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Republic Day 2021 Farmers Write History



Who is Nitin Raj and Why is The Yogi Government After Him?

(Excerpted and translated from a report in Janchowk)

If you are a student and are interested, along with your studies, in politics and are pained by the current situation in the country and stand up to voice your protest, beware for you will be hunted down. If, moreover, you are a dalit or are ideologically Left thinking, then you face even greater danger. 22 year old Nitin Raj who showed a black flag to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has been arrested for the fifth time and thrown into prison. Nitin Raj is the Uttar Pradesh State Vice President of AISA. His bail application has been denied for the second time by the Magistrate and the next date of 22 January has been given.

An FIR (FIR No. 0142/2020) registered on 16 March 2020 at Thakurganj Thana, Lucknow with regard to the anti-CAA-NRC protest names 23 persons under Section 66 of the IT Amendment Act, Section 7 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1932, and Sections 505, 427, 353, 283, 188, 149, 147 and 145 of the IPC. The charges against the protesters in the police FIR include raising of inflammatory slogans, pushing police personnel, and putting up posters. Nitin has been denied bail by the sessions and district courts, where judges are fearful of giving an order that may "offend" the Yogi regime.

Nitin comes from a poor dalit family. His family lives in Janata quarters in Lucknow. His mother is an Anganwadi worker and his father is in the rag trade. His 80 year old grandfather Sundar Lal is a retired defence personnel and is emotionally very much attached to Nitin; he neither eats nor drinks nor

sleeps, his one and only concern is, "When will my Nitin come back from jail?" Nitin's mother is worried as they are from an economically weak section and if her son does not get bail his future education will be ruined, since he may not be able to take up the offer of admission in JNU that he has qualified for.

Nitin is a post graduate in Mass Communications from BBAU where he has also qualified for PhD. A thoughtful and sensitive young man, he reads widely, and responds to every act of injustice by standing up for the underdog. Nitin was attracted to AISA when he came to Lucknow University after passing his Intermediate exam, and he joined AISA.

It should be remembered that the showing of black flags to Yogi Adityanath on 6 June 2017 at Lucknow University was the first open display of protest against Yogi after he became Chief Minister. Clearly, undemocratic-minded persons like Yogi found this intolerable. 14 students including Nitin were jailed for this 'crime' and faced all kinds of harassment and torture inside jail as well as after coming out of jail.

Lucknow University awarded him his degree on condition that he never again seek admission into this University. Undaunted despite all this harassment, Nitin took admission in the BBAU for MA in Mass Communications.

When the anti-CAA-NRC protests started last year Nitin Raj went to Gantaghar in Lucknow to join the women protesting there, where the police nabbed him on the street. They checked his bag and abused him while arresting and taking him away, but released



him when women in large numbers stood up in protest. The next time he went for the protest the police caught him again and this time a group of lawyers got him released on a personal surety. The third time on 16 March the police caught him on the street before he reached the dharna spot. They beat him inside the police van and switched off his phone. Around midnight it became clear that Nitin was arrested and kept in Thakurganj Thana from where he and two other boys were sent to jail the next day.

The Covid-19 pandemic spread around that time and Nitin was released on parole 15 days later. The parole period ended on 5 January 2021 and Nitin was re-arrested and sent to jail.

Protests to demand Nitin Raj's release are being organized at various places through AISA and other organizations. JNUSU has also released a poster appealing for his immediate release. Protests for his release have been held at Allahabad University students' union office, JNU campus and other places. □



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Republic Day 2021: Farmers Write History



The journey of independent India as a modern democratic republic began on 26 January 1950 when the Constitution of India came into force, the Constitution adopted by 'we, the people of India' resolving to constitute India into a sovereign democratic republic and secure to all its citizens comprehensive justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The 71st anniversary of India's Republic Day saw India's farmers and other common citizens rekindle that republican spirit of India's Constitution in an unprecedented display of people's unity, determination and power.

Incidentally, the current phase of the farmers' movement demanding repeal of the disastrous farm laws began on 26 November, the day of adoption of India's Constitution. While the government of the day betrayed the spirit and vision of the Constitution to promote corporate interests as farm laws, the determined resistance of the farmers to this fascist corporate assault has created a countrywide people's platform to defend the interests and rights of not just India's farmers and other sections of agricultural population but all Indians fighting for justice and democracy. Between 26 November, 2020 and 26 January, 2021 while the Modi regime, Indian state and the Sangh-BJP brigade tried every possible trick to isolate, confuse, divide and discredit the protesting farmers, the movement has gone from strength to strength, arousing tremendous hope and goodwill and unleashing massive energy and determination all around.

The farmers' movement has shown enough patience, maturity and power to brave a cruel winter and deal with the multi-pronged strategy of the government. Frustrating all attempts of the government to bring the movement to an end before the Republic Day, the protesting farmers took their movement to a new high. Having failed to crush the movement by force or outwit the farmers through deceit, the Modi government is now trying to delegitimise the movement by with a distorted and misleading

account of Republic Day events in Delhi, accusing farmers of indulging in anarchy and insulting national symbols and monuments.

Nothing could be a bigger and more brazen lie. While waiting for more details to emerge on the clashes between protesters and the police in parts of Delhi and the visual of some people hoisting the Nishan Sahib

in the Lal Qila complex, two facts stand out as clear as daylight. It is the farmers who lost at least one life in the course of the day's events and they mourned this loss without getting provoked. It should also be noted that in the Lal Qila

incident, the flag in question was hoisted on an empty flagpole without showing any disrespect to the tricolour. In fact, as in most recent examples of popular struggles since the anti-rape and anti-corruption struggles during the last years of the second term of the UPA government, the tricolour has been the most prominent flag of the ongoing farmers' movement along with red and green flags of farmers' organisations.

The ongoing farmers' movement has emerged as one of the biggest in India's history in terms of vibrant participation, fighting spirit and creative energies of the protesting people. In the last decade, Delhi has witnessed several instances of sustained popular assertion. The anti-rape and anti-corruption struggles played a big role in bringing

about a change of governments, with the AAP replacing the Congress government in Delhi and Modi-led NDA replacing the UPA government at the Centre. These struggles too had their shares of confrontation between the protesters and the police or scenes of chaos and disorder. But these struggles were never sought to be dismissed as anarchist or anti-national exercises


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by the media and the governments of the time.

The culture of discrediting and demonising popular democratic protests as anti-national acts of anarchy is a distinct post-2014 trend. We've seen the Modi government try and do that to suppress the student movement triggered by the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula. We saw it again last year in the wake of the equal citizenship movement initiated by the students of Jamia and the protesting women of Shaheen Bagh. The attempt to intimidate and discredit the Shaheen Bagh protesters even took the form of a campaign of organised anti-Muslim violence followed by persecution of protesters by arresting them under draconian laws. The government wants the world to believe that the

Shaheen Bagh movement was a conspiracy to carry out a communal riot!

The same pattern is at work following the Republic Day events in Delhi. A vicious and concerted disinformation campaign is underway to discredit the movement in popular perception. The farmers' movement which has remained remarkably focused and united till date will surely be able to overcome this challenge. The farmers' movement has every potential to secure a complete repeal of the disastrous farm laws. All forces of anti-corporate anti-fascist resistance must stand firm with the farmers in this great battle. More power to the fighting farmers, more power to people's protests! 



The Resonance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Today's India



Netaji Subash Chandrabose with Captain Laxmi Sehgal inspecting Rani of Jhansi Regiment of INA

23 January 2021 marks the 125th birthday of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. As we celebrate this historic occasion, it is time we went back to the core vision and legacy of this great hero of India's freedom movement.

The Modi government has christened Netaji's birthday as Parakram Diwas or the Day of Valour. Just as Gandhi has been sought to be reduced to the idea of Swachhata or cleanliness, Bose is now being identified with the idea of Parakram or valour. In other words, while Gandhi becomes a saint preaching cleanliness, Bose is accommodated as a military icon in the iconography of the Sangh-BJP establishment. This is a clever ploy to appropriate these great icons of India's anti-colonial national awakening, while keeping the people oblivious of how these leaders had fought all their lives against the disastrous communal politics that the Sangh-BJP establishment is today inflicting on India from the citadels of power.

The Azad Hind Fauj phase was of course the most eventful and decisive phase in Bose's political life, but before that he had already emerged as one of the tallest leaders of the Indian National Congress, widely recognised as the leader of the Left wing within the

Congress, who twice went on to be elected the party's president. As the President of the 1938 Haripura Session of the Congress, he formed the Indian Planning Committee and appointed Jawaharlal Nehru as its chairman. Eventually, as he had to part ways with Gandhi and quit the Congress, he formed the Forward Bloc as an independent socialist party with an uncompromising call for complete independence and clear vision of a secular socialist India.

In all his political writings and speeches, Subhas Chandra Bose emphasised the composite culture of India, identifying the Mughal period as a golden period in India's history and crediting it with the rise of much of the cultural synthesis and civilisational mosaic inherited by modern India. He was a great champion of the struggles of peasants and workers for their basic rights and dignity and considered them as important pillars of India's anti-colonial national awakening. At the same time, he was keenly aware of the divisive potential of communal politics. Even as the Hindu Mahasabha was trying to spread its network in undivided Bengal, Bose came down hard against this mixing of religion with politics and called upon the people to reject it and banish these practitioners

of communalism from the political arena.

With the advent of the Second World War, Bose thought the time was ripe for a final push for freedom. While the majority of India's communists went to the extreme of ignoring the national context of India's freedom movement in responding to the international call for defeating the fascist alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan, Bose went to the other extreme of joining hands with the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis to achieve a military ouster of India's British rulers. It is an irony that an ardent socialist like Bose who had categorically denounced the rise of fascism in Italy and Spain and wanted to build free India on a strong socialist foundation eventually sought the help of the fascist alliance to achieve military victory over British colonialism.

The Azad Hind Fauj experiment and expedition must not however be seen only as a tragic phase of Indian history which ended in defeat and mystery. It had its elements and moments of glory. The formation of a government in exile, Arzi Hakumat-e-Azad Hind or the

Provisional Government of Free India and the building of an Indian National Army (INA) by bringing together Indian prisoners of war and expatriates from South East Asia, with brigades named after Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Rani of Jhansi, and Bose himself, signified a totally new level of determination and maturity in India's battle for independence. The way the INA experiment drew on the rich legacy of 1857 with the motto of Ittehad, Itmad and Qurbani (unity, faith and sacrifice), including also Sikhs (who had not been part of the 1857 uprising) and forming a full regiment of women under the leadership of Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan (Sahgal) named after the Rani of Jhansi, upheld the spirit and vision of a united India with an explicit recognition of India's composite past and present. Even after the military defeat of the INA expedition, the call for the release of INA prisoners resonated through India and together with the revolt of the Royal

Indian Navy in Bombay, created a decisive backdrop for the end of British rule in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

In 1857 India's freedom fighters, comprising soldiers (who were peasants in uniform), peasants and citizens, had reached Delhi but could not hold on for long. Netaji tried to pick up the thread, paying tribute to the memories of Bahadur Shah Zafar in Rangoon. 'Delhi Chalo' was Netaji's final battle cry. Today as India remembers the legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and braces itself for the 71st anniversary of the foundation of the Indian Republic, India's farmers are shouting the same slogan as they march on the borders of Delhi, demanding freedom from Adani-Ambani-Company Raj and complete repeal of the Modi government's disastrous anti-farmer farm laws. This is the living legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and India's freedom movement, and it will resist today's corporate aggression and communal fascist offensive as uncompromisingly as Bose had fought for freedom from British colonial rule. □



Vaccine Politics: Jettisoning Science for Jingoism



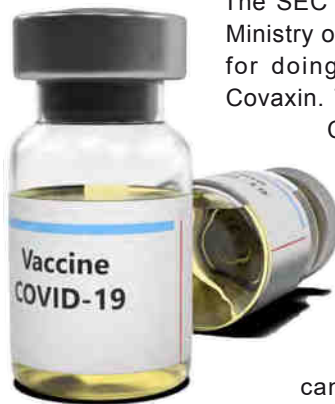
India launched its vaccination program against Covid-19 with much fanfare on 16 January. Unlike other countries which are using just one vaccine for their whole population, India has opted for two vaccines, Covishield and Covaxin. Citizens as of now do not have an option to choose from the two. Even though administration of vaccines to health care workers has already started there are serious questions over the process of approving the vaccines especially Covaxin including ethical issues and questions of accountability. Till now the two vaccines have been approved for 'restricted emergency use' (REU) by the Drug Controller General of India but the lack of transparency and the jettisoning of scientific parameters in the process of approval has established a dangerous precedent and will further undermine public trust of science.

