliberal and imperialist claims to women's empowerment, reaffirming radical visions of hope, possibility and freedom. ■

Brave Women of Badgaon

On February 13, twenty three CPIML comrades were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in a politically motivated murder case by the Arah MP/MLA Court in Bihar. Most of those jailed are poor, landless and small farmers, who have spent their lives fighting feudal forces in Bihar.

Manoj Manzil, a Central Committee member of CPIML a popular young MLA from the Agiaon constituency is one of them. In the 2020 Vidhan Sabha election, he secured more than 62 percent of votes polled and defeated his nearest rival by more than 45 thousand votes. On the basis of his conviction, his MLAsip was cancelled.

A Liberation team visited Badgaon village on 7 March 2024 to meet the life partners and relatives of those imprisoned. Their lives and story of struggles and resistance against feudal oppression reminds us of Alok Dhanwa's famous poem '*Bruno ki betiyan*' (Daughters of Bruno).

Next day, which was coincidentally International Working Women's Day, the team sat to pen down the interaction with family members of Badgaon 23. What a day to pen down a note on these brave, resilient, inspiring women.

Ramsawati Devi (58): She is the wife of Com. Cheena Ram, is a leading CPIML personality in Badgaon and been a member of the party's block committee. Her parental house is in village Nagri, block Charpokhari of Bhojpur district.

Com. Cheena Ram is in jail since 2020 as a result of cases filed against him in the course of his political struggles. In this new judgement, Com. Cheena Ram and his two younger brothers Keraram and Bharat Ram have also been convicted. Ramsawati Devi is a party member, who had been in forefront of all party activities and rallies. In 2011, she contested the election for village Mukhiya. Her father, as well as other members of her family, had been associated with CPIML.

Ramsawati Devi said that the party's struggle for dignity and rights of the poor had always inspired her. She told us about the fateful day of 11 November 1998, when 10 people belonging to Dalit and other backward communities were killed by the Ranveer Sena in the Nagri village. All the accused were acquitted by an order of Patna High Court in March 2013. Ramsawati Devi recalled that she got married a few years before this massacre and her eldest son Amrendra Kumar had been born by the time this massacre happened. Most of those killed lived in her neighbourhood.

She fondly narrates the visits of martyred comrade Satish Yadav at their home. His wife used to campaign during the elections. She recalled her reaction to the news of Com. Satish's killing on 20 August, 2015, when he was returning from a meeting. She quickly wound up the meeting she was attending, collected the party flags and banners, and joined the comrades in mourning.

Earlier she resided in her ancestral home, but has now shifted to a hutment near a pond, due to the lack of adequate dwelling space at the ancestral home. Her elder son is engaged and she hopes that her husband will be released on bail by the time of the marriage.

She said that she would continue to raise her voice against this politically motivated case and injustice.

Pramila Devi (45): Her husband Com. Jaykumar Yadav is a member of Agiaon block committee. Her parents' house is in village Malpura, Karakat block of Rohtas district. She told us that her father Chandra Dev Singh, who is also a supporter of CPIML, rushed to meet her on hearing the news of the court judgement.

In 2016, she won the election for the post of village Mukhiya in Paaswa panchayat. In 2021, her husband contested for this post but lost by a thin margin. During her tenure as Mukhiya, she prioritised the construction of drainage facilities and roads, as well as the construction of houses under the Indira Awaas Yojana scheme and distribution of ration cards.

She is now facing the challenge of managing a large family consisting of the widow and daughter of her husband's late brother, her father-in-law and mother-in-law and her 3 children. The younger brother of her husband has also been sentenced in this case. A woman of firm determination, Pramila Devi remains steadfast not only in her resolve to be part of future struggles but also to lead them.

Hemanti Devi (40): Her husband Ravindra Chowdhury as well as her father-in-law Ramadhar Chowdhury have been jailed in this case. Her parental house is in Harnat and village of Jagdishpur block, in Bhojpur district.

She is a member of CPIML. Her entire family is landless and works as farm labourers. Her two sons are married while her two daughters – Pratima

and Neha – and 10-year-old son Karan, are currently pursuing education. Hemanti Devi said that people will fight and foil the conspiracy against Dalits and poor hatched by the feudal elements and BJP.

Phoolpatto Devi (60): Her husband Ramadhar Chowdhury and elder son Ravindra Chowdhury have been sentenced to life imprisonment in the case. Her parental house is in Mali village of block Karpi in Arwal district. Her two brothers - Jaymangal and Munna stay there with their families. She works as a farm labourer. Her entire family is a staunch supporter of the party. She proudly tells us that she attended the Jan Vishwas Rally held in Patna on March 3 and will continue to take part in the struggle for rights, dignity and justice.

Daulati Devi (52): Her husband

Badgaon: A Saga of Struggle

Eighty year old Bhinik Ram has six sons, three of them are among Badgaon-23 who have been given life sentences. He says that the CPIML had been working in this village since the 70s. He was arrested once by the police back then on a false charge of murder, and was set free later. The founding leaders of CPIML in Bhojpur region, comrades Jagadish Master and Rameshwar Yadav used to visit this village and his home.

Much Rajput caste lumpens of this village, led by Guddu Singh, Lavkush Singh and Bam Singh, had joined Ranvir Sena. Toiling dalit people of Badgaon faced and valiantly resisted many attacks by the Ranvir Sena, and made sacrifices.

In 2006-07 a piece of community land was freed from the illegal occupation of feudals of the village and redistributed to 110 landless families belonging to Mahadalit, Bind and Kahar castes. This was a struggle

involving huge mass participation. The District Magistrate and Senior Superintendent of Police along with a huge force had to make a retreat in face of massive mobilisation. The police, colluding with feudals, had come to demolish the newly built huts.

In face of the growing unity of the poor toiling dalits, then mukhiya of the village and leader of upper caste feudals, Rinku Singh, with his gang murdered CPIML leader and a popular leader Comrade Satish Yadav in August 2015. Comrade Satish was ambushed when returning home after attending a public meeting. They then conspiratorially implicated 23 party cadres and supporters in the murder of one Jaiprakash Singh, whose dead body was not even recovered. The criminals tried to divert the attention from the heinous killing of Comrade Satish Yadav by lodging this false case.

Poor and dalits in the village understood this conspiracy quite well and responded by giving a decisive mandate to CPIML candidates in the panchayat elections held next year in Badgaon and nearby Poswan and Karwasi panchayats.

This year in January and February people of Badgaon and Poswan organised the party's Panchayat conferences with enthusiasm. The Badgaon CPIML Panchayat committee members Prem Ram, Nandkumar Chaudhary and Prabhu Chaudhary and Poswan Party Panchayat committee member Jaikumar Yadav are now in jail in this motivated false case.

The poor of Badgaon are anguished and upset, but they are also determined to take their struggle for dignity, land and equality to newer heights. CPIML, the voice of the poor and working people in Bhojpur, is conducting an intensive mass contact campaign among the poor and dalit masses in the region. ■

Nand Kumar Choudhary, a member of CPIML and currently a member of the party's Panchayat committee has been sentenced in the case. Her parental house is in Navdeeha of Buxar district where the families of her three brothers – the late Pinto Choudhary, Sudama Choudhary and Jagdamba Choudhary reside.

Daulati Devi is also a party member and she was the Pradhan from 2016 to 2021. Their children are mostly employed as labourers. Daulati Devi asserted that, despite all the challenges, she and the party comrades will continue to fight against injustice.

Rajkumari Devi (50): Her father-in-law, Ramanand Prasad, aged 90 years, has been sentenced. Her ailing mother-in-law, Suvachan Devi (87) lives with her sons Shivaji Prasad and Dayanand Prasad in Delhi. Rajkumari's husband Krishnanand Prasad died at the age of 55 due to Covid.

She is an Anganwadi Sevika. Though she has a pucca house in the village, she is unable to stay there as it is in a Rajput locality and they constantly threaten and intimidate. Currently, she stays on government land. She said that the case filed against her father-in-law and others is a political conspiracy and she will continue to raise her voice against this injustice.

Tetri Devi (50): Her husband Triloki Ram and his two brothers Cheena Ram and Bharat Ram are imprisoned in the case. Her parental house is in Amhruan village of Sahar block, district Bhojpur. This village is next to the well-known Ekwari village, where the flame of resistance was lit in 70s which then engulfed Bhojpur. Her husband was a construction worker while she earns a living by working as a farm labourer. They do not own agricultural land.