Of the two vaccines in use in India, Covishield was developed by a team of researchers in Oxford University and the pharmaceutical company AstraZenca. The Serum Institute of India (SII) has got the license to manufacture it in India. The other vaccine Covaxin has been developed by Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech in collaboration with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). For a vaccine to be approved it has to go through a set of trials to establish its efficacy and safety. If the vaccine has been developed in another country like Covishield there has to be a 'Bridging Trial' to demonstrate efficacy and safety in local conditions. The data from the trials are then submitted to the regulatory authority for approval, they are also made public along with the consent forms and the ethics approval granted

to the trial. This is important so that members of the scientific community across the globe, not just those who sit in the regulatory authority can scrutinize and study the data; after all, being evaluated by peers is one of the pillars and norms of science.

Opaque and Exceptional Process

In India the whole approval process granted to the vaccines has been shrouded in secrecy. The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of the DGCI gave approval to Covaxin for REU even though Phase 3 bridging trials are still ongoing, but at least we have data from the UK where the same vaccine has completed all trials and has been found to have 70% efficacy against the virus. More alarming is the case of Covaxin which has been touted by the Modi Govt as the 'Make In India' vaccine and a flagbearer of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. Between 30th December-2nd January the SEC first didn't give approval to Covaxin and then did a complete 180 degree turn to grant approval without the vaccine even completing Phase 3 trials (any vaccine has to complete 3 phases of human trials before being approved for use). In fact, as this article is being written the Phase 3 trials for Covaxin have not yet started.



The SEC which comes under the ambit of the Ministry of Health has not yet given any reason for doing an overnight U-Turn to approve Covaxin. The SEC put out a statement saying Covaxin has been approved because it can be effective against the new strain of the Coronavirus recently discovered in the UK, but rigorous science demands that such a capability be demonstrated by the vaccine and ensuing data be made available for scrutiny. Approvals cannot be granted in the realm of the possibility for this would set the precedent for future vaccines to be approved on their 'possible capabilities' and not their 'proven capabilities'.

Multiple instances of unethical practices have also been reported in the conduct of the trials by Bharat Biotech. Victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy were paid to take the shot without being informed about the vaccine. Subsequently no one has monitored them to observe the effects of the vaccine, in case adverse reactions emerge they will have to look after themselves. Astonishingly, the Health Ministry has refused to take responsibility for any adverse

reactions and deaths arising out of vaccination!

Increasing Mistrust of Science

Dr. Gagandeep Kang, one of the world's leading virologist who has critical of the vaccine approval process pointed out that it is a worrying sign that not enough people in India were volunteering to be part of vaccine trials which point towards a hesitancy and doubt about the vaccines. This is an important observation because it is not just anti-vaxxers who distrust vaccines, today there are valid grounds to doubt the safety and efficacy of the Bharat Biotech Covaxin. When principles of science like transparency and peer review are not adhered to then it is only natural that citizens who trust science start doubting the vaccines. The historian and philosopher of science Naomi Oreskes has argued that one of the reasons for people trusting or not trusting science is their knowledge about the process of reaching a conclusion in science. If citizens know that the final product has gone through a rigorous process of scrutiny, trials and all the data is placed in the public domain citizens are more likely to trust a vaccine. Secrecy will lead to the death of trust in science. In the case of Covaxin and to an extent Covishield, the lack of transparency will not encourage people to trust the vaccine.

But the Govt's jettisoning of scientific principles to approve the vaccines is not surprising. Since 2014 the Modi Govt has been anti-science. It has cut funding for research, promoted mythology and fake news in the name of science. It has promoted

an ecosystem which has scant regard for scientific knowledge and has institutionalized practices which undermine science. For example, it recently allowed Ayurveda practitioners to conduct surgical procedures, such actions end up undermining Ayurveda and modern medicine which are two completely distinct systems of healing. More importantly such actions end up making a caricature out of science thus reducing public trust in science, which can have disastrous consequences. Distrust of science resulting in climate change denial and anti-vaccination and anti-evolutionism is a common thread among right wing across the globe hence state sponsored undermining of science and evidence-based decisions in India will only act as fodder to Hindutva right wing groups.

Science as a Law and Order Problem

To add a cherry to the top the Home Secretary has in the guise of a circular issued a gag order directing all state govts prosecute those questioning the lack of transparency around Covaxin. If such is the case then the first person to be prosecuted will be the Director General of the ICMR itself, who is an author of a just published paper in the journal Lancet which states that "results reported here do not permit efficacy assessments. The analysis of safety outcomes requires more extensive phase 2 and 3 clinical trials." Turning science in to a law-and-order problem will only increase the doubts about the vaccine and will lead to an increase in vaccine hesitancy. This is a dangerous situation for India where millions of children get vaccinated every year for a variety of diseases. This is literally playing with lives.

Jingoism not Science

By hurriedly approving the 'indigenous' Covaxin the Modi Govt. is more interested in trumpeting his empty slogans of Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat rather than rolling out a safe and effective vaccine which has gone through the rigors of trials and tests. Modi has an eye on 26th January to grandstand his achievement of an Indian vaccine. Gaining political capital by rushing a vaccine is a dangerous game as it puts millions at risk but Modi has shown that he and the BJP are willing to sacrifice anything under the sun to gain political capital, transparency and safety are of little importance to them. The BJP and RSS have gone on a social media overdrive to portray Covaxin as the nationalist vaccine. Not surprisingly all those who have questioned the lack of transparency and the violations of established protocols have been branded anti-nationals.

If Atmanirbhar Bharat means the jettisoning of principles of science then one can only infer that the target of the vaccine is not the virus but to gain political capital by putting millions at risk. It is clear that Covaxin has little credibility and is being forced down on people because India is supplying Covishield to countries like Nepal and Bhutan not the homegrown vaccine. If Covaxin is reliable why not supply it to our neighbors also?

Most importantly Narendra Modi who misses no opportunity to be the center of attention has not taken the vaccine himself. Surely it is a valid question to ask why Modi who purports to lead from front has stayed away from the jab. It is probably because he knows something which we don't.

As India's vaccination drive expands there are daily reports of adverse reactions but the Modi Govt is more interesting in harvesting votes from the vaccine rather than provide Indian citizens a safe, effective and trustworthy vaccine against the coronavirus.

Most importantly Narendra Modi who misses no opportunity to be the center of attention has not taken the vaccine himself. Surely it is a valid question to ask why Modi who purports to lead from front has stayed away from the jab. It is probably because he knows something which we do not. As India's vaccination drive expands there are daily reports of adverse reactions but the Modi Govt is more interesting in harvesting votes from the vaccine rather than provide Indian citizens a safe, effective and trustworthy vaccine against the coronavirus. □



Caging Women Is Violence Not “Safety” or “Protection”



KAVITA KRISHNAN

Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Chouhan has proposed that every woman stepping out of her home be required to register herself with her local police station so that the police can track her for her safety.

A few days ago, the Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde asked why women had been “kept” in the farmers’ protests, and praised advocate AP Singh (a man with a record of victim-blaming ‘Nirbhaya’ and boasting for his appetite for honour crime <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWlw151oasE>) for giving an assurance that women would be sent home and henceforth kept out of the protests <https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/01/14/sorry-this-isnt-a-mans-protest-women-farmers-on-sc-wanting-them-to-go-home>.

As an Indian woman, these developments fill me with a sense of foreboding and panic. Shivraj Chouhan and Sharad Arvind Bobde are not, after all, conservative neighbourhood uncles whom I can afford to ignore, humour, or attempt to reason with. They are men with immense power, who do not feel obligated to listen to the voices of women. Their whims carry the weight of authority.

I deal with my overwhelming sense of alarm in my usual way – by using words to communicate, as simply as possible to as many people as possible, why these propositions that sound so benign, reek not of care but of control.

We need to tell these powerful and influential gentlemen: Women are not a “problem” for which confinement and surveillance are the “solution”. Women are not “things” owned by men, that need to be “protected” from theft or damage.

Women are people with an inalienable right to live the fullest of lives. Everything that prevents their life from being lived to the fullest extent of freedom, is a form of violence.

Violence against autonomy is, by far, the most widespread and the least acknowledged form of gender-based violence in India. Ask me, I have written a whole book (<https://thewire.in/women/interview-kavita-krishnan-fearless-freedom-women-rights>) documenting and discussing this fact. National Family Health Survey data shows that just 42% of women with no schooling, and 45% of



women with no schooling, have the right to go “alone to the market, to the health centre, and outside the community.” The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) found that even those women who could go out alone - to workplaces, for instance - are expected to seek permission from some authority figure in the household to do so. Both the NFHS and IHDS surveys found that even Dalit, OBC and adivasi women experience restrictions on mobility without permission, to more or less the same extent as women from more privileged castes.

In *Fearless Freedom*, I wrote: “What do these facts and figures really mean? They translate to a life lived ‘crashing against walls’, like a bird caught in a closed room, battered by every attempt to escape and fly free. There’s really no way to dress up this life and romanticize it as ‘safe’. Such intense and obsessive confinement of women is not ‘safety’. It’s time we recognized it as violence in its own right.”

Rape or sexual assault is violence against women’s autonomy – i.e her control over her own body.

Confinement to the home, and surveillance inside and outside the home is also violence against women’s autonomy.

Requiring women to take permission from authority figures in the family to step out of the home is violence against women’s autonomy.

Requiring women to inform the state authorities (like the police) of their movements outside the home is violence against women’s autonomy.

Requiring women to seek permission from the state to convert to another faith or marry someone from a different caste or community is violence against women’s autonomy.

Withholding the right of a woman to take risks (by protesting in cold weather for instance) is violence against women’s autonomy.

A man is not asked to explain and answer for why he is “outside his house.” The “outside” is accepted as his natural sphere. The very fact that a woman is expected to answer to others for her presence “outside her house” proves that the house is in fact a prison for a very large number of women. As the 2011 book *Why Loiter* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlgGNv5t92A> eloquently asserts, women have a right to loiter without purpose, and it is only by asserting and defending this right can women truly have a claim to their city.

Confinement is violence, not safety.

Surveillance is violence, not safety.

Those who prescribe restrictions on women’s freedoms in the name of “safety” are the most likely to voice rape-culture that blames victims, not perpetrators, for sexual violence. Advocate AP Singh is a handy example. The honourable CJI thanked AP Singh for his assurance that women farmers would go home and stay home, away from the protests. (The organisation Singh represented clarified that they had not authorised him to give any such assurance.) Surely you know that the same AP Singh is the one who declared, in the context of the Delhi 2012 gangrape and murder, “if my daughter was having premarital sex and moving around at night with her boyfriend, I would have burnt her alive. All parents should adopt such an attitude.” <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnaashrulla/lawyer-for-delhis-gang-rapists-said-he-would-burn-his-daughter> The man

who justified rape of a woman on the grounds that she went out of her home, at night with her boyfriend, says today that women must stay home, and keep out of protests – and the Chief Justice of India agrees with him! What a disturbing and dangerous meeting of minds!

The Manusmriti, which Shivraj Chouhan, Yogi Adityanath and other BJP leaders revere, declares that women never be free, and must always be in the custody of their father, husband, or son. The BJP and RSS act as though it is the Manusmriti that is India’s Constitution – and they boast that their views and policies are in line with those of the majority of Indians, while feminist ideas are confined to an isolated, “westernised” minority. A BJP leader Ram Madhav boasted in an op-ed in the Indian Express in 2017 (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/independence-day-coming-full-circle-at-70-atal-bihari-vajpayee-hamid-ansari-muslims-india-insecure-modi-nehru-4796919/>) that this liberal, feminist minority which had enjoyed an influence out of proportion to its size, was finally out of the driving seat, and “The mob, humble people of the country, are behind Modi. They are finally at ease with a government that looks and sounds familiar. They are enjoying it.” In 2019, in another op-ed in the same paper, Ram Madhav called (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/lok-sabha-elections-result-narendra-modi-bjp-government-congress-5745313/>) for the “pseudo-secular/liberal cartels that held a disproportionate sway and stranglehold over the intellectual and policy establishment of the country” to be purged from “the country’s academic, cultural and intellectual landscape” under Modi’s second term as PM. Contrast this triumphant majoritarianism of

the BJP with the “Constitutional morality” that Ambedkar expected the arms of the State to be guided by, even as he recognised that “Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment... We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic.” Unlike the RSS and BJP, Ambedkar did not celebrate the fact that democracy sometimes seemed “foreign” to an Indian society riddled with caste-patriarchy; he aimed to challenge and change it. People’s movements in India (trade union, students’, feminist, anti-caste, civil liberties and environmental movements) aim, like Ambedkar, to democratise Indian society – and these movements have been led by masses of ordinary Indian men and women, not by liberal intellectuals. From educators Savitribai Phule and Fatima Sheikh, to anti-dowry campaigners Shahjahan Apa and Satyarani Chaddha, feminist organisers are the products of Indian soil, fighting for a more democratic India!

As we have seen, NFHS data does show that regressive anti-feminist ideas and practices are still widespread in India. But till six years back, women could still appeal to the Courts, at least, and be fairly

confident that the outcome would uphold Constitutional morality above social majoritarian morality. Today, we have no basis for such complacency.

With the BJP and RSS controlling Government and influencing every institution, women’s legally recognised liberties in India hang by a mere thread. All that stands between women, and regressive laws legalising the shackles on their autonomy, are the courts. And the sheer number of judges in Indian courts who seem to have no understanding or respect for the very concept of women’s autonomy and constitutional morality, does not inspire confidence. It is no coincidence, after all, that some of the inspiring Indian feminist figures of our times (to name a few - advocate Sudha Bharadwaj and teacher Shoma Sen, student activists Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita of Pinjra Tod, Ishrat Jahan and Gulfisha who walk in Savitri and Fatima’s footsteps) are in prison today under draconian laws, with no judge who seems to be able to see and end the appalling injustice of their incarceration.

Our rights rest on the chance that the judge who gets to weigh in on such regressive policies and laws will be guided by Constitutional

morality, and not by his own patriarchal common sense. That is a grim thought.

It is women’s movements, and the extraordinary courage of ordinary women in the face of fascist assaults, that supply the confidence that the Courts do not. We draw courage from the young women like Muskan (<https://thewire.in/communalism/up-moradabad-interfaith-couple-miscarriage-bajrang-dal>) who tell violent mobs that she is an adult and has a right to marry whom she pleases. We draw courage from the young women out to loiter and break the cages of hostels and homes even as leaders of these movements are thrown in prison. We draw courage from the elderly, grey-haired women who lead movements asserting equal citizenship and farmers’ rights, and refuse to be treated like schoolkids and “sent home” by paternalistic judges.

The fact is that the followers of the Manusmriti are afraid of the change that women’s movements can bring. And we can smell their fear. And their fear dispels ours.

So Messrs Chouhan, Adityanath and company, the honourable CJI and other honourable judges -

We are not going to be boxed up by you.

Lucknow Police Is Stalking Women

In yet another nightmare scenario for women in a BJP-ruled state, police in the Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow is deploying facial recognition technology backed by security cameras that will “read expressions of women in distress” and alert their nearest police station. This new project is part of the Uttar Pradesh government’s Mission Shakti programme that was launched in October 2020.

This is yet another excuse for Lucknow police to disbelieve women’s own testimonies in the name of “reading expressions”. If a woman says she is with a man in a public space of her own will, the Lucknow police can claim otherwise, based on machines that can supposedly read “facial expressions”!

We refuse to show you papers to prove our citizenship.

We refuse to register ourselves with the police.

We refuse to allow courts to decide if obnoxious, regressive “laws” and policies are legitimate or not – we will defy them and refuse to obey them no matter what the judges think.

We are going to wash the dirty linen in public – and expose the violence inside our homes.

We need no one’s permission to break our cages.

We are here on the streets – and here we are going to stay.

Get used to it. □

Landmark Judgement by Allahabad High Court May Help Intercaste and Interfaith Couples

In a landmark verdict, the Allahabad High Court has ruled that couples seeking to solemnise their marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 can choose not to publish the mandatory 30-day notice of their intention to marry. This 30-day notice period was exploited by violent groups like Bajrang Dal, who were alerted by people within registration offices, and who would then mobilise violence against such couples.

The verdict held that the mandatory 30-day notice period “would invade in the fundamental rights of liberty and privacy, including within its sphere freedom to choose for marriage without interference from state and non-state actors, of the persons concerned.”



Constitutional Vs Majoritarian Morality



KAVITA KRISHNAN

India Today has published a survey which claims to reflect the “Mood of the Nation”. This survey was conducted by a market research agency Karvy Insights between January 3-13, 2021. A total of 12,232 interviews were conducted - 67 % in rural and 33 % in urban areas - across 97 Lok Sabha and 194 Assembly constituencies in 19 states.

To the question “Is there ‘love jihad’ conspiracy to convert Hindu women?”, 54% of respondents said yes, 36 % no. To the question “Do you support inter-faith marriage?” 54% said No, and 41% said it is a personal choice. To the question “Should a law be passed against inter faith marriage?” 58% said yes and 35% said No.

What needs to be said, and repeated, is that constitutional rights and liberties cannot be left to the mercy of majoritarian opinion. Laws seeking to outlaw interfaith marriage based on “love jihad” myths are unconstitutional. Such regressive (albeit majoritarian) views are “anti-constitutional” and should not be declared as the “mood of the nation”?

The India Today survey finds Yogi Adityanath (who passed the laws outlawing interfaith marriage, and who threatened Muslim men such relationships with death) to be “Numero Uno” among Chief Ministers in popularity. The choice by the India Today group of the term “Numero Uno” makes leadership a popularity context – where appealing to the most regressive instincts of people in a bid for “popularity” is legitimate.

Surveys by the Social Attitudes Research for India (SARI) have found that most Indians across caste lines want intercaste and interfaith marriage outlawed. They also found that two-thirds of their respondents practice untouchability. If indeed the majority of Indians embrace such views, should such views prevail in law-making and governance?

On Independence Day 2017, an op-ed by BJP and RSS leader Ram Madhav in the Indian Express claimed that the Modi government was the first in Independent India to be “rooted in India’s genius,” that is, “rooted in

its religio-social institutions like state, family, caste, guru and festival.” Ambedkar called caste “anti-national”, the BJP celebrates it as the genius of India, as its “core” ideology. Madhav declared in the same article that while only “westernised” liberals who are not rooted in India’s genius are unhappy with the majoritarian politics Modi represents, “The mob, humble people of the country, are behind Modi. They are finally at ease with a government that looks and sounds familiar. They are enjoying it.” So Madhav suggests that majoritarian support for Islamophobic, patriarchal and casteist ideologies and politics is “the mood of the nation”, and implies then that opposition to these policies is “anti-Indian.”

How would Ambedkar, the architect of India’s Constitution, have seen the findings of such surveys? While moving the Draft Constitution in the Assembly on November 4, 1948, Ambedkar said: “Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment ... We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic.” What is “constitutional morality”? It is a morality based on the idea that the rights of individuals and minorities are not left at the mercy of the opinion of the majority. Those who defend these rights – even when, especially when such rights are unpopular – and those who seek to popularise these rights, are the leaders that India needs. ▣



Arnabgate and India’s Battle against the Goebbelsian Godi Media Propaganda

Arnab Goswami, the vitriolic face of India’s notorious ‘Godi Media’ – a school of media that operates not just on behalf of the state against the interests of democracy but acts as the stormtroopers of a propaganda war, colluding round the clock with fascist forces to spread hate and lies, distort facts and demonise dissent – has finally got a debilitating dose of his own medicine. For too long he has been holding media trials on behalf of the Modi-Shah establishment and the Sangh brigade using select leaks from mails and chats. He would not have perhaps bargained for the moment when WhatsApp chats would prove such a leveller for him and expose his identity as a thoroughly unscrupulous power broker in the garb of a self-righteous journalist.

The law has of course begun to catch up with Arnab Goswami in recent times. He was arrested by Maharashtra police in November 2020 as a key accused in a 2018 suicide abetment case. Interior designer Anvay Naik and his mother who had committed suicide in May 2018 had accused Arnab Goswami and Republic TV of driving them to commit suicide by not paying Naik his dues worth Rs 5.40 crore. The Supreme Court of India which has of late been denying bail petitions filed by journalists, writers, lawyers and human rights activists, all victims of trumped up charges and draconian laws, by contrast rushed to the rescue of Arnab Goswami to grant him bail.

While Republic TV gets away with its routine peddling of hate and lies in India, its Hindi channel Republic Bharat was fined last December by Ofcom, the British TV regulatory authority, for “hate speech against Pakistani people, and derogatory and abusive treatment of Pakistani people”. But here in India, we now know how Arnab’s Republic TV has been the beneficiary of systematic collusion with India’s TV rating agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC). Former BARC CEO Partho Dasgupta is already in jail in connection with what has now come to be known as



the TRP (Television Rating Points) scam, and with the submission of the supplementary chargesheet by the Mumbai Police containing 500 pages of Whatsapp conversation between Arnab Goswami and Partho Dasgupta between 2017 and 2019, we now have explosive details about the functioning of Republic TV.

The Arnab chats tell us not only about the collusive nexus between Republic TV and the BARC and the tampering with India's TRP data to the business advantage of Republic TV, they give us an anatomical picture of the propaganda war that the Modi-Shah establishment has been waging with Arnab Goswami as a key manager of this war. Viewed only economically, the TRP scam may look like nothing more than a media equivalent of India's notorious share market scams or banking frauds based on systematic manipulation of 'insider information'. But it assumes a totally different dimension when we realise that this 'insider information' pertains to military and political planning at the highest level of the executive, when we hear Arnab Goswami mention the Pulwama tragedy as a 'war we have won like crazy' or when we realise that Arnab Goswami has prior intimation of official secrets like the Balakot air strike or the abrogation of Article 370! It is all the more disturbing to realise that the National Investigative Agency (NIA) is currently busy targeting leaders of the farmers' struggle – while ignoring the evidence in Arnab's chats of what is clearly a breach of national security.

The world has just heaved a collective sigh of relief over the failure of the Trump coup in America. Major parts of the American media played a key role in securing America's escape from

the trauma of a second term of Trump's tyranny. The Arnab chats tell us how India fares in contrast, how the Pulwamas and Balakots are unscrupulously used by the combination of the Goebbelsian Godi Media and the Hitlerite Modi Regime to manufacture and manipulate public opinion. At the same moment Modi was shamelessly asking for votes in the name of Pulwama martyrs, Arnab was unscrupulously using their deaths to increase viewership and further consolidate his channel as a Sanghi propaganda machine. The battle for democracy in India will have to be advanced by challenging this collusion between the dominant sections of the media, especially television, and the ruling political establishment.

The Arnab chats are way more explosive and ominous than the infamous Radia tapes of the UPA era. The Radia tape were about journalists and corporate lobbyists trying to influence ministerial appointments and policies, the Arnab chats are about the transformation of the media into a tool of corporate aggression and fascist propaganda war. It is reassuring that the ongoing farmers' movement against the Modi government's disastrous farm laws has identified the Godi media as a key adversary along with the Adani-Ambani company raj and the dictatorial Modi government. Regardless of the legal trajectory of the TRP scam, the Arnab chats must be used as key ammunition in advancing this battle for truth, justice and democracy against the combined assault of corporate power, dictatorial government and an aggressively partisan media establishment.

Arnab-BARC Chief Chats Expose Corrupt Modi-Media Nexus

Here are the highlights of the chats between Arnab and BARC Chief Partho Dasgupta.

BARC Chief Partho Dasgupta speaks of "unofficial collaboration" between the ratings agency and Republic TV, advises Arnab on how to boost ratings.

BARC Chief warns Arnab that some decisions are being taken which will "hurt" Republic, and discuss how to prevent such decisions from being taken.

They discuss how to harm other channels.

BARC internal documents, email evidence shows rigging of ratings. Two BARC officials exchange mails saying that a particular set of data "can't go out" because it would expose "which channels we are controlling and which we are not".

BARC Chief asks Arnab to "get him a media advisor kind of position with the PMO", and Arnab boasts of his influence within I&B Minister Venkaiah Naidu, saying Naidu will meet the BARC chief "one on one" so that he can make a personal presentation, and also says that Minister of State for I&B, Rajyavardhan Rathore, has "set aside" a complaint about Republic.

BARC Chief tells Arnab how to brief I&B Minister Smriti Irani, and tell her to "whack" rival networks to warn them not to trouble Republic.

Arnab boasts of setting up a

meeting with the PM Modi. The BARC Chief reminds Arnab that he has supported Republic and “jammed” other channels, and in return asks Arnab to “help him through the PMO”, and Arnab promises to take up the BARC Chief’s concerns during a meeting with PM Modi.