Her parental family has long been associated with the party. Her elder son works in the railways while her other three sons and her lone daughter Kusum Kumari are college students. Tetra Devi is worried about



March 18 : CPIML Protest Convention in Badgaon for Release of Badgaon 23 Comrades (see report on Page 34)

their education and future. The entire family is bearing the brunt of the sentence, but are determined to fight for justice.

Baby Devi (35): Her husband Gabbar Choudhary was a brick kiln worker and imprisoned in the case. Her parental home is in the neighbouring village of Poswan. She, along with her son and mother-in-law work as farm labourers. She asserted, "Our entire family supports CPIML. We have stood with the party and will continue to do so in the future".

Prabhavati Devi (52): Her husband Shivbali Choudhary is in jail. Both of them are farm labourers. Her parental house is in Kanui of Jagdishpur block. She recalled about Comrades Juit (Totaman Paswan) and Comrade Sahtu, who embraced martyrdom in her village. She stays with her widowed daughter and two grandchildren. She is worried about her husband, but she said she will continue to seek justice.

Chinta Devi (38): Her husband Pawan Chaudhary, who is jailed in the case used to work as a driver. Chinta Devi works as a farm labourer. Her parental house is in Devradh of Jagdishpur block.

Kalawati Devi (55): Her husband Tanman Chowdhury is a member of CPIML block committee. Her parental

house is in Diliyan Tola of Jagdishpur block. She has no homestead land of her own and stays on government land. All her four sons are labourers. She is worried about her future as she has no earning of her own.

Phoolpato Devi (54): Her husband is Rambali Choudhary. Her parental house is in Kanui village of Jagdishpur block. She doesn't own any agricultural land and her husband used to work on leased land. She worked as a labourer in the farms. Their daughter Anjali Kumari is studying in class 8.

Binda Devi (50): Her husband Prem Ram, who is in jail, is a member of the panchayat committee of CPIML. Her parental house is in Sikriyan of Agiaon block. Her three sons are farm labourers and stay elsewhere with their families. She is a farm labourer and stays on government land as she is landless. She stays with her daughter Kajal Kumari who has appeared for the Matriculation examination. She is distressed because her husband is in jail, but hope that he will be released soon.

Phoola Devi (40): Her husband is Manoj Chaudhary. Her parental house is in Gulzarbagh of Karpi block. The family has a small amount of land, where they live. ■

Fascism in India Has Found a Role Model in Israel

(Based on talk by Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya at the Palestine Solidarity Convention held at the Constitution Club, New Delhi on 23 February, 2024)



I stand here in fullest solidarity with the suffering people of Gaza and the cause of Palestine's liberation from the cruel colonial occupation of Israel. The genocide being relentlessly perpetrated by Israel on the unarmed people of Gaza and the growing toll of Palestinian children, women, doctors, journalists, writers being killed every day are the most brutal and violent reflection of the world today.

It is important for us to see where India stands in the mirror of this ongoing genocide. We all applaud the courageous role South Africa

has played in this context, securing a historic indictment of Israel and a significant interim verdict against the ongoing genocide from the International Court of Justice. Just as South Africa, which had to wage a protracted battle to defeat the apartheid regime, could feel the pain of Palestine, it should have been possible for India to do so too. In fact, as a country which had to face centuries of racist colonial rule and brutal military repression by the colonial rulers, India should have boldly championed the Palestinian cause and mobilised the international community against

Israel's genocidal campaign. That would have been in keeping with the legacy of India's own freedom movement and the current claim of being a leading voice of the Global South.

Yet India under Modi today stands at the other end of the global spectrum. India is today perceived as being in league with Israel and complicit in the ongoing genocide. This is not just because of India's repeated refusal to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza in various international fora, but also because of the involvement of Indian corporates like the Adani group in Israel's armament industry



and trade and Indian state's growing strategic convergence with Israel. Worldwide, Adani is being condemned for the group's complicity in the genocide in Gaza. Among the many demonstrations of international solidarity with Palestine, we could see children and parents demonstrate in the London Science Museum against Adani's sponsorship of the so-called 'Green Energy Gallery', because Adani has the blood of the children killed in the Gaza genocide on his hands.

We can see how the Modi government uses Israeli surveillance tools to stifle dissent and persecute its political opponents. It is not just the Modi government which has developed close ties with the settler colonial regime of Israel headed by Netanyahu, various BJP-led state governments also collaborate with Israel and imitate the Israeli model of repressive governance. In 2018 a delegation led by Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar visited Israel to draw lessons from the Israeli assault on the Great March of Return protests. Today we can see those lessons in action in Haryana with the Haryana government attacking protesting farmers with drones, showering tear gas shells,

firing pellet guns and even bullets, and blocking roads with concrete barricades, barbed wire fences and nails. From the bulldozer model which started from Uttar Pradesh and has now become the universal BJP template of governance, to this emerging Haryana model - the Israeli imprint is now unmistakable and ubiquitous.

The Indian state has now taken it upon itself to ensure the supply of Indian workers as replacement for expelled Palestinian workers to serve in the construction sector in Israel. Taking advantage of mounting unemployment in India, BJP-led governments of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are playing the role of labour exporters. The colonial era phenomenon of indentured labour is back in Modi's new India to serve Israeli interests. It is therefore time we stop treating the question of India's strategic convergence with Israel as just a foreign policy question. It is very much a matter for our domestic concern. India's trade union movement must rise forcefully against the disastrous implications of India's strategic subservience to the US-Israel war machine. It is encouraging to see the construction workers' federation

and now the port workers take the call and refuse to serve the US-Israel war machine and the genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people.

In the not-too-distant past, India used to make common cause with national liberation movements in any part of the world. The memories of Vietnam and Bangladesh solidarity actions are still very much alive. Today whole new generations across the world are rising against the horror of the genocide in Gaza and in support of the Palestinian people's right to a free Palestine. In Delhi and many other cities of India, BJP-led governments are stopping Indians from expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian people. Indeed, Hindutva and Zionism are operating as ideological twins and Indians are being mobilised to identify with Israel and vocally support the genocide.

Zionists conflate every criticism of Israel with anti-semitism, likewise the Hindutva brigade dubs every criticism of the Modi regime an anti-national anti-Hindu act. Just as academics and writers around the world opposing the genocide and supporting the Palestinian cause are being accused of anti-semitism, overseas Indian citizens opposing the Modi government's policies and the Sangh brigade's fascist aggression are being charged with anti-India activities and Hinduphobia and being stripped of their OCI status. Fascism in India has found an ideological and strategic role model in Israel, and opposing the Israeli occupation of Palestine and especially the current phase of the genocidal campaign in Gaza must therefore be considered not only our international duty but an integral part of our task of defeating fascism in India. ■

End the genocide!

Solidarity with Palestine!

Joint Statement of the Southeast Asian Left Organizations

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly condemn the Zionist regime of Israel for committing genocidal crimes against the Palestinian people.

The Zionist state of Israel is currently carrying out an invasion and continuous colonization of Palestine, resulting not only in deprivation of the Palestinian people's fundamental rights to independence, dignity, justice, and prosperity, but also in perpetuating and even bolstering global imperialism which is currently still entrenched in various parts of the world.

Without the military and political backing of the United States Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Palestinian territories and the genocide underway in Gaza will not be possible. The U.S and the Western imperialist powers are thoroughly complicit in the genocide of the people of Gaza. Even the very existence of Israel would be impossible.

The fascist Zionist Israeli regime led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has committed egregious crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide on a massive scale with the assistance of weapons and funding from Western imperialist powers led by the United States. Since the start of the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, the cunning actions of ordering people to evacuate, then bombarding the refugees' escape route, and murdering journalists and medical teams, have resulted in the deaths of at least 30,000 people, including more than 12,000 children, and over 70,000 wounded. Over 1.9 million Palestinians are displaced in the Gaza Strip.

The invasion, colonization, crimes against humanity and other atrocities committed by the Zionist Israeli regime, notwithstanding the myriad of excuses and falsehoods propagated, are basically aimed to obliterate the struggle for Palestinian independence, expel the Palestinian people, seize their lands and expand Israeli territorial control.