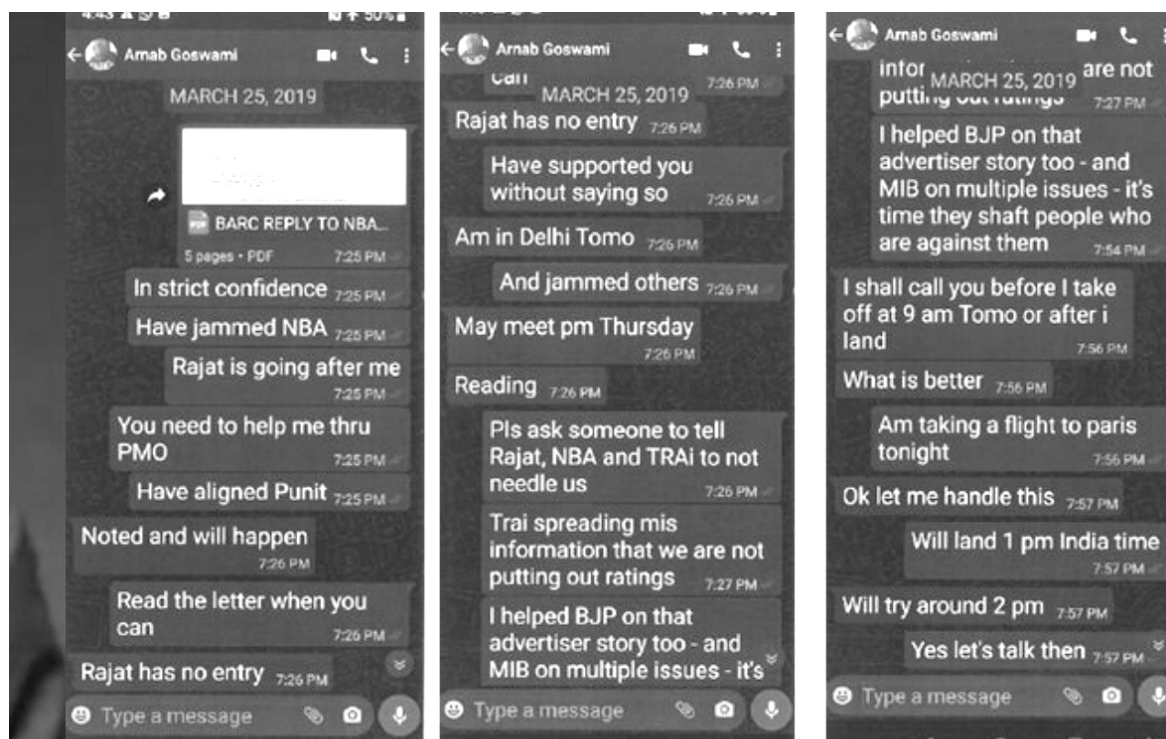
BARC Chief and Arnab discuss how “AS” will rein in the TRAI and make sure that TRAI does not pursue its investigations of various illegalities by BARC. BARC Chief asks Arnab, “Can you help me by telling AS to tell TRAI to pipe down on BARC?”, to which Arnab replies “I can.” The BARC Chief continues, “Can you text AS and get TRAI rapped?”, to which Arnab replies “Can you give me three points why TRAI action is working against AS interest?”

Arnab also hints at prior knowledge of the Balakot strike – information that is supposed to be only with top political and military leadership alone - and the abrogation of Article 370.

So – what picture emerges from these chats?

Arnab gets “inside” help from the ratings agency to rig ratings, harm rival channels, and gets advance tip-offs about policy changes that may hit Republic’s interests. In exchange, he peddles his influence with the Prime Minister, the PMO, various I&B Ministers, and “AS” (the identity of whom is not difficult to guess). Why does he have such influence with the PM, “AS” and the Modi Cabinet? Clearly, because he helps them construct a political narrative favourable to them. That is why they give him advance knowledge of political and even military decisions – because these decisions are being taken to help the PM’s political image, which Arnab and the Republic will help shape. The Republic is no news channel which will take an impartial look at policies and decisions – it is a propaganda tool, literally embedded in the Modi PMO.

Such corruption is dangerous for democracy and national security alike. 📌



Screenshots of BARC Chief's Chats with Arnab which are part of supplementary chargesheet by the Mumbai Police





Farmers Reclaim The Republic!

Farmers' Tractor Parade Reconnected Republic Day To The Spirit Of Democracy

On Republic Day, the official parade had the usual display of military hardware, while the floats had an ominous tinge of Hindu supremacy. The Uttar Pradesh Government float displaying a model of the prospective Ram Temple at Ayodhya – which will take the place of the historic Babri Masjid, demolished by Hindu supremacists in the presence of the topmost BJP leaders who went on to profit politically for decades to come from this act of violence against Muslim minorities and the Constitution of India.

In contrast to this disquieting official spectacle, the people of Delhi had the historic opportunity to witness and participate what Republic Day is really about: the spirit of democracy in which We The People of India speak truth to power, rather than celebrate the state's power over people. All along Delhi's Outer Ring Road, for kilometres at a stretch as far as the eye could see, farmers from all over India were on the streets on tractors and trolleys that had been decorated as floats with sugarcane shoots and leaves, flowers, and flags. The Tractor Parade in fact continued all night right up to the morning of 27 January, when the huge number of tractors could finally make their way back to the protest sites at the borders of Delhi.

The electronic media, which spent the whole morning focusing its cameras on the official parade, failing to show any meaningful coverage of the thousands of tractors and lakhs of farmers in a peaceful parade, chose to blow one small chapter of the 26 January farmers' actions out of proportion. This was a chapter where some small contingents of farmers (from the processions that left the Gazipur, Tikri and Singhu borders) chose to follow the parade route along the inner ring road, which the joint platform of farmers' unions had changed to minimise clashes with the police. In the first place, the Delhi Police (answerable directly to Home Minister Amit Shah) had no right to "deny permission" to the original route proposed by the farmers. In the second place, in a huge movement, not all farmers are bound by the decisions of the farm unions' joint platform. Choosing an alternate route is not a crime,

since the streets do not belong to the government but to the people, and protest by its very definition is not held at the mercy of “police permission”. It was obvious to all observers from the night before that some farmers were planning to take the original route, and the police had ample time to be prepared and should have simply made plans to cooperate with those farmers. The police, instead, unleashed brutal repression, beating up farmers with batons and using tear gas at various places including Akshardham and ITO. At ITO, this repression and the resulting chaos cost the life of a young farmer. In the confusion and panic that inevitably follows tear-gassing, a tractor lost control and turned turtle, and young Navreet Singh Hundal, a farmer from the Uttarakhand contingent which had been camped at Gazipur, lost his life on the spot. Navreet, whose village falls on the border between Uttarakhand and UP, had taken up farming after being deported from Australia for taking up a job while on a study visa. Hardeep who had been in the same truck as Navreet, alleges that the police had fired at them. Even if this is not true, it is likely that the farmers mistook the sound of tear gas shelling for gunfire. Defying attempts by the police to take Navdeep’s body into their custody, the farmers sat down at ITO to mourn Navdeep, draping his body of this martyred young farmer with the national tricolour, and several of them chanted prayers for him.

The Ambani-controlled and Modi-serving media, chose not to focus on this tragedy caused by the police repression, and the incredible restraint shown by the farmers in the face of the death of their brother. Instead it chose to focus its gaze exclusively on some younger protestors who, following

the chaos at ITO, moved ahead to the Red Fort, where some of them scaled it and hung some of their flags (including a flag with a Sikh religious symbol on it) on some empty flagpoles, below the national tricolour. The media promptly began misreporting the parade, claiming that it had “gone out of control”, had “desecrated the national flag and a national monument”, and even that farmers had “raided” the national capital and “captured the Red Fort.” In fact, the incident at the Red Fort was at best a very understandable restlessness among the younger farmers following two months of patient protests in deadly cold, more than 150 deaths, and an adamant and arrogant government; and at worst, it was perhaps instigated by some agent provocateurs. But two fact shine out even in this episode. First, it is crystal clear that had the Delhi Police not opposed the original route proposed by the farmers unions’ platform, the Tractors’ Parade would have passed without the Red Fort incident and without any loss of life. Even if the Delhi Police had simply allowed the contingent that followed the original route, to do so without repression, these incidents would almost certainly not have taken place. Secondly, all the participants of the Tractor Parade, including at ITO and Red Fort, returned peacefully to their protest sites as had been previously decided. As several Delhi residents we spoke to in the course of the day said, the farmers, even after the death of one of their own and in the face of dire provocation by the police, had not raised a finger against any Delhi resident’s home or property. Even the “attacks on buses” that the media showed were merely the result of the fact that the Delhi Police had used the buses as barricades! Clearly the farmers had

no intention to either “raid” Delhi or “capture” any monument.

We can clearly recall the 2012 anti-rape protests, when sections of young protestors had made their way into the Rashtrapati Bhawan and Parliament, and other areas “forbidden” by the police, and had faced repression by the police. The difference is that then, the UPA Government was in power, and the media, instead of being servile to the government and vilifying the movement, had rightly shown the perspective of the protestors.

Mirroring the Farmers’ Parade in Delhi, farmers and workers together held parades (including motorbike and tractor parades) in support of the farmers’ movement, at many cities and towns all over India including at Patna, Ranchi, Bagodar, Bangalore, Kolkata, and Bangalore.

Republic Day marks the occasion when “We The People of India” gave to ourselves a Constitution and set for ourselves a goal of democratic values to aim for as a society – goals we knew we fell short of, but goals for which we felt we had a potential. The farmers on the streets reminded the whole country that Republic Day is not a day for citizens to be mere spectators (watching a military parade on TV) but to be active participants. People are the heroes of the Republic, not mere “extras” in a televised script where the PM is the hero. □



Notes From The Delhi Farmers' Parade

 KAVITA KRISHNAN

Throughout the extraordinarily cold night of 25 January, farmers at the protest sites at the Singhu, Tikri, and Gazipur borders remained awake till late in the night decorating their tractors and trolleys and planning and preparing for the parade.

At Tikri on 26 January, All India Kisan Mahasabha National President Comrade Ruldu Singh, as well as comrades Gurnam Singh and Jasbir Kaur Nat of AIKM the were at the very forefront of the tractor parade. At Gazipur, AIKM General Secretary Comrade Rajaram Singh, along with AIKM leaders Comrade Purushottam Sharma from Uttarakhand and Comrade Ishwari Prasad Kushwaha from UP were at the forefront of the parade.

All three processions were greeted with enthusiastic welcome and hospitality by Delhi residents throughout their route. At various points along the routes, the Delhi units of the AICCTU trade unions and student-youth organisations

AISA and RYA had organised welcome gatherings, with banners and slogans and refreshments. The Tikri farmers' procession were greeted and felicitated by the AICCTU-AISA-RYA delegations in this manner at Najafgarh. Similar demonstrations of solidarity were organised at Swaroop Nagar and Singhaula for the procession that began at Singhu, and at Apsara Chowk for the procession that began at Gazipur. Apart from this, comrades told us that people gathered on their roofs and balconies to shower flowers and petals on the farmers' parade as it passed through residential areas.

Comrade Sanjay Sharma, V Arun Kumar and I had spent the night of the 25th January at Singhu, preparing to cover the parade for Liberation and for the CPIML's social media pages. I will share some of my impressions of this unparalleled experience.

We spent the night at Singhu in the Shaheed Bhagat Singh library tent, where AICCTU and AISA comrades were up all night preparing decorations for the

tractors and trolleys. Banners featuring a cartoon depicting Modi as a puppet controlled by Adani and Ambani by an AISA activist Neha Tiwari were much in demand – with farmers coming up asking to display it on their trolleys. Our comrades decorated one AIKM trolley as a float featuring large cut-outs of Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqullah, Chandrashekhar Azad, Dr Ambedkar, Che Guevara, Shaheed Udham Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha – and this float became a centre of much attraction at the Singhu site and throughout the parade.

Comrade Sanjay and I, along with a young Chandigarh comrade Soumya, walked a couple of kilometres from the library to the tent where our Gurdaspur AIKM comrades were camped. There, we met a family of four – father and mother, and two daughters, one about 13 and the other about 9, who had made a two-day journey from Gurdaspur to Singhu on a motorbike, just to join the farmers' protest. The two young girls were besides themselves with anticipation for the next day's parade, pleading and persuading Soumya as well as the Gurdaspur comrades to somehow ensure a spot for them on one of the tractors.



We also met contingents of farmers from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, eager to find a place right at the front of the parade.

The next morning, as I waited sleepily in the queue at a petrol pump bathroom, I noticed one man nudging a young girl and looking my way. A short while later, he came up and said, “This is the person whose book I gave you - Fearless Freedom!” Immediately, several other young women there greeted me with great enthusiasm, recognising the book. I was gratified to find young women readers of my book on women’s autonomy in the middle of this historic protest. They told me they had come, variously, from Patiala, Gurdaspur and Chandigarh to join the movement and were especially looking forward to the Republic Day parade.

Gulping down a quick cup of tea and a snack at one of the many langars briskly distributing food, Comrade Sanjay and I began making our way to the border where the parade would begin. Arun had already made his way, with his camera, to the very front. Waiting at a tea shop at the Singhu border, we met Jasbir Singh (who seemed to have phocomelia, congenital condition in which the legs are extremely shortened and traveled in a wheelchair). He told

us he was from Gurdaspur and had been at Singhu for 25 days – “We’ve made our bungalow (kothi) here,” he joked. He showed me the flag of his Kisan Union which he had proudly displayed on his wheelchair. He added, “The line of tractors goes back all the way to Sonipat and beyond, there are so many thousands of them. You can only see 2 percent of them here. If these laws are implemented, it will badly affect everyone. People will go hungry, there will be an end to rations. Modi will have to agree to our demands.”

As the seemingly endless parade of tractors began, Sanjay and I joined an almost equally large number of farmers and their supporters marching on foot alongside the tractors. This was no militarised “march past” – it was exuberant, with slogans being raised, a whole range of songs including patriotic and revolutionary songs, as well as songs composed specially for the farmers’ movement and parade being played, while youngsters and quite a few old men and women also, danced to the tunes.

Sanjay and I walked alongside the parade for more than 10 kilometres. We were struck by the total absence of any cameras of the major TV stations. The internet connection

appeared to have been deliberately slowed down, to make it difficult for us to report on the parade live on social media.

Throughout the route, wherever there were residential areas, the locals came out to clap and cheer for the farmers. I spoke to one set of young workers. One of them told me, his face beaming, “Everyone must admire the farmers – their spirit (jazba) and courage (himmat) both! We are besides ourselves with joy to see them and we wholeheartedly support their demands. We workers are farmers too – all of us come from farming communities in villages.”

We met a tractor full of women, being driven by a young woman. Along with trolleys and tractors full of women, we met innumerable women walking alongside the parade, waving flags and raising slogans.

At Khampur (a village in Delhi), we saw an entire community of residents – men, women, children – busy filling buckets full of water, and briskly distributing glasses of it to the thirsty and tired farmers on the tractors and on foot. Two of them told us, “We fully support the farmers, what they are doing is excellent.



One man who keeps a small shop at Khampur offered us water and was eager to comment. “I educated my son with so much effort and at so much expense, all in vain. There are no jobs for him. He is a property dealer and the property market is in a crisis. This Modi speaks of good days, but we got nothing. Only Adani and Ambani seem to be getting everything. This is why the farmers are fighting.”

At Khampur, Sanjay and I hitched a ride with a trolley that was part of the parade. A young man walking alongside the trolley saw me struggle to get up into it, and lifted me up by my armpits into the trolley! Inside, we met an entire family including several women, that runs a cosmetics shop in Chandigarh, that had come down to Singhu for the movement and the parade. The view from the trolley was breathtaking – an ocean of tractors, in orderly lines, for as far as the eye could see. There seemed to be no end to the procession.

Finally, as we began to get reports from Arun about the police repression at ITO and other places, we realised that the whole parade had come to a halt – clearly because the police, using the ITO incident as a pretext, had stopped it from moving past Mukarba Chowk on

its route forward. Realising this, we hopped off the truck and found that we were on the Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar flyover, and below us was Libaspur village. We had no choice but to make our way down the embankment, using bushes and trees for support, to the road below. There, we made our way back to our office in Shakarpur in fits and starts, with several missteps along the way, because the Government had shut down most metro routes as well as the internet, and the traffic jam caused by the police bringing the farmers’ parade to a standstill, meant that travel in Delhi had become exceedingly complicated.

The good part was that throughout our return journey, every Delhi resident we met – mostly auto and e-rickshaw drivers and passengers from various classes and sections of society – was sympathetic to the farmers and highly critical of the Modi Government and the police.

One gentleman in an auto criticised the Government at length, “How is it that this government, which was elected with so much goodwill six years ago, seems to manage to create a major upheaval and chaos every year, with demonetisation, lockdown, CAA and now the farm laws? Don’t we have enough trouble with China at our borders,

that the government should be making enemies of its citizens? Last winter, there was the agitation against CAA, this winter farmers are protesting for the past two months. If so many people are opposed to some law, surely any government with sense would gracefully withdraw it? The problem with Modi is, he is too arrogant. He thinks he is a king who will lose face if he bends. Look at these farmers, they have not harmed a hair on the head of even a single resident in Delhi, even though they are so many in number.”

An auto driver said, “Farmers already earn so little and have to worry every season about their survival. Now the government is trying to take away even what little they earn. You know the problem with this government? It brands every critic ‘anti-national’. How can it be that the government is always right, and everyone who questions it is a traitor to be arrested and jailed?”

One girl in an e-rickshaw at Libaspur said, “I heard that the farmers beat up a police officer.” When we told her that in fact, a farmer had died in the midst of police repression, she looked up at the long line of tractors on the flyover and replied, “Well, they look peaceful here. If the



police beat them up and kill them, is it any surprise that some of them will hit back?"

Not a single person we met complained of the inconvenience they were facing as a result of the farmers' parade – instead all of them looked sympathetically at the stranded farmers and expressed concern for them.

With Republic Day, the farmers have crossed another milestone in their courageous and historic movement. We must stand with their struggle which will end only when the three farm laws are repealed. ▣

Gadkari Reveals Modi Regime's Anti-Farmer, Anti-Poor Mann Ki Baat

 KAVITA KRISHNAN

The Modi regime which said it would never blink on the farm laws, has not only blinked, but bent, offering first to amend and then to "suspend" the laws, in desperate attempts to save the laws from outright repeal. But the farmers, who continue to camp at Delhi's borders in the bitter winter cold, braving thunderstorms and rain showers, have told the Government that nothing short of an outright repeal of the Three Anti-Farmer Laws is acceptable to them.

The Government is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that it is only rich farmers, and that too only farmers from Punjab who are protesting under instigation from the Opposition. At Delhi's borders, farmers from Punjab and Haryana have been joined by farmers from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu. In Bihar, tens of thousands of small and medium farmers and farm workers marched to the Governor's headquarters to demand repeal of the farm laws. It is clear, moreover, that the farmers enjoy the support and solidarity of ordinary Indians.

Meanwhile, in an interview with a leading newspaper, the Indian Express, senior member of the Modi cabinet and the BJP, Nitin Gadkari, made several remarks that confirm the farmers' apprehensions about the


Government's motive behind the farm laws.

Gadkari made it clear that the new laws have been introduced to correct what he described as the "root causes" of India's agriculture problems: "surplus foodgrains"; and the fact that the MSP offered by the government for foodgrains is higher than the domestic and international market price. Gadkari actual words were, "Our MSP is more than the international and market prices, and that is the problem. I have been talking about ethanol for the last 12 years. But the permission to convert foodgrains (to fuel) was not granted. The root cause of the problem is surplus foodgrains and higher MSP than the market price."

It is clear from Gadkari's interview that the Government's claims that the new laws will not only protect MSP, but in fact allow farmers the "freedom" to sell crops in the open market to companies at prices that are even higher than MSP, is a lie. Farmers obviously demand MSP because they know that market prices tend to be much lower; and also without MSP they will be forced to sell at distress prices. But the Government sees MSP as a problem, and has introduced the new laws to make sure that farmers have no option but to sell at much lower prices in the domestic and international market.

Also, it is clear from Gadkari's interview that the Government has brought in the new farm laws to facilitate diversion of so-called "surplus" foodgrains away from the Public Distribution System and rations for the poor. The truth is that India's "surplus" foodgrains rot in godowns while India ranks 94th among 107 countries in the Global Hunger Index, much behind its neighbours Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. There is a "surplus" precisely because the Government has introduced a "targeted" Public Distribution System (PDS) instead of universal PDS, leaving a vast section of India's needy people deprived and hungry. Now, instead of focusing on hunger as the key problem, the Modi regime is claiming that the "surplus" in overflowing godowns is the problem, and is prescribing a shift from foodgrains to biofuel. The contract farming being sought to be universalised through the new laws will, among other things, engineer this shift and push us into a state of external dependence for foodgrains and hence greater food insecurity for the poor.

What Gadkari does not spell out is that the Modi regime is seeking to get rid of MSP, force farmers to sell at rates fixed by domestic and international markets, and dismantle procurement and PDS, because it is seeking to obey the WTO diktats to cut down government support for India's farmers.

India's farmers see through the Government's lies very clearly, and they stand firm in their demands to repeal the three new laws, lock, stock, and barrel. Farmers at the frontlines of the struggle to save India's Republic, asserting not only the farmers' rights, but also the right of all citizens to protest, the right to food security and food rations, and the country's freedom from Company Raj. India's people stand with the farmers in this crucial fight. 

Three Farm Laws: Aimed to Meet Demands of Rich Countries Not Indian Farmers

 **SANJAY SHARMA**

How is it possible that after the world attained an overall surplus in food production in most of the food-producing countries, worldwide hunger and malnutrition have also increased to a much greater extent? The answer lies in the logic of capitalism, which is the logic of greed and profit.

The farmers' movement going on in India is a revolt against the Modi government's deceitful, greedy and profiteering designs of surrendering country's food sovereignty into the hands of few big capitalists (symbolised here in India's leading capitalists Adani and Ambani) under the imperialist diktats of the WTO.

The implementation of these three farm laws will be the last nail in the coffin of public welfare policies, completing a process that began in late 1980s in USA under the garb of Uruguay round of GATT negotiations and in India in 1991 with the diktats of IMF and World Bank given to the Narasimha Rao Government.

It is no surprise that the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) has come out openly in support of the three farm laws. Ironically the Modi regime which yelled "foreign interference" when the Canadian PM Trudeau expressed concern about the Government's repression of farmers at Delhi's borders, is perfectly happy with the "foreign interference" of the IMF!

History of World Bank-IMF Interference

The World Bank submitted a long memorandum to India in 1991 demanding immediate restructuring of the economy and warning that without such measures India would be deprived of international financial assistance - mainly IMF loans. The major part of that structural readjustment programme proposed through that memorandum has already been implemented in bits and pieces by different governments, and what remains would now be completed if the three farm laws are implemented.

The World Bank recommended that:

- i) heavy fiscal subsidies to agriculture are not sustainable and are ineffective in sustaining growth, so subsidies on irrigation, electricity, fertilizer and credit be removed
- ii) export/import restrictions on agri-produce be removed.
- ii) universal PDS is not required hence a targetted PDS be initiated and the role of FCI be curtailed.
- iv) governmental protection be removed, agricultural trade be liberalised.
- v) private investment in agriculture sector be increased.



vi) bank credit system be rationalised and private investment be promoted.

vii) technology imports and privatised (corporate-funded) research be encouraged

viii) regime for intellectual property rights protection be introduced

ix) government's extensive role in agri input production and marketing, including fertilizer and seed production, be considerably reduced, and private sector involvement in research and marketing be encouraged.

x) involvement of state seed companies in commercial seed production be ended

xi) private sector be introduced in irrigation sector, water rates be increased

The World Bank recommendations were immediately accepted by the Government of India in spite of wide opposition by left parties and many farmers' organisations. In the budget of the same year, 1991-92, fertilizer costs were raised by 30%, export subsidies were abolished and subsidy on sugar was also eliminated. During the course of three decades most of those WB diktats have been fulfilled by the successive UPA and NDA governments.

The three farm laws forced through without a proper vote division in the upper house of Parliament are meant to accomplish what few of the WB diktats remain. The current farmers' movement has now posed the most formidable resistance yet against the virtual parliamentary consensus in support of the imperialist package. This is why the farm law proponents complain of "too much democracy."

WTO Agreement on Agriculture

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture signed in 1995 echoed the same World Bank package in a more binding form for nations. Now it became mandatory for the developing countries to be "committed to achieving specific binding commitments" to "establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system" by "regressive reductions in agricultural support and protection". This was done in the name of "correcting and preventing restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets" which is nothing but another name for lifting the system of subsidies and support to the peasants of poor nations to give a free hand to the rich countries to dump their agricultural surplus in the markets of developing countries. A new form of colonialism.

The AoA restricts member nations from providing support to domestic agricultural producers; restricts export subsidies; reduces import tariffs; and restricts public stockholding for food security which in the case of India amounts to doing away with the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the government's procurement of food grains for

the purpose of ensuring food security to the deprived citizens and communities. This agreement imposed a system of crop insurance to be run by private companies instead of measures to develop and improve basic agriculture infrastructure. The three farm laws now fulfil the commitments made by India to WTO under the AoA.

There was a time when scarce food production was a primary concern particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. That was also a period of imperialist aggression and realignment surrounding two world wars. Food production worldwide increased considerably with technological advancements in latter half of the century. A system of subsidies and support to farmers and to develop agricultural infrastructure was also evolved by the nations as a natural corollary to ensure sufficient food supply.