We, as a progressive people's movement, are united in our struggle against imperialism, Zionism and genocide. We reiterate our support for the Palestinian struggle for national liberation.

We hereby, call for:

- **An end to the Zionist genocide in Palestinian territories;**
- **An end to all aggression by the Zionist Israeli military on the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip and West Bank;**
- **Punishment against all the perpetrators who committed crimes against humanity, including the Netanyahu government, U.S President Biden, and the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom in their complicity in the genocide in Gaza;**
- **Fullest support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to resist Israel's occupation;**
- **Support for the establishment of a new democratic state based on solidarity among all peoples regardless of ethnicity or religion.**

Free Palestine now!

Signed by:

1. *Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, India*
2. *Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM), Malaysia*
3. *People's Liberation Party (PPR), Indonesia*
4. *Socialist Union (Perserikatan Sosialis), Indonesia*
5. *Partai Rakyat Pekerja (PRP), Indonesia*
6. *Socialist Workers Thailand (SWT), Thailand*
7. *Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM), Philippines*
8. *Papuan Student Alliance, Papua/Indonesia*
9. *PEMBEBASAN, Indonesia*
10. *Praxis, Indonesia*
11. *Gabungan Marhaen, Malaysia*
12. *GegarAmerika, Malaysia*
13. *Jentayu, Malaysia*
14. *Sekolah Merdeka, Malaysia*
15. *Haqooq Khalq Party, Pakistan*
16. *Partido Manggagawa, Philippines*
17. *DinDeng, Thailand*
18. *Socialist Alliance, Australia*
19. *Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France* ■

A Break with the Past

US Labour Unions in Solidarity with Palestine

▲ TAMARAI

Crimes Against Humanity: Israel's Horrific Actions in Gaza

We are watching with horror the genocide that is taking place in Gaza in Palestine by Israel's military supported by the U.S. for more than four months. This has led to the deaths of nearly 30,000 people in Gaza. More than twice that number have been grievously injured. Only one in three hospitals are partially functional as medical facilities and infrastructure have been targeted by Israel. 75% of the 2.3 million population of Gaza are internally displaced.

South Africa with its glorious history of fighting apartheid took Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Hague charging it with genocide. On January 26, 2024, the ICJ ordered Israel to take measures to prevent acts amounting to genocide and ensure that services reach the affected people in Palestine. The Economist/YouGov poll results released in January, 2024 showed that 35% of Americans believed that Israel was committing genocide in Palestine with 29% undecided. 49% in the age group 18-49 agreed with the term genocide and 27% were undecided. The horrific attacks against the people of Gaza are continuing while people all over the world have taken to the streets in large numbers again and again.

Not On Our Watch: Workers and Unions are Rallying in Support of Palestine

Martha Grevatt, a retired Stellantis worker who served on the executive board of United Auto Workers Union



Photo: Noch Berger

(UAW) Locals 122 and 869 and a long time anti-war activist, spoke to me about her impressions on the response of workers and unions in the U.S. and their solidarity with the Palestinian people. "While some unions have been silent or, worse, declared "solidarity" with the Zionist state of Israel, the unions with a progressive stance now represent a majority of union members in the U.S.". While she is happy with a significant number of unions in the U.S. who have issued statements calling for a ceasefire in Palestine, she adds that "merely calling for a ceasefire is inadequate — unions must honor the call from 30 Palestinian labor organizations for workers to block shipment of weapons to Israel. But given the reactionary, staunchly pro-Zionist position of organized labor in the U.S. until now, calling for a ceasefire represents a significant break with the past."

AFL-CIO the largest labor federation in the U.S., which represents nearly 13 million workers, finally released a statement on February 8th for

a negotiated ceasefire - some say better late than never! The rank and file workers had already pressured several unions like American Postal Workers Union, United Electric Workers, Communication Workers of America, Service Employees International Union to make ceasefire statements soon after Israel started to carpet bomb Gaza and cut off food and water supply. Some like the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 3000 and United Electric Workers started a petition less than two weeks from the commencement of Israeli actions demanding a ceasefire. Starbucks United was also one of the first unions to oppose Israel's actions. The National Writers Union issued a statement on October 13, "... in a massive ethnic cleansing, Israel is forcibly displacing more than a million people as it prepares a ground invasion. All of this violates international law, which the Israeli government has done with impunity for decades and with the material and political support of the U.S."

Not Another Nickel, Not Another Dime, No More Money for Israel's Crimes

On Jan 13, 2024, the Oakland port's operations in California was shut down by 3000 strong workers and activists. The action was co-organized by Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) and International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). The port has been used to transport weapons, technology and other assistance to Israel in addition to facilitating transfer of military aid in U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Jimmy Salameh, a Palestinian longshoreman and member of ILWU Local 10 said to AROC, "I have worked at the port for 10 years, and I can say for a fact that there was no business as usual out here today..."

Zachary Valdez a labor organizer with UAW as reported in prismreports.org said, "Labor movement has the power to disrupt supply chains ... workers

can shut down everything".

Masters of War and United Resistance

Israel has received \$300 billion dollars in aid from the U.S. in the last 75 years and most of this is for military assistance. The U.S. has promised another \$4 billion per year until 2028. AFL-CIO has supported Israel for many decades, and has millions of dollars as investments in Israeli state bonds. That said, there is hope and optimism that change is in the air. Gerry Scoppettuoloi, who is an anti-war activist and the Vice President of the Greater Boston Labor Council, AFL-CIO, official AFL-CIO LGBTQ Constituency Group, spoke to me after attending a rally for Palestine where people from many nationalities came together in thousands, "Organized labor in the U.S. has not been as united in this way since the 1980s when a majority of labor opposed the Reagan/Kissinger

support of death squads in Honduras, fascist national police in El Salvador, and the Contras in Nicaragua." Gerry is encouraged by the "flowering of labor internationalism that is showing no signs of letting up" and the countless protests all over the country by youth and the organized left against the merciless bombings of Palestinians by the Israeli forces.

The U.S anti-war movement has seen a resurgence. The demands of the movement include an immediate end to the assault on Gaza by Israel, an end to all of U.S. aid to Israel, reparations to Palestinians, return of all the occupied land, and the Palestinians right to return. Working class organizations, Jewish Voices for Peace, communist parties, faith-based organizations and youth are coming together against the U.S. and Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians. And together they are chanting "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free". ■

Regularisation and EPFO Benefits of Sanitation Workers of Karnataka

▲ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

In two consecutive victories to the struggles of powrakarmikas (sanitation workers) of Karnataka, the State Government has declared that 24,005 workers will be made permanent, and the High Court has directed the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to deposit Rs. 90,18,89,719/- (Rupees Ninety Crore Eighteen Lakh Eighty-Nine Thousand Seven Hundred and Nineteen only) along with 12% interest to the accounts of powrakarmikas.

In July 2017, under the banner of BBMP Powrakarmikara Sangha (affiliated to AICCTU) thousands of powrakarmikas across the state thronged the capital city of Bengaluru and demanded that the

contract-system be abolished and the workers be made permanent. In response to this in 2018, the state government removed the exploitative contract system, and brought the workers under the direct-payment system, through which the municipal corporations and the local bodies paid wages to the workers directly. However, it was only the sweepers who were brought under this direct-payment system, whereas the drivers, helpers, loaders and other such workers involved in transport and handling of garbage remained under the contract system. The government, at the time, assured that the workers would be made permanent in a phased manner.

Thereafter, the powrakarmikas have consistently launched struggles demanding that the government regularize their services, since the assurances were not kept.

In 2019, a notification was issued by the BBMP inviting applications for a few permanent posts of sweepers. The BBMP Powrakarmikara Sangha fought against the discriminatory and unscientific notification, that would exclude the majority of the existing powrakarmikas from being eligible for the job. After a day-long protest by thousands of workers in 2019, the BBMP was forced to withdraw this notification. Thereafter, the government had failed to move forward in declaring permanency for the workers. A jatha was also organized to mobilise the workers on the issue over a period of one month in October-November 2020.

In July 2022, the workers launched

a state-wide four-day strike seeking that the then BJP government make them permanent. The state government had then given a written assurance that the workers would be made permanent and a notification to that extent was issued by the respective local bodies. However, the then BJP state government failed to keep its promise. A state-level Conference of pourkarmikas held on 6th November 2022 adopted a declaration to fight until workers were assured dignified working conditions.

Subsequent to the 2022 Assembly elections, where the Congress came to power after promising permanent jobs to the powrakarmikas in their election manifesto, the union engaged in constant protests to ensure that the assurance was made a reality.

On February 8th, 2024, the union gheraoed Vidhan Soudha where the workers were detained by the Bengaluru Police and despite the same, stood their ground and sought that the government declare that they will be made permanent. The demand was reiterated in a meeting with the Chief Minister held thereafter. On February 16th, the Karnataka Government declared that 24,005 workers across the state will be made permanent, and the BBMP on February 29th, declared in its budget that 15,000 powrakarmikas in Bengaluru would be made permanent.

It must be noted here, that while the sweepers, under the direct payment system, have been declared to be made permanent, the workers engaged in transport and disposal of garbage, including auto tipper and truck drivers, helpers and loaders continue their struggle for the abolition of the contract system. These workers continue to be plagued with issues of non-payment of wages for several months, non-

disbursal of ESI & EPF, harassment of workers, threats of termination, among others. These workers had launched a protest in March 2023 demanding their rights. The union will continue to fight for their legitimate rights and dignity.

Historic order of the High Court directing BBMP to deposit EPF dues

The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka has passed an order dated February 7, 2024 in WP No. 16539/2022 c/w WP No. 4449/2018 (L-PF) directing the BBMP to deposit Rs. 90,18,89,719/- along with 12% interest within eight weeks from the date of its order to the accounts of powrakarmikas.

The BBMP Powrakarmikara Sangha (affiliated to AICCTU) had filed complaints seeking for the PF dues of powrakarmikas employed with the BBMP, upon which the EPF Authority had passed an order on 26.10.2017 directing the BBMP to deposit Rs. 90,18,89,719/- into the EPF accounts of powrakarmikas, towards their provident fund, pension fund and insurance fund contribution for the period between January 2011 and July 2017. Since the BBMP had failed to comply with the order of the EPF Authority, the Union had approached the High Court seeking for a direction to the BBMP to comply with the same.

The High Court has recognized the services and plight of working conditions of the powrakarmikas and noted that – “These workers (powrakarmikas) are doing great service to the society and the union has worked for several years to ensure that all workers shall receive their dues including proper and regular wages... The Powrakarmikas are almost entirely from Dalit Community and predominantly women. They are employed in the most scientifically backward, inhuman and primitive form of garbage- collection and street-sweeping throughout the



year, without weekly or national holidays or any breaks at all. They have ceaselessly protected the health of the public and continued to do so each and every day. This has come at the cost of their own health and safety and they suffer from serious and life-shortening respiratory ailments, heart problems, back and knee problems etc.”

The High Court has also given observation on the injustice caused to the powrakarmikas, noting– “The acts of the respondent BBMP have caused financial and mental suffering to the workers who come from extremely poor and marginalized background. The failure of the respondent No.1 to comply with and implement the order dated 26.10.2017 is highly illegal, violative of public policy in contravention to the fundamental and statutory life of the powrakarmikas.”

The powrakarmikas, who have faced triple oppression of class, caste and gender for decades, have stood steadfast in fighting for their rights and dignity, and will continue their struggle till justice is met. ■

Anti-CAA Protests Across the Country

Soon after the notification of CAA by the Union Home Ministry on March 11, people took to the street against this discriminatory law. Despite the atmosphere of threat and intimidation by Delhi police, students from AISA and other left and progressive organisations protested against CAA in Delhi University campus on March 12. The protest was met with police repression and more than 70 students, including AISA DU President Manik Gupta, were detained.

Comrade Saumya, an AISA National Council Member, who was also detained by the police said that the police brutally thrashed the students and tore their clothes. She added that the students of DU strongly reject the divisive and discriminatory CAA-NRC-NPR package of the Modi regime and will resist the bulldozer raj.

In West Bengal, CPIML organised a protest in front of the state office in Moulali on March 12 rejecting the CAA. The protest, which was addressed by Comrades Atanu Chakraborty, Basudev Basu, Dibakar Bhattacharya and Malay Tiwari and Mamata Ghosh burned the copy of the discriminatory CAA notification.

In Assam's Jorhat, protests were organised by CPIML and RYA against the unconstitutional CAA and called for an immediate withdrawal of CAA. The protest condemned the Modi-BJP regime's political conspiracy ahead of 2024 to polarise the people. Soon after the notification of CAA by the Union Home Ministry on March 11, people took to the street against this discriminatory law. Despite the atmosphere of threat and intimidation by Delhi police, students from AISA and other left and progressive organisations protested against CAA

in Delhi University campus on March 12. The protest was met with police repression and more than 70 students, including AISA DU President Manik Gupta, were detained.

March 14 Protest Call

On the call of CPIML protests against the divisive and discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were held across the country on March 14. In Patna, a protest march was taken out by CPIML from JP Chowk to Budh Murti raising slogans against anti-people and unconstitutional CAA.

CPIML General Secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya remembering and saluting the historic Shaheen Bagh movements in Delhi as well as across the country said that the Modi government wants to push this country into tyranny by destroying the democracy and constitution. CAA is brazenly anti-constitutional as it violates Article 14 of the constitution which prohibits any form of discrimination. CAA divides citizens by religion.

Speaking at the rally, MLA Mahboob Alam said that the Modi government which has failed in providing jobs, education and livelihood to people now wants to wedge division among people in the name of religion using the CAA. We have seen in Delhi, how a police officer publicly kicked and assaulted Muslims offering Namaz and this is what the Modi government conspires to do in the country. They want to spread hatred and division. He added that toiling masses of this country will foil this conspiracy orchestrated by BJP.

Protest programs were also held in Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and other places by CPIML.



Police Repression of AISA-RYA Comrades in UP

In a protest in Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow the police unleashed a wave of repression and arrests against AISA and RYA leaders who organised protests against discriminatory CAA. On March 14 and 15, Uttar Pradesh police arrested AISA UP Vice President Manish Kumar, RYA Joint Secretary in UP Sonu Yadav, Allahabad Univ. AISA Vice President Bhanu Kumar and Joint Secretary Alok Ambedkar just for carrying out their democratic right protest. A memorandum was submitted to police authorities in which CPIML and other progressive organisations condemned the police-raj in the state and demanded immediate release of arrested activists.

On March 19, the AISA-RYA comrades were released from jail. After their release, they said that despite the repression, the fight for justice will continue. ■

Notification of Rules for CAA Signals a Major Political Conspiracy Ahead of 2024 Polls

The notification of rules for implementation of the patently unjust, discriminatory and divisive Citizenship Amendment Act passed in December 2019 signals a major political conspiracy just ahead of the notification of the 2024 poll schedule. The CAA, as indicated by Amit Shah in his famous 'chronology' explanation, is a precursor to a nationwide NRC-NPR exercise aimed at stripping undocumented citizens of their citizenship rights. CAA clearly seeks to polarise citizens on the basis of their religious affiliation, deceptively promising citizenship to non-Muslim 'refugees' while threatening Muslims with loss of citizenship and possible deportation. But going by the experience of the NRC exercise in Assam

and the ongoing demolition drives across the country, the poor of every community including Adivasis and forest-dwellers are going to be particularly vulnerable.

The democratic opinion of the country and the equal citizenship and constitutional rights movement have rejected the CAA-NRC package as an assault on the Constitution. The notification of the CAA rules just ahead of the elections underlines the urgency of the people's movement to defend the constitutional foundation of democracy and the need to vote out the Modi regime in the coming elections.

We appeal to diverse sections of the people fighting for their rights - the farmers

fighting for legal guarantee to MSP, the working class fighting for labour rights, the employees for restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, the youth for secure jobs, women for freedom, safety and equal rights, the deprived people for caste census and enhanced reservation and diverse identities and regions fighting for constitutional safeguards and federal rights - to share the just concerns over the discriminatory and divisive CAA and make common cause with the equal citizenship movement. We must stand united and not let the Modi government and the BJP succeed in their design to polarise the people, divert their attention and derail the mission to defeat the fascist forces in the forthcoming elections.