India strived for its own food security after Independence, adopting land reforms and developing agriculture infrastructure to do so. The agenda for land reforms was never completed, which remain till today the biggest blockade towards rural development. The productive forces could not be unleashed keeping agriculture



shackled by feudal remnants. Some states including Punjab, Haryana and parts of Western UP fared better in land reforms. These areas became the sites of the “Green Revolution” (capitalist development in agriculture) in later years.

The “Green Revolution” & the Path Not Taken

India has an immensely rich and vast diversity in agriculture, in terms of crops as well as climate. Agriculture here has evolved into various different regional traditions, cultures and techniques. The introduction of High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) as the basis of Green Revolution by importing technology from the USA was not the sole option before scientific community during the Sixties. Our political establishment, bureaucracy and a section of agricultural scientists favoured imported Green Revolution technology. This involved import and development of HYV seeds which also required large quantities of pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation and other inputs because they were not adapted to Indian environmental conditions as were the indigenous varieties. Therefore, this technology import in turn increased input costs in agriculture production and also paved the way for the dominance of big corporations in this sector.

The then Director and world renowned rice scientist of Central Rice Research Institute Dr. RH Richharia at that time stood up in opposition to the Indian scientific establishment risking his own career. He gave a model to identify and develop high yielding seeds from India's own vast diversified varieties because they are resistant to diseases, pests, drought and need less chemical fertilizers etc. This would not only have kept the

input costs at much lower levels, it would have prevented health consequences like the cancer epidemic in Punjab that is the result of pesticides in the groundwater.

Dr Richharia made a gene bank of naturally occurring varieties of rice from Chhattisgarh (then in Madhya Pradesh) which were in no way less high-yielding than the imported ones and did not require huge input of fertilizers and other inputs. Let us argue what would have been the agrarian scene today had Dr. Richharia's model of agricultural development been adopted at that time in place of what we today call the “Green Revolution”? Today we are experiencing huge environmental degradation, water crisis, farmers' indebtedness and suicides on the one hand and an overwhelming dominance of big corporations over the lives and livelihood of rural population as an ultimate fall out of the Green Revolution.

Dr. Richharia in the 1960s had challenged the fundamental approach of the Green Revolution. In early 1980s he described this in his plan for increasing production of rice submitted to the PMO on latter's request saying, "The main constraint has been the hurried introduction of the undesirable new rice material, the HYVs (dwarfs) on which we based our strategy, replacing even the reputed high yielding rices of the locality, forgetting at the same time unexpected drought situation, under the HYVs lowered the yields.... HYVs proved susceptible to diseases and pests which cannot be controlled easily, thus against pointing towards reduction of yield."

Dr. Richharia's story is lost in oblivion thanks to political establishment which apparently favoured US designs ignoring India's ground realities. He was isolated and victimised to the extent that he

had to unsuccessfully fight a long legal struggle to keep his job and designation as well as his scientific accomplishments. Today we talk of importance of organic farming and organic food, and we have a chance to review our entire approach towards India's model for scientific and technological innovations in agriculture and rural economy.

Indian agriculture is facing stagnation since decades. Neo-liberal restructuring and WTO diktats have made the situation even worse. The same WB memorandum of 1991 also said that “limits to growth from Green Revolution technologies are approached, there are no new technologies on the horizon.” In place of reviewing and correcting the inherent weaknesses of the Green Revolution, now there are talks of “Green Revolution II” which is nothing but the going further ahead with the same policy regime to introduce bigger penetration of imperialist capital which in turn makes farmers more alienated from their own lands and from agriculture as a profession. This scheme is unacceptable to Indian farmers.

Land reforms were required most to unleash the potential of agrarian development. This unfinished agenda is now a thing of the past and whatever land reforms were achieved are now being reversed. The policy of land acquisitions, and policy rhetoric of land consolidation in the name of making agriculture viable is nothing but a disguise for alienating small and marginal farmers from their lands. The three new farm laws are meant to do this job more speedily.


There has always been a demand by farmers for increased expenditure in agriculture infrastructure and development of roads, storage capacity, irrigation, electricity in order to develop the rural economic base

and the country's food sovereignty. These are demands which were never considered by the State seriously. Now preparations are on to hand over the whole business of agricultural infrastructure to the private sector on a platter.

Subsidies are not doles or freebies as alleged by the ruling class parties, especially by the ideologues and apologists of the Modi regime today. On the contrary they are an essential way of allocating the state's resources to the most deserving sector in order to strengthen the country's socio-economic development. Marketing with proper remuneration is common sense. Every nation has a right to evolve and develop its own mechanism. We need not to go for abolishing APMCs or similar mechanisms to give a free hand to monopoly capitalists, instead one should go for accepting the farmer organisations' long pending demands for improvement in those mechanisms as well as a good and viable credit system the absence of which has made thousands of farmers to commit suicides.

Indian farmers today produce more than enough food to feed each and every citizen comfortably. Sadly, not all Indians are well nourished and well fed because the food produced by farmers is not accessible to them owing to rising economic inequality manifested in rising poverty levels. This phenomenon has become more acute under Modi-rule. We need to secure our food sovereignty by rejecting the policy framework which will further endanger our farmers, and we also need to create suitable conditions so that food reached to all as their fundamental right. Government's dilution of National Food Security Act, decreased funding of MNREGA, declined budgetary allocation to the FCI, etc should not be seen as unconnected events. These are part of the same scheme which today is being opposed by massive farmers' movement.

Developed nations want their surplus food-grains to be dumped in Indian and other developing nations' markets through WTO route. In these times our government is being 'governed' by the WTO rules and imperialist diktats which must be opposed by supporting the ongoing movements of farmers, workers, and other sections of toiling masses who are directly resisting WTO's adverse impacts on Indian people. These three farm laws are integral to the US designs of forcing Indian farmers to shun traditional crops, mainly food grains, in the name of diversifying towards more

'commercial' crops like raising corn for ethanol production. This is a direct attack on our food sovereignty and independence – and we all need to support the farmers at the frontlines of resisting this attack. 

18 January: Women Farmers' Day

The Chief Justice of India had asked why women had been "kept" in the farmers' protests at the border, and had sought reassurances from farmers' legal representatives that women would be sent back home and kept out of the protests. He had even said he would personally take the "risk" of appealing to women to return home.

Well, women gave a befitting rebuff to this paternalistic attempt to control them and insult their autonomy. On 18 January 2021, they flocked to the protest sites at Delhi's borders to observe Mahila Kisan Diwas (Women Farmers Day) and remind the CJI and everyone else that most women in India are farmers or farm workers; half the farming population is female; and the major share of farm labourers are women. Women raised placards and slogans in various languages asserting that "Women's place is in the resistance" – a rebuff to the patriarchal adage that "women's place is in the home."

Thousands of women protested at the Delhi borders against the Modi government and burnt effigies of IMF and WTO. Women from Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand participated in the protests. All over the country also, Women Farmers' Day was observed by AIPWA and other women's movement groups.

The rally on Mahila Kisan Diwas at the Tikri border was addressed by Punjab Kisan Union leader Jasbir Kaur Natt, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari, AIPWA Vice President Sudha Chaudhury (Rajasthan), AISA leader Geeta Kumari (Haryana), trade union leader and AIPWA activist Comrade Lekha Adavi (Karnataka), renowned Punjabi theatre and film artist Anita Shabdish and Lokayat leaders from Karnataka. Several of the AIPWA leaders also sat on a 24-hour hunger strike at the Tikri dharna site.

Addressing the gathering, Comrade Meena Tiwari said that when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave well-meant advice to the Modi government to consider the farmers' demands the Modi government rubbished the it as interference in internal policy matters but when



IMF spokesman openly supported these draconian anti-farm laws as very useful, the Modi government was delighted. Today by burning the IMF-WTO effigy we the women farmers of India send out a message to IMF, WTO, World Bank and other such puppet organizations of multinational corporates that if they do not stop interfering in India's internal and policy matters we can take the decision to gherao the offices of these organizations just as we have gheraoed the offices of Ambani-Adani.

At the Ghazipur border, AIPWA's UP President Krishna Adhikari addressed the women farmers' gathering, and warned against the communal politics of the Yogi and Modi Governments that sought to divide farmers and people on Hindu-Muslim lines so that the companies like Adani and Ambani can rule.

At the Singhu border, AIPWA National Secretary Kavita Krishnan and AISA activist Navkiran Natt addressed the gathering. Women

workers from unorganised colonies and slums of Delhi held a march under the AIPWA banner in support of the farmers' movement. They stressed that if the farm laws are implemented, farming will go into corporate control, government procurement of grains will stop, and that means that food rations also will be scrapped. To save farming and save rations, and demand MSP for all crops and rations for all people, workers must support farmers.

The protesting women warned that if the Modi government does not shed its ego and obstinacy and fails to repeal these ro-corporate black laws soon, there will not only be a Tractor Parade on 26 January on Republic Day but lakhs of women across the country will also launch a campaign to expose BJP-RSS in every city, town, village, mohalla and house.

At Kolkata, a massive dharna of women was organised at Dharamtala by the farmers' struggle platform AIKSCC, to which AIPWA

contributed a large contingent.

At Patna, women's groups together held a march against the farm laws. □

We Came To Join Women Farmers At Delhi's Borders

(Afshan Jabeen, AIPWA activist who along with several other AIPWA comrades from Bihar spent a week at Delhi's borders with the farmers, writes about her impressions of the movement.)


Lakhs of farmers from across the country are protesting on the borders of Delhi. The government has passed three farm laws which are against farmers' and the country's interests. Therefore huge

numbers of farmers are sitting in protest and people from across the country are joining this struggle in support of the farmers' demands.

Along with my comrades from AIPWA I got the opportunity to be a part of this large scale and historic farmers' struggle in Delhi. This was my first experience of participating in such a huge movement and I was filled with happiness and pride at joining this movement.

I reached Tikri border on 18 January which was Mahila Kisan Diwas (Women Farmers' Day) and women were at the helm of affairs and managing everything. It seemed as if the numbers of the protesters equalled their unity, especially the unity of the women. On that day, men did not get much opportunity to speak from the dais, and this in a patriarchal society where men usually control everything. Women were freely expressing themselves on stage, some through revolutionary and progressive songs, some through speeches. A veritable sea of women was surging ahead at all the borders, Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur. Even the groups who had come from far-off places to be part of this struggle had large numbers of women. There was an incredible energy and enthusiasm in all the women and they reminded me of the nationwide anti-CAA-NPR-NRC equal citizenship movement led by women. It occurred to me that maybe the women-led equal citizenship movement had inspired women farmers also.

At various places we could see women and men working shoulder to shoulder to prepare and serve food. Langar was being served at places just meters apart. Not only was food taken care of, all the borders had Shaheed Bhagat Singh libraries organised by Delhi students for wonderful reading material. I saw the amazing sight of all sections and ages of people immersed in reading, some in the library and some on their tractors. There are also medical camps set up at various places. As I was walking by one early morning, an elderly senior who was sitting on a tractor saw me and started raising the slogan, "Repeal the Black Farm Laws!" Slogans of "Modi Sarkar Murdabad!" (Down with the Modi Government) also echoed from place to place with such spirit and energy that I find difficult to describe in words.

There is a big difference in watching something on TV and seeing it actually unfold in front of one's own eyes. So much energy, and on such a large scale! The real world is something to be experienced directly and seen through our own eyes. 

MAHENDRA SINGH MARTYRDOM DAY

50 KM Long Human Chain In Solidarity With Farmers

On 16 January 2021, the martyrdom day of beloved CPIML leader and Jharkhand MLA Comrade Mahendra Singh was observed with a massive 50 kilometre-long human chain from Koderma to Gandey, in support of the farmers' movement to repeal the Modi regime's three draconian farm laws. Bagodar MLA Comrade Vinod Singh, CPIML Politburo members Swadesh Bhattacharya and Manoj Bhakt, 6 newly elected Bihar MLAs from CPIML - Manoj Manzil, Rambali Prasad Yadav, Sudama Prasad, Virendra Prasad Gupta, Mahanand Singh, and Arun Singh; former Jharkhand MLAs Arup Chatterjee from Nirsa, and Bahadur Oraon from Chakradharpur participated in the human chain.

At Mahendra Singh's ancestral village Khambhra, his bust was garlanded and the whole village gathered to pledge their support for the farmers' movement. At Bagodar, Comrade Mahendra Singh's statue at the CPIML office was garlanded by Bihar and Jharkhand MLAs, and senior CPIML leaders, followed by the human chain against the farm laws, in which women and men from Bagodar, Sariya, Birni, Rajdhanwar, Jamua and other blocks and small towns participated in large numbers, raising slogans against the Modi-Shah tyranny and in support of the farmers' movement.