- Statement by Central Committee, CPIML Liberation ■

The Assault on Muslims Offering Namaz by Delhi Police is a Strike on India's Constitution and Syncretic Ethos

CPIML organised protests on March 11 and 12 against the Delhi Police's assault on Namaz offering Muslims in the national capital. The incident occurred on March 10 in Delhi's Inderlok, as due to space constraint some people were offering Namaz on the roadside with required permission. The police personnel deployed in the area, including the in-charge Manoj Tomar kicked and assaulted the people.

Addressing the protest march organised in Patna, CPIML General Secretary Com. Dipankar said the assault reflected the widespread communalisation of police and security forces in the country under the current Modi-BJP regime. This hate in police uniform, reminds us of the hate we saw a few months ago in a running train by RPF personnel, Chetan Singh.

CPIML MLA Mehboob Alam said that the Delhi police's assault is a reflection

of BJP's agenda of communal hatred and violence against Muslims in the country. He has also been running a campaign of communalisation of the security forces. The people will resist and defeat such divisive forces.

Congress MLA Shakeel Ahmed said that BJP is against the integrity and diversity of our country. They want to divide the country, and we must all unite to resist this with all our might.

CPI(ML) MLAs Sandeep Saurabh, Gopal Ravidas, Birendra Prasad Gupta, Amarjit Kushwaha, Mahanand, Ajit Kumar Singh, Rambali Prasad, Arun Singh, AIPWA leaders Meena Tiwari, Shashi Yadav, Manju Prakash, Saroj Chaube, Anita Sinha, veteran CPI(ML) leader KD Yadav, AIARLA General Secretary Dharendra Jha and several other leaders joined the protest. In Gaya, Katihar and other areas of Bihar, protest marches were carried out by CPIML against the brutal assault.

In Jharkhand's Bagodar, a protest



Protest in Tamilnadu

march was taken out on March 12 against the police assault. Condemning the violence, the protesters noted that the assault was not just on Muslims but on the spirit of our constitution and India's Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb (syncretic ethos).

Protest demonstrations were also organised in various districts of Tamil Nadu, Delhi, West Karbi Anglong (Assam), Karnataka and West Bengal against the inhuman and brutal assault. CPIML has called for criminal action against police officers involved in the assault. ■

Use Your Vote to End Inequalities in Politics and Society

The months-long Bharat Jodo Yatra concluded at Mumbai on 17 March 2024 with a mega rally at Shivaji Park called the Bharat Jodo Nyay Manzil. Graced by the whole gamut of INDIA leaders, the rally unitedly called upon the Indian people to treat the upcoming Lok Sabha election as their chance to save the constitution and save democracy.

Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the party, addressed the Bharat Jodo Nyay Manzil alongside other INDIA leaders on 17 March. He reiterated the need for peoples' unity at this difficult hour. *Here is a summarised version of his speech.*

The Bharat Jodo Yatra has sent a powerful message of love against hatred, of justice in the face of injustice, about the need to save the constitution and democracy against the ongoing attack against both, and about the rights of ordinary citizens. This is a very important message, and it has been delivered at the right time.

Our friends in Maharashtra, I have come here to tell you that today the eyes of the entire country are focused on 2-3 crucial states. One of them is Bihar, the state where the opposition unity kickstarted and where the INDIA alliance held its first meeting. You all know what a clever game the BJP has played since then. Nitish Kumar has gone over to that side. But I have come here to tell you that Nitish Kumar's volte-face has not affected opposition unity one bit. On 3 March, a huge Jan Vishwas Rally at the Gandhi Maidan in Patna showcased the immense strength of our alliance.

I have come here to say that we are all aware of games that have been played in Maharashtra. The whole

country is hoping that the people of Maharashtra will reject these games. Bihar, Maharashtra and West Bengal have a large number of seats where there will be a tough contest. We hope that in Maharashtra the massive opposition unity, and the unity of the people on the ground, will be kept strong at all costs.

We must give them a rebuff. They have played the money game – through electoral bonds, through electoral trusts, they have money speaking for them. In the face of their money, we have peoples' unity, we have our sweat and blood. Our sweat, the sweat of the farmers who they tried to stop through barricades, nails, and killings, will beat their money.

Recently in Delhi's Ram Lila Maidan, farmers' unions and trade unions came together to voice their united demands. The Dalit Bahujan communities and their movements are all united. Half of India's population – the women – came together on 8 March and raised their voices.

The students and youth are united everywhere, like in Jawaharlal Nehru University of Delhi. JNU is a university that they have tried to defame and destroy but the youth of JNU have always given a fitting reply to these regressive forces.

We are trying in all possible ways – through peoples' movements as well as through elections. They have the anti-constitution electoral bonds but our strength is the constitution itself. The constitution has given us the strength to vote. Babasaheb said that each vote is a vote for political equality, to end inequalities in politics and society. We must use that

one vote well. That one vote will save Babasaheb's constitution, protect the Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb. Over the last 75 years, we have struggled to build a modern democratic Hindustan, a secular Hindustan – that is the spirit of the Constitution which they want to destroy. They have tried to destroy the constitution through the CAA, which will deprive the poor of citizenship. Friends in Maharashtra, friends in Mumbai must stand up against this and make their votes count.

Mumbai is not a city; it is a microcosm of Hindustan. Workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, the Southern states, all come here. Through them we wish to send across our message to the whole country. The voices emerging from Gandhi Maidan, Ram Lila Maidan and Shivaji Park are one the same: this is a united voice, raised to save the country, save the constitution and save democracy. In 2004 such a united voice strongly rebuffed the false claims of the India Shining campaign and showed the door to Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In 2024 let us expose the false claims of Amrit Kaal, the deceptive dreams of 2047, let us question them for their misdoings of the last 10 years, and demand an answer.

I thank all of you. Your enthusiasm, spirit of unity, is commendable. I salute you on behalf of the entire Communist tradition of India, the traditions of social justice, socialist traditions and the Congress tradition – all those which were part of the glorious freedom struggle whose achievements BJP-RSS want to destroy.

Inquilab Zindabad!

Jai Bhim, Lal Salaam! ■

DDA Bulldozes House of Silkyara Tunnel Rescue Miner Waqeel Hasan!

Nation's Hero Treated as Criminal in Modi Government's Bulldozer Regime!

Waqeel Hasan was a part of the team of 12 workers who rescued the 41 entrapped workers in Uttarakhand's Silkyara Tunnel in November last year. He along with his associates worked tirelessly to save fellow workers who were trapped when the tunnel collapsed. After returning from the rescue operation he said that they took the risk for their fellow workers, it was a duty to the nation that they served.

After three months, the central government agency Delhi Development Authority (DDA) bulldozes the house of the Nation's Hero in Delhi's Khajuri Khas.

In protest, trade unions jointly held a demonstration in front of DDA office on 4 March to demand rebuilding of Waqeel Hasan's house at the same place along with monetary compensation. Protesters also demanded rehabilitation of all evictees of earlier bulldozer demolitions taking place at dozens of other places in Delhi.

On 28 February, a team of DDA and Delhi police reached Waqeel Hasan's house in the morning. At that time, only the children of the family were present. Despite that, the DDA and Delhi Police continued thrashing his door forcefully. It is to note that all officials forcing the children to open the door were male officials. When Waqeel and his wife returned home and clarified to DDA that they have bought the house and have been staying in the house for more than a decade, Delhi Police arrested Waqeel and his wife and kept them at Khajuri Khas police station. In the meantime, bulldozers ravaged Waqeel's house to the ground. ■

Dhami Government Must Stop Targeting Minorities in Uttarakhand

Haldwani town has not yet recovered from the trauma of Banbhoolpura violence of 8 February that began in the wake of the demolition of a mosque and a madarsa. In the aftermath, Banbhoolpura residents reportedly faced violence by the police for many days in the name of search operations and raids. The targeting of Muslim shopkeepers and vendors by Hindutva groups has taken place with impunity in other localities of Haldwani. This continues despite reports coming into local media but the police administration has not arrested anyone of those frenzied hindutva groups making trouble.

Now the Uttarakhand administration has issued eviction notices in Bagjala in Golapaar, an area at the outskirts of Haldwani, not too far from Banbhoolpura. The notices were issued by the forest department. CPIML Nainital district secretary Dr. Kailash Pandey says this is a deliberate attempt to evict the poor from their homes and must be opposed. People are living for decades on these lands,

paying all dues like electricity bills. They are not encroachers.