At Ranchi, a memorial meeting was held at Albert Ekka chowk, where the gathering pledged support for the ongoing farmers' movement. This gathering was addressed by CPIML Central Committee member Shubhendu Sen, social activists Aloka Kujur and Raju Mahto, MCC leader Sushanto Mukherjee, CPIML District Secretary Bhuneshwar Kewat, and CPI District Secretary Ajay Singh.

CPIML paid tributes at the Patna State office and across Bihar to Comrade Mahendra Singh. Among the large number of people who attended the memorial meeting in Patna were CPIML State Secretary Kunal, AIPWA General Secretary Meena Tiwari, State



Secretary Shashi Yadav, State President Saroj Chaube, Umesh Singh, Prakash Kumar, Sangeeta Sinha, Rita Baranwal, Sant Lal and others.

Addressing the memorial meeting, State Secretary Kunal said that Mahendra Singh was a people's leader and the epitome of a true people's representative. Fearful of his popularity, BJP-protected

criminals brutally murdered him on this day in 2005. His voice was the fearless voice of the revolutionary opposition inside the Assembly. He made the voice of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized everywhere, from the Assembly to the streets. He was an ideal people's representative, an inspiration for the Communist movement, and an intrepid warrior for the 'jal-jangal-jameen' rights of the people. □

Kundan recited his poetry about the certain downfall of this tyrannical government.

AIPF leader Ghalib, conducting the program, said that the campaign We the People of Patna with Farmers will hold programs at various places till 26 January to make people aware of their responsibility to stand with the farmers in this just and historic struggle.

The program was also addressed by AIKM leader Umesh Singh, Insaf Manch leader Asma Khan, Dr Prakash and Anuradha Singh. A large number of people attended the program including leaders and activists from AUSA, Jan Sanskriti Manch, social workers, academics and intellectuals.

Kisan Mahasabha Dharna at Patna Concludes

The indefinite dharna in support of the ongoing farmers' movement that started on 7 January at Gardanibagh in Patna concluded on 15 January with the call to make the human chain called by the Mahagathbandhan to be organized on 30 January a resounding

We the People of Patna Stand with Farmers

22 January was the 4th day of the 'We the People of Patna with Farmers' campaign organized under the banner of AIPF Patna. A program in support of the ongoing farmers' struggle against the 3 black farm laws was held at the Kankarbagh Sabji Mandi in Patna attended by a large number of members of civil society.

All India Kisan Mahasabha National Vice President Shiv Sagar Sharma said that if farmers provide food for the 135 crore population of the country, they also know how to

deal with those who want to steal the food from the mouths of the people. He appealed to all people to stand with farmers against the loot of Adani-Ambani Raj.

Senior CPIML and AIKM leader KD Yadav said that the martyrdom of 147 farmers on the Delhi borders will not go waste and the Modi government will have to repeal these black laws.

AISA leader Priyanka Priyadarshini recited a ghazal written by Dushyant and poet Sanjay Kumar

and historic success. Kisan dharnas there were going on across Bihar also concluded on 15 January with the resolve to continue the farmers' struggle.

Addressing the dharna at its conclusion CPIML Bihar State Secretary Kunal said that this struggle is no longer confined to farmers but has become a second freedom struggle of the people. Enslaved agriculture equals an enslaved country. These three black laws will destroy farming as well as the country's food security. He gave the example of Somalia and how corporate farming destroyed that country, pointing out that the BJP government wants to repeat that story in our country as well. He also gave the example of the Adani group cornering the apple market in Shimla, buying apples cheaply and earning fat profits by selling at Rs 100 per apple. The Modi government wants to serve such corporate houses through these new laws.

AIARLA General Secretary Dharendra Jha said that the protesting farmers and people of India have no confidence in the stay order given by the Supreme Court on the implementation of the three black laws which farmers are demanding should be repealed. A CPIML team has just returned from the Singhu-Tikri borders where they spoke with the agitating farmers. Farmers believe that a misconception is being sought to be spread through the Supreme Court but the farmers will never accept this. He also said that the farmers' parade in Delhi on 26 January is going to be historic.



AIKM National Vice President Shiv Sagar Sharma said that the people have now understood that Adani-Ambani Raj is being imposed in the country and we have to save our freedom and democracy. All the leaders said that the struggle would continue till the three black laws are repealed. They called upon all the people in the country to stand in support of farmers.

Through the dharna the call was given for saving farmers and farming, for protecting rations for the poor, for protecting democracy and making the farmers' parade in Delhi on 26 January and the human chain across Bihar on 30 January a historic success.

A large number of people attended the Mahadharna including AIPWA leader Shashi Yadav, AIKM State Joint Secretary Umesh Singh, Office Secretary Rajendra Patel, District Secretary Kripa Narayan Singh, Munna Chauhan, Mukhia Jai Prakash Paswan, AICCTU leader Ranvijay Kumar and Jalla Kisan Morcha leader Manohar Lal. □

Solidarity Convention in Delhi For Farmers' Movement

Left parties organized a joint convention at the Constitution Club in Delhi on 16 January 2020 in solidarity with the ongoing farmers' movement at the Delhi borders. Through the Solidarity Convention the people of Delhi conveyed the message that they are with the farmers' movement and not with the power-drunk Modi government at the Centre.

A resolution was passed at the convention and submitted to the Prime Minister demanding the immediate repeal of the three new farm bills and unconditional fulfillment by the government of all the demands of the farmers.

Workers, students, youth and women of Delhi are consistently organizing medical camps, libraries,

langars, film shows and cultural programs at the various borders of Delhi in solidarity with the farmers' movement. The powers that be may say anything, but today the common citizen of Delhi is standing firmly with the farmers' movement and even celebrating their festivals at the borders with the protesting farmers.

Lohri was celebrated on 13 January and if necessary the coming Holi and Eid will also be celebrated with the farmers at the Delhi borders.

On 17 January, Kamgar Union affiliated to AICCTU marched at the Singhu border in support of the farmers' movement, while the Bhagat Singh-Ambedkar Brigade affiliated to RYA (Revolutionary Youth Association) organized a march at the Ghazipur border. □

The Failed Trump Coup and Lessons for India



DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

As Americans continue to deal with the aftermath of the failed coup attempt by the Trump Presidency, warning bells ring loud for the whole world as the threat to parliamentary democracy becomes a universal companion of the growing crisis of global capitalism, especially with the pandemic currently haunting the world for the second successive year.

Ever since the counting of votes began, Trump had been trying to stop the count, complaining of the election being stolen. But he failed in these attempts and the US is now all set to usher in Joe Biden as the country's next President. Even as Congress was going through the formal process of certifying the elections, Trump incited his supporters to storm the Congress building. Trump has all along been unpredictable during the four years of his despotic Presidency, but the insurrection was clearly beyond the anticipation of the US and the world.

As we make sense of the emerging details of the aborted coup, it becomes increasingly clear that the storming was far from sudden and spontaneous, it was meticulously planned and sponsored from within. For decades, the United States has been destabilising governments across the world, engineering coups and genocides, inflicting wars, fomenting civil wars, and effecting regime changes by all possible means, only to prop up dictators and camouflage it as democracy. In light of the January 6 coup we can say that the chickens of US

sponsored 'export of democracy' have started coming home to roost.

The fact that the Trump Presidency could come to power, and go on to unleash a powerful racist frenzy within America by stoking the fire of Islamophobia and the fear of immigrants, and then secure the support of almost half of America even as Trump lost his comeback bid in the face of massive Covid19 casualties and utter crisis of governance, shows that the US cannot dismiss the January 6 aborted coup as a nightmare. The rot has gone far too deep and there can be no quick and easy overcoming of the disastrous legacy of the Trump Presidency.

The rise of the Trump Presidency brought into the open the racism and white supremacy structurally embedded in American society. It also brought to the fore the sharp conflict between the interests of ever-growing corporate aggression and the basic tenets of democracy, public accountability and rule of law. Unchecked privatisation in the economic arena is pushing us towards relentless centralisation of power and privatisation of governance, thereby hollowing out democratic institutions and procedures. The Trump Presidency not only represented the horrific spectre of a Hitler reincarnate, it also gave us a glimpse of unbridled corporate rule.


The aborted Trump coup has attracted global outrage and condemnation. Internationally, governments have called for a peaceful and orderly change of guard in the US in accordance

with the election outcome. Even Narendra Modi, who behaved as the strongest votary of Trump, going to the extent of campaigning for a second term for Trump in his shared public meetings with Trump during the 'Howdy Modi' and 'Namaste Trump' programmes, has tweeted to express his 'distress'. But the strong bond between Modi bhakts and hardcore Trump supporters was on display once again during the failed insurrection, with several Modi supporters identified among the crowd.

In the history of India's parliamentary democracy, we can see stark parallels with the 6 January 2021 U.S. Capitol raid. On 7 November 1966 tens of thousands of supporters of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP, had stormed India's parliament to demand a ban on cow slaughter. Twenty-six years later, supporters of the BJP had demolished the Babri Masjid in broad daylight in open defiance of the Supreme Court. While the 1966 coup was quelled by the police, in 1992 the police remained mute spectators. And with the BJP emerging as the dominant political force, now the demolition brigade has been acquitted and rewarded with a verdict by the Supreme Court ordering the construction of a temple in place of the demolished mosque. The Sangh brigade has now perfected the art of mob lynching to silence and kill people while the BJP has mastered the art of buying out opposition MLAs and MPs and bypassing and bulldozing legislatures with ordinances and fraudulently passed laws.

We in India can therefore ignore the lessons from America's attempted coup only at our own peril. When farm laws are passed in India without any voting in Parliament, when the government's policy-making wing complains of 'too much democracy' in response to

the farmers' demand for repeal of these draconian and disastrous laws, and when dominant sections of the media dub the farmers anti-national for opposing the government, we know we are still dealing with an extremely critical situation in India. While standing by

the pro-democracy forces within US political institutions in their battle to end and overcome the disastrous Trump legacy, we in India must fight hard to save Indian democracy from a fascist corporate takeover. 

Tamil Martyrs' Monument In Sri Lanka Demolished By Rajapaksa Regime

 BALASUNDARAM

In the first week of January 2021, a memorial for Tamil martyrs in Jaffna University was demolished. The memorial had commemorated the tens of thousands of Tamils massacred in Mullivaikal in 2009, on the directions of the then President and current Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa, during the final stages of the struggle for Tamil self-determination in Sri Lanka. While the University has now agreed to reconstruct the memorial following a hunger strike by the University students, the demolition itself is symptomatic of the Sinhala majoritarian triumphalism of the Sri Lanka government, since Gotabaya

Rajapaksa and his brother the notorious Mahinda Rajapaksa were elected President and Prime Minister respectively in August 2020.

Justifying the demolition, the University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairperson Sampath Amaratunge said it was a threat to national unity. Branding a memorial to massacred Tamils as a threat to "unity" in Sinhala-majority Sri Lanka, reeks of majoritarianism and bigotry. In the same vein the Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekera said that "no one will and should be allowed to commemorate dead terrorists."

According to the Tamil Guardian which tweeted live video reports

on the whole episode, journalists covering the demolition were assaulted by Sri Lankan police and plain clothes intelligence personnel. Sri Lankan Special Task Force troops blocked the Jaffna University campus gates and conducted motorbike patrols. Even in the face of this intimidation, Tamil students gathered to hold a sit-in protest against the destruction of the Mullivaikkal memorial, asking their Vice Chancellor to come out and agree to reinstate the memorial. One tweet summarised the situation in this manner, "While Tamils want to remember the dead the Sri Lankan government keeps reminding us who the killers are."

Eventually, on the fourth day of the hunger strike by students, the VC met them and promised to reinstate the monument, following which the strike ended.

The demolition of the monument is a reminder that the Rajapaksa regime wishes to annihilate the very memories and histories of the Tamil people. Such attempts at the erasure of history are also a form of ongoing genocide.

The Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed five members of his own family (including Mahinda Rajapaksa) to cabinet and



The structure that was erected in memory of civilians killed in the Mullivaikkal incident that happened in the last phase of the Sri Lankan civil war


ministerial roles, cementing a dynastic and tyrannical stronghold on the country.

Thousands of acres of land belonging to Tamils, that had been occupied by the military and that the government was supposed to return, remained under military occupation. The Rajapaksa regime has ignored the UN's urging to return the land and rehabilitate the Tamils who had been forcibly evacuated or driven from the land.

In a constitutional coup, the Rajapaksa regime is dismantling the North East Provincial Council (set up after the Rajiv-Jayawardane Accord, that had held out some meagre powers of self-governance for the Tamil regions).

Women relatives of thousands of Tamil people who were "disappeared" by the military during the conflict,

continue to search for their loved ones.

Meanwhile, the killing of Tamil fishermen by who find themselves in Sri Lankan waters continues. The Sri Lankan Navy recently sank a Tamil fishermen's boat, killing four of them - A Mesiya, V Nagaraj, S Senthil Kumar and N Samson Darwin. More than 800 Tamil fishermen have been killed by the Sri Lankan navy in the past 35 years. A huge number of Tamil fishermen have also been arrested and imprisoned in Sri Lanka. Addressing an election rally at Ramanathapuram in April 2014, Narendra Modi had said Tamil Nadu fishermen were harassed by the Sri Lankan Navy because the Congress-led UPA government was weak. With Modi's own "strong" government ruling for the past six years, why do the same killings and harassment continue? 

An Update on People's Struggles And Victories Around the World

V Arun Kumar

A Victory for Women's Movement in Argentina

On December 30, the Argentinian Senate voted to pass a bill that will legalise abortion in the country, marking a historic victory for country's feminist movement that has been organising for the past 15 years for the legalization of abortion. The bill, known as the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy (IVE), legalises terminations in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy was passed with 38 votes in favour, 29 against and 1 abstention.

The legalisation of right to abortion sent out a wave of joy across Argentina, with tens of thousands of feminist activists gathering at the Argentine Congress with symbolic green bandanna/scarf. The green scarf, which became the symbol of women's movement for liberation and rights was an allusion to the Mothers of Plaza De Mayo who wore white headscarves and fought against the disappearance of their children by the brutal dictatorship backed by the United States in Argentina in the 1980s.

In Argentina, abortion was penalised based on the 1921 regulation that criminalised the right to abortion with certain exceptions. The abortion ban led to women, especially from poor and disadvantaged communities

forced to opt for clandestine and unsafe abortions out of fear of repercussions from the state authorities and the right wing anti-abortion groups.

According to reports, since the fall of dictatorship in 1983, more than 3000 women have died due to unsafe and clandestine abortions. Also, every year more than 500,000 clandestine abortions are performed and nearly 40,000 women are hospitalized after performing unsafe abortions.

The watershed movement in the campaign for right




to abortion came in 2015 when mass protests swept across Argentina against the brutal murder of 14 year old Chiara Paez, who was few months pregnant. The protests mobilised with the call - #NiUnaMenos (Not One Less) - no more women lost to gender violence. Demanding an end to all forms of gender violence, the movement also strengthened the fight for the right to abortion, LGBTQI rights and all social struggles.

The earlier attempt to legalise abortion was blocked by far-right wing Mauricio Macri led senate in 2018, which rejected a similar bill. Despite massive vilification campaign and opposition from right wing anti-abortion

groups in the country, the feminist movement constantly mobilised for their rights.

With the rejection of the Macri government in the 2019 elections and victory of the Frente de Todos coalition led by Alberto Fernández and Cristina Kirchner, the right to abortion struggle gained further momentum and ultimate victory on December 30 2020.

This decisive victory for the feminist movement in the long and hard fought struggle for right to abortion in Argentina is an inspiration for similar movements across the world. 

Venezuelan people throw US-Backed Juan Guaidó Out of Power


In the Venezuelan National Assembly Elections held on December 6, 2020, the people of Venezuela have resolutely thrown out the puppet of US imperialism, Juan Guaidó into the dustbin of history. The Grand Patriotic Pole (GPP) of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and other parties upholding the legacy of Liberator Simon Bolivar and Commander Hugo Chavez were elected into the National Assembly by the people, securing 257 out of 277 seats in the country's parliament.

Guaidó was elected to the National Assembly in 2015, and in 2018 he declared himself as the interim President of the country, betraying the mandate of the people who elected Nicolas Maduro as the President. Guaidó was propped up by the Venezuelan oligarchy and far-right wing forces which aimed at ending the socialist policies in the country. Backed, funded and supported (both politically and militarily) by the United States and its puppet states in Latin America like Colombia, Guaidó and right wing forces clandestinely organised multiple coup attempts, including assassination attempts against the democratically elected government of Nicolas Maduro.

These groups also attempted to take over military bases and infiltrate mercenary forces into the country

to carry out attacks and organise sabotages against vital infrastructures in Venezuela. In May 2020, a large number of mercenaries including two American military contractors employed by Silvercorp attempted to infiltrate into Venezuela by sea and overthrow the Maduro government. The attack failed as Venezuelan people and the civic-military militia of the Bolivarian Army captured the mercenaries as they attempted to enter into the country. After the attack, the contract document signed in October 2019 between Silvercorp and Guaidó's Strategy Committee came into public domain. The Strategy Committee was formed by Guaidó with the goal of exploring all available options for overthrowing Maduro from power and installing himself as president.

The fall of Juan Guaidó is a victory for the people's movement and a rebuff for US led imperialism forces which for decades has been trying to overthrow the Venezuelan government.

Despite the inhuman and criminal economic blockade imposed by the US on Venezuela, the people are determined to continue their heroic resistance against all nefarious plans of US backed Venezuelan oligarchy to dismantle a process of building a Venezuela of workers and toiling masses as envisioned by Chavez. 

Free Ahmad Sa'adat Campaign

A week long campaign was organised from 15-23 January 2021 across the globe by Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network and other Palestinian organisations demanding the release of Ahmad Sa'adat who held in Israeli jail for resisting Israeli brutal military occupation of Palestine. Sa'adat

is a revolutionary-national liberation movement leader and the General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He was sentenced to 30 years in Israeli prison on 25 December 2008 and he was kept in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison for a long period. Inside the prison, Sa'adat continued to resist the

Israeli occupation and inhuman treatment meted out to Palestinian political prisoners through hunger strike. The International Week of Action to Free Ahmad Sa'adat also called for release of all Palestinian political prisoners, including hundreds of children currently held in Israeli prisons.

Release all Palestinian Political Prisoners! End Israeli occupation of Palestine!



Hands Off Our Campus! Students Protest in Philippines


Massive students' protests have erupted since 15 January at University of the Philippines (UP) campuses against fascist President Rodrigo Duterte government's attempt of red-tagging (targeting leftist students and teachers) and trampling student activism. Carrying placards 'Fight Back State Terror,' hundreds of students and faculty members protested against the government's decision to unilaterally terminate the 1989 agreement with the UP that prohibited entry of police and military into UP campuses without the permission of university authorities.

The 112-year-old university has long had a long history of being a bastion of student activism and progressive politics. Under Duterte, who had been organising terror campaigns against progressive, leftist and dissenting voices, the UP campus had been in the forefront in resisting the fascist regime. And the new move by the government is seen as an expansion of red-tagging campaign by targeting UP, which played a historic role in the fight against the United States backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and 80s. Hundreds of university students were abducted, tortured and killed by military forces during the Marcos dictatorship, which in 1986 was ousted by the people's collective action.

In February 1971, the UP Diliman campus (in Quezon City, Philippines) students and teachers, along with transport workers rose in protest against oil price hikes, took over the campus and organized a "Diliman Commune" that resisted police and military attacks for eight days.

The 1989 agreement was signed to prevent military brutality against students and teachers witnessed during Marcos dictatorship era. The ruling Duterte government is following in the dirty footsteps of Marcos.

Unlike many other incidents of state repression on universities across the globe, the UP administration stood with the students and teachers in the protest. UP Diliman Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Louise Jashil R. Sonido said "To all those who continue to doubt and underestimate our youth, enough. Because the kids are all right. They are here and unafraid. They will stand their ground on the right side of history, and they will be remembered for their strength and vigilance, for their relentless service to the people despite red-tagging, despite political persecution, despite big bullies in government picking on them and pointing their guns at them. Our weapon is our criticism, our insolence, our daring, our defiance. History will remember that in the line of fire, UP stood its ground and it will not back down. We will defend the University."

Duterte's 'War on Drugs' and 'War on Terror' has witnessed horrific crimes, including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Since 2017, many people from poor backgrounds were summarily executed as drug peddlers and state machinery was given a free hand by Duterte to target union leaders, environmentalists, farmers, lawyers, students, indigenous peoples and journalists. 



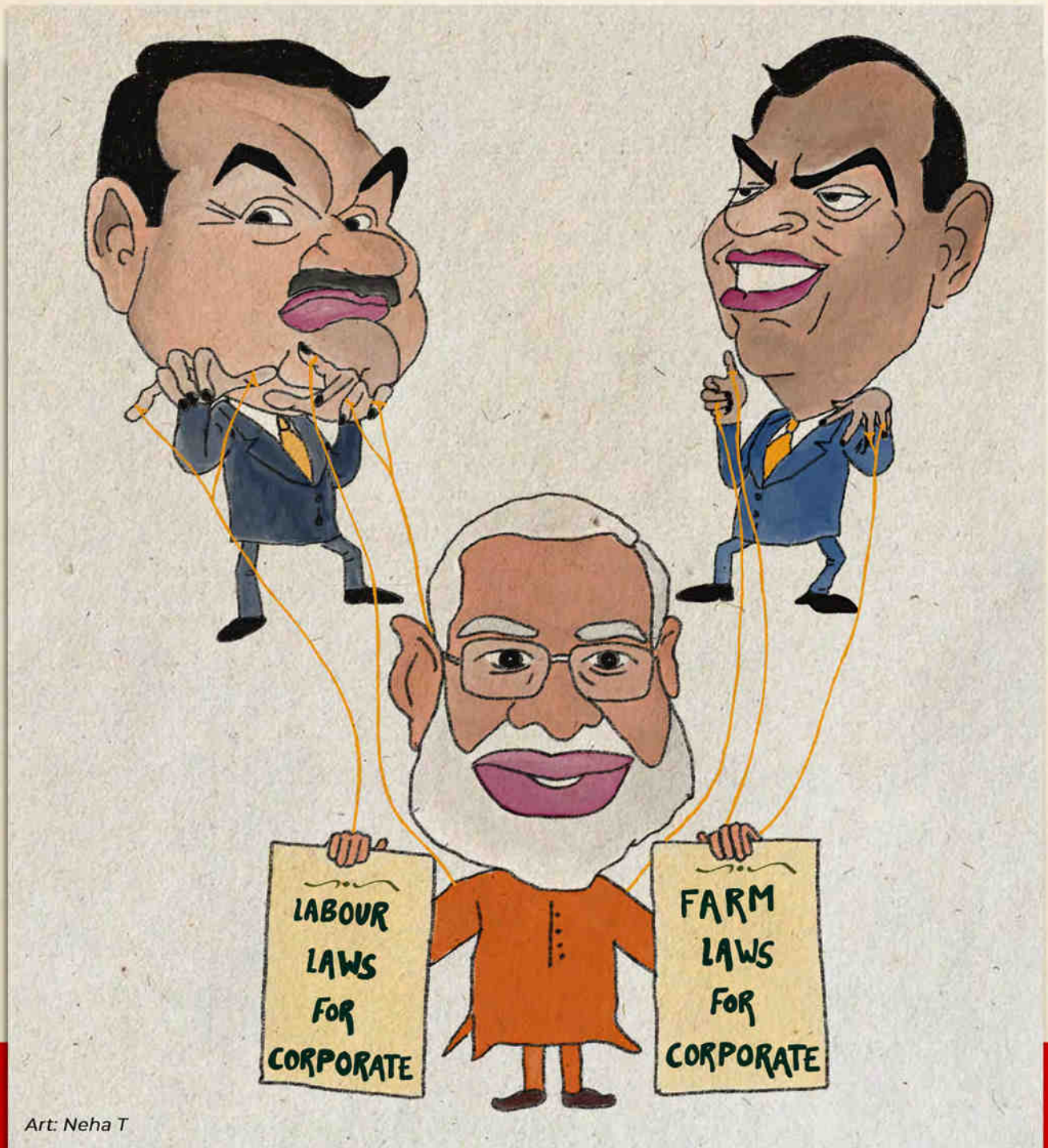
Nitish Government's Shameless Gag Order



A gag order dated 21 January 2021 issued by the Bihar government declares that any individual or organisations that post criticism or comments against the Bihar government, or its Ministers, MPs, MLAs and government officials, on social media will be punished. It is difficult to imagine a more shameless and draconian attempt to gag criticism.

Recently, a video of the Chief Minister Nitish Kumar reacting angrily at being asked a question by a reporter, went viral. The CM's reaction, and his subsequent gag order, reveals the fact that he knows that his government barely scraped by, through hook or crook, in the elections. But gagging social media will not make the criticism of the BJP-JDU regime go away!

This gag order is reminiscent of the notorious Press Bill 1982 of the Jagannath Mishra era, against which the journalistic community along with the people of Bihar launched a historic protest and forced the government to repeal the draconian law. This new order by the Nitish government is a similar draconian law and must go.



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