These people living on lands classified as forest, leased, Nazul or other for decades must be given land ownership rights and not evicted. Residents of Bagjala earn livelihoods mostly from agriculture, animal husbandry and daily wage labour.

With the constant fear of state repression and bulldozers, Banbhoolpura residents, mostly from the working class, are finding it difficult to earn their livelihoods.

In Kamaluaganja, a locality at the other end of the town, Hindutva groups are threatening Muslim shopkeepers and forcing them to shut their shops. On 16 February, a group of right-wing members on motorcycles forcefully closed the shops of Muslims between Kamaluaganja and Kathgharia stretch. Despite this, the police and state administration have remained a mute spectator.

On the night of 23 February, the shanty of a small cotton quilt vendor, a migrant muslim worker from

Thakurdwara, was burnt down by miscreants. Many such craftsmen used to come for seasonal work in towns of Uttarakhand. Several other shops belonging to the Muslim community were also damaged earlier.

Many Hindus in the area are also facing the wrath of these Hindutva terror groups and are forced to ask Muslim tenants to vacate the shops. Although some local activists and Hindu shopkeepers resisted the communal frenzy being orchestrated by the right-wing group, there is a deep sense of fear among Muslim shopkeepers. By 27 February, nearly a dozen out of approximately 150 minority shopkeepers opened shops at Kamaluaganja, Kathgharia, Bachi Nagar road and Ramdi Jasuva road. But the numerous others are choosing to leave the area due to the fear of attack. The lack of action by police point towards the state government's patronage impunity to these Hindutva terror groups.

CPIML-AICCTU Delegation

A CPIML - AICCTU delegation comprising Dr. Kailash Pandey, KK Bora and Advocate Kailash Joshi met

the team of the National Minorities Commission, which was in Haldwani on February 22. The delegation submitted a memorandum demanding a high level judicial probe into the incidents of 8 February in Banbhoolpura and action against the DM and SSP of Nainital for their provocative and irresponsible decisions. They also demanded an investigation into the questionable actions of Haldwani city commissioner Pankaj Upadhyay, who in some viral videos of the incident, found to be very biased and offensive.

The delegation condemned the violent and vengeful crackdown perpetrated by the police in Banbhoolpura post the incident of February 8. These leaders also brought to the attention of the Minority Commission members the

issue of Nazul land which is being used as a tool for selectively evicting poor and minorities in Uttarakhand. Nazul lands are government land leased to, and occupied by, people for various purposes mostly since the colonial times and this has been the norm to renew those leases as a matter of mere formality. Now the BJP government is selectively cancelling such leases to target the minority community, while it is reported that more than half of the Haldwani town is inhabited on Nazul lands. The CPIML has been demanding regularisation and ownership rights to residents on all Nazul lands as well as other inhabitations like the ones in Bagjala which is technically marked as forest land.

The delegation also apprised

the Commission of the vicious communal propaganda being done by the Uttarakhand government leaders, especially by the CM Dhama, in the name of 'land jihad' which is a motivated lie and must be stopped.

Another delegation of Quomi Ekta Manch, a joint platform of many social and political organisations, including AICTTU leaders, met with the SSP of Nainital an SP City on 26 February. They for immediate action and arrest of RSS associated Vipin Pandey, whose right-wing terror group has been intimidating the shopkeepers from minority communities. They also called for police to provide protection for the Muslim shopkeepers who are being threatened with violence. ■

Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat in Delhi

SKM's Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat on March 14 at Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi witnessed a massive participation. The Mahapanchayat resolved to intensify the fight against the pro corporate, communal, dictatorial policies of the Modi Government.

SKM declared that it will intensify the ongoing struggle to achieve the genuine demands of the farmers as well as the workers.



Com. Shashi Yadav Elected to Bihar Vidhan Parishad

Comrade Shashi Yadav, Politburo member of CPI(ML) and General Secretary of All India Scheme Workers' Federation was elected to the Bihar Vidhan Parishad (Bihar Legislative Council) along with other Mahagathbandhan candidates. The results were declared on March 14.

Comrade Shashi Yadav had been at the forefront of ASHA (frontline health workers) and Mid-Day meal workers' struggle in Bihar for working-class rights, better pay and dignity. In July 2023, she played an instrumental role in the 32-day historic strike action by ASHA workers and facilitators in the state that secured an increase in honorarium being paid for ASHAs. ■



Fatuha-Azaad Nagar Colony Fire: **Return of the BJP-Nitish Regime to Power has Emboldened Feudal-Mafia Forces**



Close to 600 huts set up by shelterless poor families over some 20 bighas or 5 acres of land in Fatuha Assembly segment of Patna were reduced to ashes on March 10. At least one person has died in the fire and several children received burn injuries. For the 600 households every essential item of everyday life and livelihood are totally destroyed.

The huts were set up after a long struggle for housing rights by the Fatuha Committee of CPIML in November 2023. The colony was

named Azaad Nagar after popular CPI(ML) leader Comrade Suresh Bind alias Azaad who had been killed by the feudal-criminal nexus on the polling day of the Lok Sabha elections in 1998 after casting his vote. It was under his leadership that the landless poor of the area had freed ceiling surplus and benami land from the control of feudal forces and staked their claim to land for collective farming and housing.

The return of the BJP to power following Nitish Kumar's latest somersault has emboldened feudal-mafia forces across Bihar. The land

mafia are threatening to evict the poor. Azaad Nagar people have of late started receiving eviction threats. On 3 March five busloads of people from Azaad Nagar had joined the Jan Vishwas Maharally in Patna Gandhi Maidan. On 9 March Amit Shah addressed a rally in Paliganj, a constituency in rural Patna represented by CPI(ML) MLA Sandeep Saurabh and threatened to hang land encroachers upside down and the very next day Azaad Nagar was reduced to ashes.

CPIML General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya visited the fire devastated area on the afternoon of March 11 with a team comprising party MLAs Comrades Gopal Ravidas (Phulwari) and Sandeep Saurabh (Paliganj), Patna district Secretary and Polit Bureau member Comrade Amar, AIARLA General Secretary Comrade Dharendra Jha and other local leaders. The fire has been a big blow to the lives of the Azaad Nagar residents, but it has not been able to weaken their fighting spirit and resilience. They remain firmly united in their battle for survival, justice and rehabilitation. Pressure will have to be exerted on the district administration for quick measures of relief. ■

Stop Displacement of Street Vendors

A Delegation of Street Vendors Joint Struggle Committee led by CPIML MLA Mahboob Alam met the Commissioner of Patna Municipal Corporation on February 23, condemning the relentless assault on the lives and livelihood of street vendors in the city. The delegation submitted an 11 point charter of demands, including the immediate stop on all demolition activities against vendors.

Mahboob Alam underlined that under the garb of Patna Smart city project and Metro project, street vendors are being displaced by the Corporation. While the Bihar government is boosting its policy of survey of street vendors, granting photo identity cards and loans to vendors, the

same government is displacing street vendors and damaging their properties through the anti-encroachment drive. Furthermore, the vendors were not given prior notice or intimation regarding the action and such moves are in gross contravention of legal norms. The fact that Patna Municipal Corporation has not properly implemented the Street Vendors' Act is quite deplorable.

The vendors are demanding an end to the violation of the Central Street Vendors Act and no eviction without alternative arrangements. Furthermore, all markets should have vendor zones and the process of issuing licences should be done as per the law. Vendor zones should be built in

Multi Level hub near Patna station and strict action must be taken against corrupt corporation employees and other officials.

In October, last year, street vendors had embarked on a massive protest against the illegal eviction moves and the Commissioner has then assured that no coercive actions will be undertaken. But despite the assurance, there has been widespread demolitions and displacement of street vendors across the Patna.

The delegation informed the commissioner that the corporation must stand on its assurances and the demands of the street vendors be addressed. The delegation also warned that the street vendors will embark on a movement if the Corporation fails to address the issues. ■

The Future Will Be Ours: Jan Vishwas Rally at Patna Resolves To Oust Bulldozer Regimes



On March 3, Patna's Gandhi Maidan, a sprawling ground at the centre of the city, spread across 60 acres, bore witness to a historic moment. Braving the cold and unexpected rain, tens of thousands of youth, women, and toiling masses from across the state painted the entire ground in the sea of red and green flags. The slogans of 'Bihar will fight, dictatorship fall' and 'Mahagathbandhan Zindabad' reverberated across the city centre.

The Mahagathbandhan's [Grand Alliance] Jan Vishwas Rally saw national leaders of all the constituent political parties, including members of the larger INDIA alliance gathering at the Gandhi Maidan, a ground that has seen several historic political and social assertions, including the JP movement in the 1970s.

Saluting the spirit of resilience and determination of the people at the rally, Com. Dipankar, General Secretary of CPI(ML) said that 50 years ago, a slogan was raised from this Gandhi Maidan, that the future is ours. Today, once again, people are

here to raise the clarion call of Save Democracy, Constitution, Country - the future will be ours. The gathering here is a warning to the anti-people governments in Patna and Delhi that it's time to vacate the seat of power. The People of Bihar will fight! The dictatorship will fall!

For the last 10 years, the party [Bharatiya Janata Party] which is destroying the entire India, has in its name Janata [People], but they have nothing to do with people. The only purpose of this party is to hold on to power for their greed. Arrogance of power, is in the veins of the BJP. BJP have bulldozed India's democracy, attacked voices of opposition and dissent and destroyed peoples' lives, livelihoods, and rights over water, forest and land [Jal-Jungle-Zameen]. The BJP should change its election symbol from lotus to a bulldozer. We are here to warn that this bulldozer rule will soon come to an end. We have come here to show the steadfastness of the people and for freedom from bulldozers.

He added that farmers are being

stopped from coming to Delhi with the demand for legal guarantee for MSP [Minimum Support Price] but at the same time this government lays red carpet for corporates like Adani-Ambani. We have seen how the entire government machinery was mobilised for the wedding of Ambani's son, but when farmers want to come to Delhi, then barricades are put up on the road, nails are embedded on the way and barbed wires are laid. Bullets are fired on farmers.

The Modi government says that India will become Vishwaguru [world leader]. But they don't utter a single word in defence of the suffering children of Gaza. On the other hand, the Modi regime is conspiring to endanger the lives of our educated, but unemployed youth by sending them to Israel. The recruitment process has already begun in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and very soon in Bihar also, CM Nitish will implement this conspiracy.

For the first time in our country's history, we are seeing a party [BJP] putting all its efforts to protect the rapists, to encourage them and to honour them. Be it supporting the rapists of Bilkis Bano or protecting those who oppress women in Manipur, BJP and its leaders are at the forefront.

And that is why, we have come here to give this clarion call that the general elections of 2024 has to be a decisive fight and in this election, if Bihar resolves to give a firm mandate of 40 out of 40 seats to Mahagathbandhan, then for sure, this anti-people Modi government will definitely be wiped out from Delhi.

About the 17-month Mahagathbandhan government in Bihar, which was brought down by the BJP using deceit and fraud, Com. Dipankar said that during the Bihar assembly elections in 2020 when we said that the youth will get permanent jobs, at that time

Nitish Kumar [in alliance with BJP] was making fun of this. But when he joined hands with Mahagathbandhan for a while and our government was formed, we got the opportunity, and you saw that not only permanent jobs were given but also a caste census and socio-economic survey was conducted. Furthermore, the entire reservation policy was expanded.

People of Bihar realised that Nitish, who has been in power for almost 20 years, had given the people of Bihar the rhetoric of development and pushed them into dense darkness of poverty. The survey exposed that two-thirds of the people in Bihar, used to survive on an income of less than Rs 10,000.

This sea of red and green flags in unison we see here today is crucial in our battle to save democracy and the constitution. This is the path ahead of us today and to stop this people's assertion, Nitish was shifted to the BJP side.

We have seen the misuse of CBI-ED-Income Tax against opposition parties and leaders, but this time we saw how Bharat Ratna was used for vested political ends and to grab power. After giving Bharat Ratna to Charan Singh and MS Swaminathan, they opened fire on farmers demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations on MSP. They gave Bharat Ratna to Karpooor Thakur, but insulted his legacy. Karpooor ji's legacy of releasing political prisoners, expanding reservation in Bihar and expanding education in the state, was betrayed by this regime by using its power and money to break opposition or buy opposition MLAs. And where BJP was unable to break or buy MLAs, they imprisoned them in fabricated and politically motivated cases, like sending CPIML's popular and young militant MLA Manoj Manzil to jail. Using this conspiracy, the power hungry BJP terminated Manoj's

MLAship and attempted to suppress the voices of the toiling masses in the assembly.

Against this conspiracy, a complete unity is needed. We need to strengthen the struggle. I am sure that today's assertion at Gandhi Maidan, this is not just for Bihar. This is for the entire country.

The BJP is saying that after Nitish's somersault, who had hosted the first meeting of INDIA bloc in Bihar, that nothing is left in this alliance. We are here to tell them that just because some leader left the alliance, or by trying to topple INDIA's government formations or by breaking some MLAs, nothing is going to happen. Because the people are on the ground and fighting. Our Bihar is a fighting state and the people of Bihar will fight, and the dictatorship will be defeated.

We saw that due to rain at night you all faced problems. Despite this and facing all other difficulties, the toiling people from across Bihar have come here raising red and green flags. This red flag is the red flag of Master Jagdish, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram and Comrade Butan Musahar. The steadfast unity of this red flag and the green flag of Karpooor ji, Jayaprakash ji, will usher the change in Bihar and in the entire country.

Com Meena Tiwari, PBM of CPI(ML) and AIPWA National General Secretary addressing the rally highlighted issues of rising unemployment, poverty, and lack of development in Bihar. The Modi government betrayed the youth of our country by giving them jumla of 2 crore jobs. When the youth asked for jobs, Modi gave them advice to sell pakoras.

India's economy and people's livelihood are under threat. A large section of people are facing dire hunger. While people of the country are suffering under skyrocketing prices of essential commodities and the loss of wages and jobs, the Modi

regime is busy filling the coffers with the corporates like Adani and Ambani.

Under the Modi regime, we are witnessing an escalating violence against women. We have seen how BJP gave complete impunity and patronage to the perpetrators of violence against women. From wrestlers to IIT-BHU and Hathras to Manipur, we have how the BJP is protecting the rapists and sexual harassers.

Com. Rajaram Singh, leader of AIKM and CPI(ML) politburo member, noted that Modi has betrayed every section of the society in its 10-year rule. The Modi government has destroyed every public sector institution for the sake of corporates. They also wanted to make the farmers corporate slaves, but the resistance put forward by the farmers forced this regime to withdraw the three pro-corporate farm laws. We want to declare from this historic Gandhi Maidan that only the government which will stand with the rights of the workers-farmers-youth will be allowed to form a government in Delhi.

"Bihar had always shown the path for the defence of democracy and the constitution. The clarion call and resolve we are taking here today will set the agenda for the upcoming general election, and I am sure this Modi government, who work for their capitalist cronies, will face a decisive defeat," Com. Rajaram added.

The spirited gathering at Jan Vishwas Maharally at Gandhi Maidan symbolised a turning point, not only for Bihar but for the entire country. The resolve displayed by the people at Gandhi Maidan under the red and green flags served as a testament to the enduring spirit of democracy and the collective power of the people to drive out the communal-corporate fascist forces from power. ■

Protest Convention in Badgaon Calls for Release of Manoj Manzil & 22 Others

A protest and pledge meeting was held in Badgaon village of Agiaon constituency of Bihar on March 18 to secure justice for Comrade Manoj Manzil and 22 other victims of the politically motivated and false case. The meeting, in which hundreds of people from the constituency condemned the motivated charges against Manoj and other comrades.

Speaking at the meeting, CPIML ex-MP Rameshwar Prasad said that the false murder case filed against Manoj and others is an attempt to stifle the growing assertion of Dalits, poor and toiling masses. He added that the Bhojpur region had been in forefront in the struggle against feudal-caste oppression and for decades under the flag of CPIML the toiling masses of the region fought for their rights and dignity. The struggle ensured that poor and Dalits were able to cast their vote without fear. The feudal and criminals, backed by

BJP tried to suppress this wave of change, but failed. Even though BJP backed feudal forces conspired to incarcerate Manoj Manzil and others, the people of Bhojpur are united against these forces of oppression and terror and the masses will foil this conspiracy. The people of Bihar have also understood this conspiracy and in the upcoming election the BJP will be uprooted.

On February, 13, Manoj Manzil, CPIML central committee member and MLA from Agiaon constituency in Bihar, along with 22 other comrades were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in a politically motivated murder case. In the case, 90-year-old Comrade Ramanand Prasad was also sentenced to life imprisonment. The case was filed on the eve of the 2015 Assembly elections and Comrade Manoj had to fight the polls from within jail. He still polled more than 30,000 votes and finished a close third.

CPIML Politburo member and AIPWA leader Meena Tiwari said that people of Bhojpur will give a befitting reply to the conspiracy of BJP backed forces of oppression who killed CPIML leader Satish Yadav and now sent Manoj and others to jail in a fabricated case. This judicial massacre of assertion of dalits and poor in Bhojpur will be resisted by the people.

CPIML Politburo members Swadesh Bhattacharya and Shashi Yadav, comrades Sudama Prasad, Raju Yadav and Kayamuddin Ansari, and AIPWA leader comrade Sheela addressed the meeting said that case against Badgaon-23 is part of a long-standing modus operandi by feudal and right-wing forces of unleashing repression and massacres against the poor and dalits and later implicating those who challenge these regressive forces in fabricated cases in connivance with the police and local administration.

The convention resolved to carry forward the flame of resistance lit by martyr comrades like Satish Yadav and defeat the forces of oppression, communalism and tyranny. ■

CPIML Condemns Nitish-BJP's New Criminal Laws in Bihar As Draconian

CPIML Bihar state secretary Kunal has strongly condemned the recently passed Bihar Crime Control Act, 2024 and the Bihar Public Safety (Measures) Enforcement Act, 2024 as nothing but an extension of the mafia-police state of Yogi's Uttar Pradesh. He said that these laws are entirely anti-poor and anti-dalit in nature and are being met with widespread opposition from all quarters.

Com. Kunal added that these laws are meant to weaken the

process of justice for the common masses. Under these laws, the district magistrate has been given powers to issue warrants, make arrests, detain, power to sanction bail applications and to expel from district or state for up to six months. This is a dangerous game where the whole judicial process has been made subservient to the powers of the DM. This will embolden parties in power and serve their vested interests.

Moreover, the new Bihar government has brought various

autonomous bodies Commissions under the administration of bureaucracy which will hamper the independent work of commissions like State Minorities Commission, commission for the prevention of child labour, state Madarsa education board, state Sanskrit education board, Bihar State Women's Commission etc. The CPIML has also opposed this move of the BJP-JDU government.

On March 1, CPIML MLAs in Bihar held a protest demonstration in the Legislative Assembly and called for the immediate withdrawal of such anti-people and police raj laws. They also condemned the dilution of autonomous bodies. ■

Comrade Hena Sultana

Comrade Hena Sultana, 30 the ever smiling and vivacious young party cadre of Hooghly District (WB) suddenly passed away on 17 March in PG Hospital, Kolkata, due to some postpartum complications. She was the wife of Comrade Sk. Anarul, the Secretary of Balagarh Block Committee and member of Hooghly District Committee of our party. She hailed from a middle peasant family where the political atmosphere was lacking, let alone the influence of any leftist culture. But soon after her marriage with Comrade Anarul, she very quickly associated herself with the revolutionary activities of our party at the village level.



She was very eager to learn Marxism and listen to the history of our party. For her ever-smiling face and sweet behaviour, she was loved by all. And for this rare quality, she became very popular among the poor villagers, especially among the tribal people in the areas where our party work has recently started. She pleasantly agreed to build up AIPWA at the Block level and also always unflinchingly stood at the frontlines in AIARLA. The comrades at Hooghly District would surely never forget the bold figure of Comrade Hena, firmly holding the red flag on her shoulder. Her sudden demise is a bolt from the blue. Hundreds of people paid homage to her mortal remains. The comrades of Hooghly, along with Comrade Anarul, pledged to bring up the new born baby daughter left behind by Hena.

Red salute to Comrade Hena Sultana. Your glory shall never fade! ■

Comrade Ramswarth Singh

Comrade Ramswarth Singh, 62, passed away in the wee hours of 14 March at a hospital in Patna where he was undergoing treatment for cancer. An old timer, he came into the party's contact in 1980 and formally joined as a member two years later. He worked as a full-time activist for a long time and was Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha's Vaishali district secretary and state council member. He was CPIML district secretary from 1988 to 1991 as well as a member of North-West Bihar regional committee. Comrade Ramswarth Singh always stood firmly with the party. His passing is a great loss for the movement.



Comrades bade him final farewell on 15 March. We pay our revolutionary tributes and pledge to fulfil his dream. Red Salute Comrade Ramswarth Singh! ■

Comrade Ashok Singh

The passing of Comrade Ashok Singh leaves a big void in the party Bihar. He died on the night of 3 March after a brief illness. He was Party's Bhojpur office incharge since the nineties. He played a pivotal role in the functioning of the party office in the tumultuous years when the party and rural poor were facing multiple attacks and massacres by Ranvir Sena. He also functioned as Vidhayak Pratinidhi for comrade Ramnaresh Ram during 1995 to 2010. A most dependable comrade, his perseverance and close connect with cadres and common people earned him great popularity. At a time when people are facing fascist assaults, his passing is a great loss for the party.



Comrade Ashok Singh's last journey was attended by comrades Dipankar Bhattacharya, Swadesh Bhattacharya, Kunal and other senior leaders. He was cremated on 4 February. We stand in this hour of grief with Ashok ji's family and friends. Adieu, Comrade Ashok Singh! ■

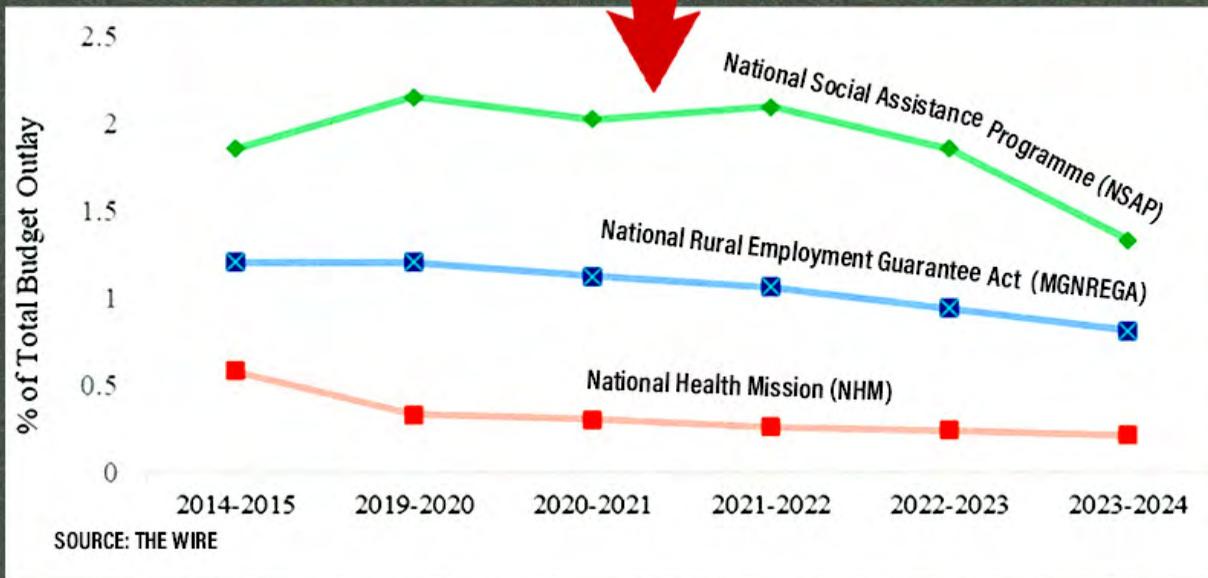


BJP GOT RUPEES 8,252 CRORE
VIA ELECTORAL BONDS FROM CORPORATES

BJP GAINED = PEOPLE LOST

In 10 Yrs Of Modi-BJP-Corporate Regime,

Budget Allocation Reduced For People's Welfare Schemes



**INDIA'S BIGGEST
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